

# FORWARD IN CHRIST

February 2002

The Word from the WELS

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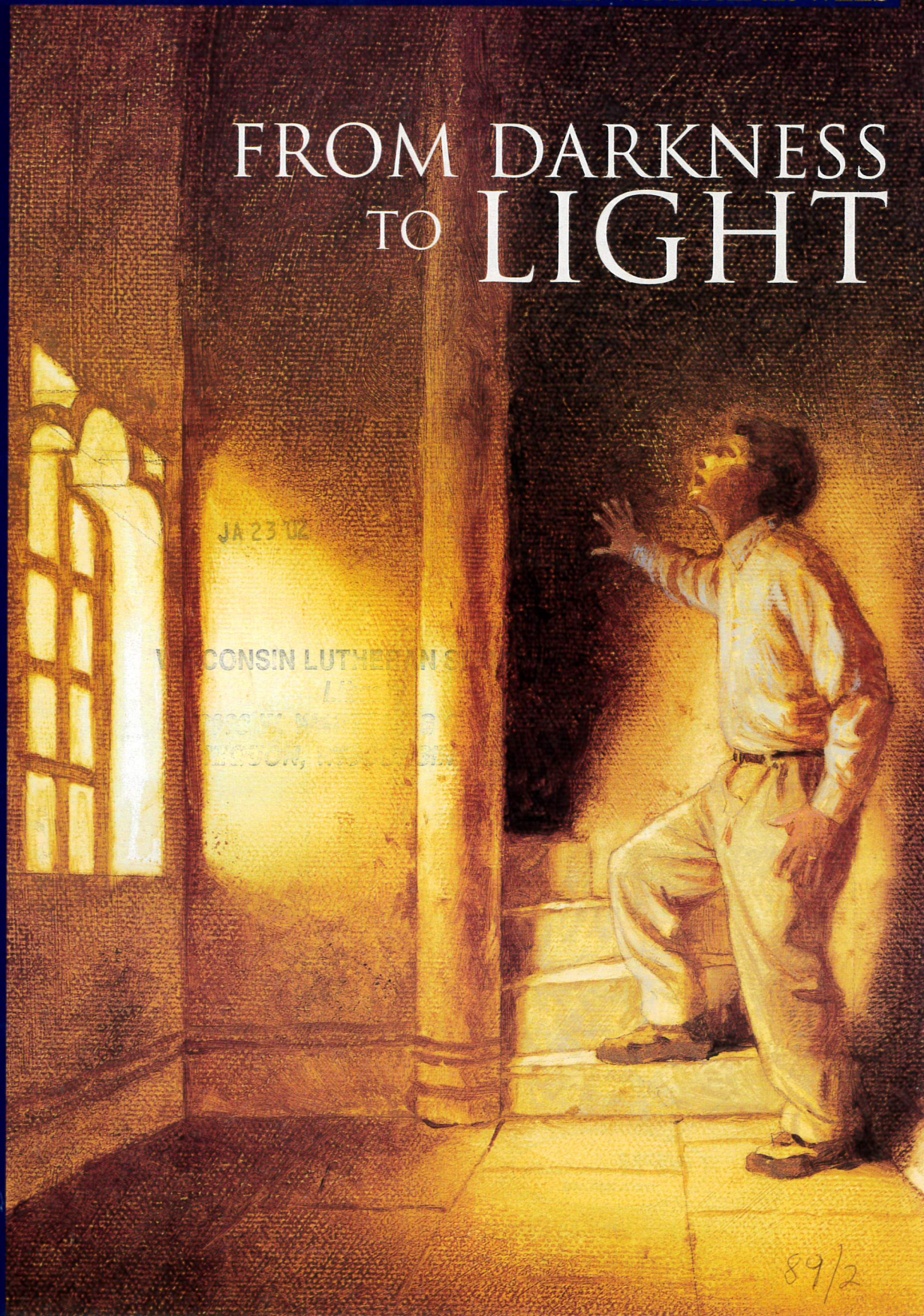
Crossing over

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The debate over Harry Potter

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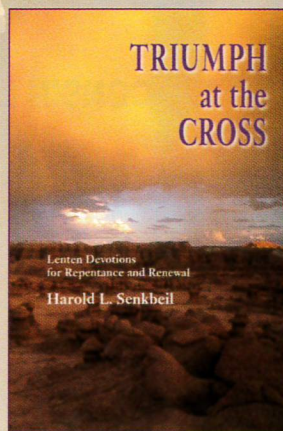
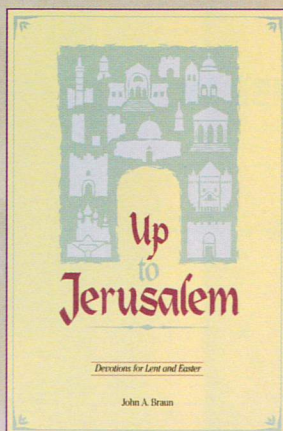
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# On our way home

*We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16*

Thomas A. Westra

I stood in the cold of the winter darkness waiting for the shuttle to take me to the terminal. I was surprised at how many people were in the airport at 6 AM—mostly business travelers. Briefcases in hand, overcoats over their arms, most looked half-asleep. I didn't see anyone smiling.

They dragged themselves through the airport to their gates. As we boarded our plane, the man taking our tickets said to a gentleman, "How are you doing this morning?"

Wearily, the gentleman replied, "I'm on the wrong end of a commute."

Later that day, on my return flight, I noticed a young man in a great mood. He engaged others in pleasant conversation, often smiling as he looked out the window. When we landed, he was eager to get going. As we entered the gate area, a woman and two small children ran up and hugged him. He was home.

## The disciples' view of a transfigured Jesus

Our outlook on life really depends on how we view the journey, doesn't it? Whether we see life as a series of mundane or difficult tasks strung together or as our journey home will determine our attitude.

Shortly before they entered the most difficult part of their journey together, Jesus took his disciples to a mountaintop to give them a glimpse of where they were going. There he was transfigured before them.



Years later one of them would write, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). He was saying, "We were there. We saw it. We heard it. For one moment, the splendor of Jesus was revealed. The doors to the throne room of heaven were opened, and we peered inside."

## Our glimpse of heaven

The disciples needed that glimpse of heaven—that reminder of where they were going—to get them through the days ahead. We need it, too.

When the boss says, "Your position has been eliminated"; when your significant other says, "I don't love you anymore"; when your doctor says, "I'm afraid there's not much we can do," we need to remember where we're going. That reminder will enable each of us to say, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

When cancer is eating away at our loved one or when we place his body into the grave, that reminder

allows us to say, "The Lord Jesus . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).

When we see our own body growing old or wasting away with disease, we need that clear vision of heaven to be able to say with Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25,26).

When Satan says, "Look at the mess you've made of your life, how could God possibly love you?" we need to remember where we are heading: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. . . . And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:14,15,17).

The journey is not always easy or happy. But joy is in our hearts, because we are on our way home. And the reunion waiting for us when we get there will be so wonderful that we cannot begin to imagine it.

*Thomas Westra is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

## FORWARD IN CHRIST

formerly Northwestern Lutheran

Official magazine of the  
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

February 2002 / Vol. 89, No. 2

[www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)

### Editorial office

*Forward in Christ* magazine,  
WELS, 2929 N Mayfair Rd,  
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398

FAX, 414/256-3899

<[fic@sab.wels.net](mailto:fic@sab.wels.net)>

### Editor

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

<[garyb@sab.wels.net](mailto:garyb@sab.wels.net)>

### Senior Communications Assistant

Julie K. Wietzke, 414/256-3231

<[juliev@sab.wels.net](mailto:juliev@sab.wels.net)>

### Communications Assistant

Nicole R. Moline, 414/256-3232

<[nicolem@sab.wels.net](mailto:nicolem@sab.wels.net)>

### Seminary Consultant

D. P. Leyrer

### Contributing Editors

J. D. Buchholz, K. A. Cherney, D. J. Engelbrecht,

R. L. Gurgel, E. S. Hartzell, R. K. Hunter,

P. M. Janke, P. L. Kieselhorst, M. J. Lenz,

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

### Art Director

Paul Burmeister

### Graphic Designer

Carianne Ciriacks

### Photographs and Illustrations

Eyewire, p. 3; Zastrow Studios & Bill Frauhiger,

p. 10; courtesy of Keith Bowe, Dennis Stein-

brenner, & Jeff Wiechmann, p. 12; PictureQuest,

p. 14; Frank Ordaz, p. 16; Gerry Koser, p. 19;

Rubberball Productions, p. 22; Glenn Myers,

p. 30; Laura Warmuth & Beth Hudock, p. 36

### Forward in Christ

*Forward in Christ* (ISSN 1528-6371) is published monthly by Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**Rates:** USA—\$10; single copy—\$1.50. Canada—\$10.70;

single copy—\$1.61. All other countries—air mail \$34;

surface mail \$26. Postage included, payable in advance to NPH. Write for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates.

For single issues, Wisconsin add 5% sales tax; Milwaukee County add 5.6% tax. Also available on audiocassette

from Mission for the Visually Impaired, 559 Humboldt Ave, St. Paul MN 55107.

### Subscription Services

**1-800-662-6093.** Milwaukee area 414/475-6600.

Or write NPH, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

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

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Printed in the USA.



Cover illustration by Frank Ordaz

Climbing up a dark spiral staircase, going from darkness to light, can be scary. But you won't want to miss the journey.

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## bits & pieces



Fred Fedke puts a spiritual twist on his hike up a dark spiral staircase in his article "Going through the darkness" (p. 16). Don't miss this one!



Since Sept. 11, WELS members have given almost three-quarters of a million dollars to the Committee on Relief for the Attack on America fund. How is that money being used? Go on location to New York City with FIC's Communication Assistant Nicole Moline and WELS Kingdom Workers volunteers as they work to discover how WELS can help people in this hurting city (p. 8).



The release of the Harry Potter movie in November 2001 has caused people to question again if this fantasy series about magic, wizards, and witches is suitable reading/viewing for Christians. Prof. Richard Gurgel examines both sides of the issue in his monthly department, "In the cross hairs" (p. 20). Don't miss his well thought out and researched article.



Death, resurrection, and Jesus' second coming are the topics covered in a final article by one writer and the first article of another.

- Jon Buchholz finishes his series on the life of Christ with a final article on judgment day and Jesus' second coming (p. 30). We thank him for his historical look at Jesus' life.

- Douglas Engelbrecht, district president of the Northern Wisconsin District, begins his stint as an FIC editorialist with a look at *Crossing Over*, a TV show that gives an incorrect look at what happens when we die. We welcome him and his viewpoints. For a more personal look at our new editorialist, check out "Meet the editorial staff—uncut" (p. 24).

—JKW

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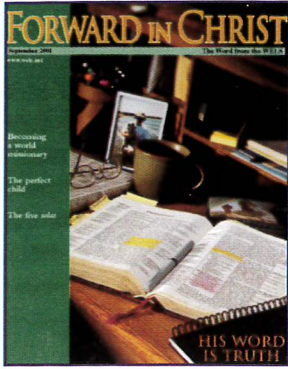
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**Regarding “Growing Pains” [Sept. 2001].** Having graduated from a small Lutheran high school (Shoreland, class of '78), I can appreciate the many advantages of a small

school. However, what the public school system has on us is a variety in curriculum offerings. I question some of the decisions of our newer schools in terms of what is offered.

Many times in my life I wish my school had offered Spanish rather than the German and Latin that were offered back then. This would have been much more practical and useful in my life. Part of the reason I'm sure, was in what languages the pastors who had been called to that school were fluent. This in turn points back to what is offered at our synodical colleges. Are we truly ready to offer the classes that our children need in today's competitive society?

*Paul Hough  
Bradenton, Florida*

*It should be noted that Latin and German have been offered in our Lutheran high schools primarily because they are the theological languages that have been required for students who wish to study to be pastors—ed.*

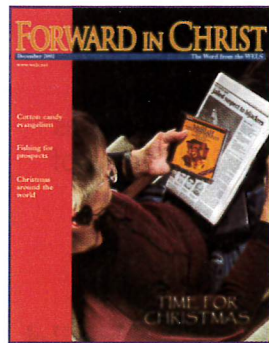
First, a big thank you to Pastor Walter Beckmann for his years of ministry as well as for his years of writing for *Forward in Christ* magazine.

**I agree strongly with Beckmann that “our fellowship in WELS is a precious gift from God” [“My prayer for our synod,” Nov. 2001].** I also agree with Beckmann that we need to encourage one another. Laypeople need to encourage called

workers. Called workers need to encourage laypeople also. Encouraging others is a way of showing and sharing our Christian love at home, in the church, in the hospital or nursing home, or any place we go. Encouragement can be spoken or written, but must come from the heart and be sincere. Encouraging others is a ministry in itself that is a part of our Christian faith.

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (2 Thessalonians 2:16).

*Peder Dressel  
Rochester, Minnesota*



**Your editorial, “The successful church,” [Dec. 2001] was excellent.** Who, indeed, would want pie crust without the substance

of the filling? Without the gospel, there is no substance to offer a world whose natural and only substance is death and condemnation. So, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Word and in his sacraments, is the substance of that gospel.

Of course, the other side of your outstanding editorial is that we should not confuse crust and filling. We should not mistake changing the kinds of pie crust for the unchanging substance of the filling. Different forms of delivery of the gospel, adapted to cultures and changing societies, is not the same as adulterating the gospel. The message of the cross has remained the same over two millennia, throughout the vast changes in societies and cultures of history, always changing the dark-

ened hearts of, and making alive, humans dead, blind, and insane in the slavery to sin.

Let us move and change the forms and the containers, that we may deliver the substance and content of the unchanging, eternal message of the gospel. In truth, Scripture tells us that anyone who alters the gospel should be cursed. Yet we must also “become all things to all men so that by all possible means [we] might save some . . . for the sake of the gospel, that [we] may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:22,23).

*Russ LaPeer  
Ocala, Florida*

There was objection to the change of WELS' official publication, *Northwestern Lutheran* to *Forward in Christ*. **Because we are a small number of people known as Lutherans and WELS takes exception, (strong) we might say, of the doctrine of other, mostly large, Lutheran groups, it no doubt was a wise change.**

Since Luther told his followers not to call themselves Lutheran, it may be time to consider a name change for the synod because of the strong disagreement with other large Lutheran groups.

Perhaps “Forward in Christ” could be used for a replacement name for the full synod.

*Dean Lewis  
Winner, South Dakota*

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, conciseness, and relevance. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ* magazine.

# Crossing over

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

“I’m getting the name Laura, or Lori, something with an ‘L’ . . . Linda, OK, Linda. She’s a sister or a sister-in-law? OK, your aunt. And she’s passed recently? OK, six years ago. Well, she’s saying that she’s all right and not to worry about her.”

You may recognize that scenario from a popular TV show, *Crossing Over*, featuring John Edwards, who claims to be able to get in touch with those who have “passed.”

Whether Edwards has some sort of special ability or whether he’s the quintessential scam artist is not for us to debate here. The point is that Edwards and his *Crossing Over* show give people, at best, a confusing idea of what death and heaven is all about and, at worst, a false sense of security about what happens when we die.

What particularly disturbs me is that, almost invariably, no matter who he is talking to or who he has supposedly made contact with, Edwards says, “Your relative wants you to know that he is all right and not to worry about him.” The impression is given that everyone who “crosses over” is doing fine.

But from the account of the rich man and Lazarus and from other portions of Holy Scripture—such as John’s description in Revelation of those who have received the mark of the beast, identifying them as unbelievers—we know that not everyone is doing fine. Some who have “crossed over” experience hell, total separation from God and his blessing, the very thing Jesus experienced on the cross when he was cursed for you and me and cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

So, how do we make sure that when we “cross over,” we will find ourselves in heaven and not in hell? Scripture makes

it clear that those who stand before God in heaven are only those who believe God’s promise that all their sins have been taken away and paid for on the cross by Jesus and that Christ’s righteousness is counted as their own.

What wonderful comfort God gives us in the Bible concerning our loved ones who have passed away. We are assured that they are all right and that we don’t have to worry about them. It doesn’t make any difference if they were rich or poor, young or old, famous or unknown. It has nothing to do with how much they gave to church or how many little old ladies they helped across the street. If, by their confession of faith in Jesus as their Savior, we are convinced that they were members of the family of all believers and remained faithful in that confession unto death, we can also be assured that they are in the presence of God in heaven, enjoying his blessing.

At the same time, God gives us this warning—don’t think that whenever someone dies they are “all right” whether they died in faith or not. But he also reassures us that, even though we sin daily and deserve nothing but separation from God, when we believe in the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross and remain faithful unto death, we can close our eyes knowing that we will open them in heaven.

John Edwards is entertaining, sometimes even amazing. But we don’t need to go to séances, mediums, or guys like Edwards to be reassured about the state of our loved ones who have “crossed over.” That’s why God has given us his holy Word.

*Doug Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.*

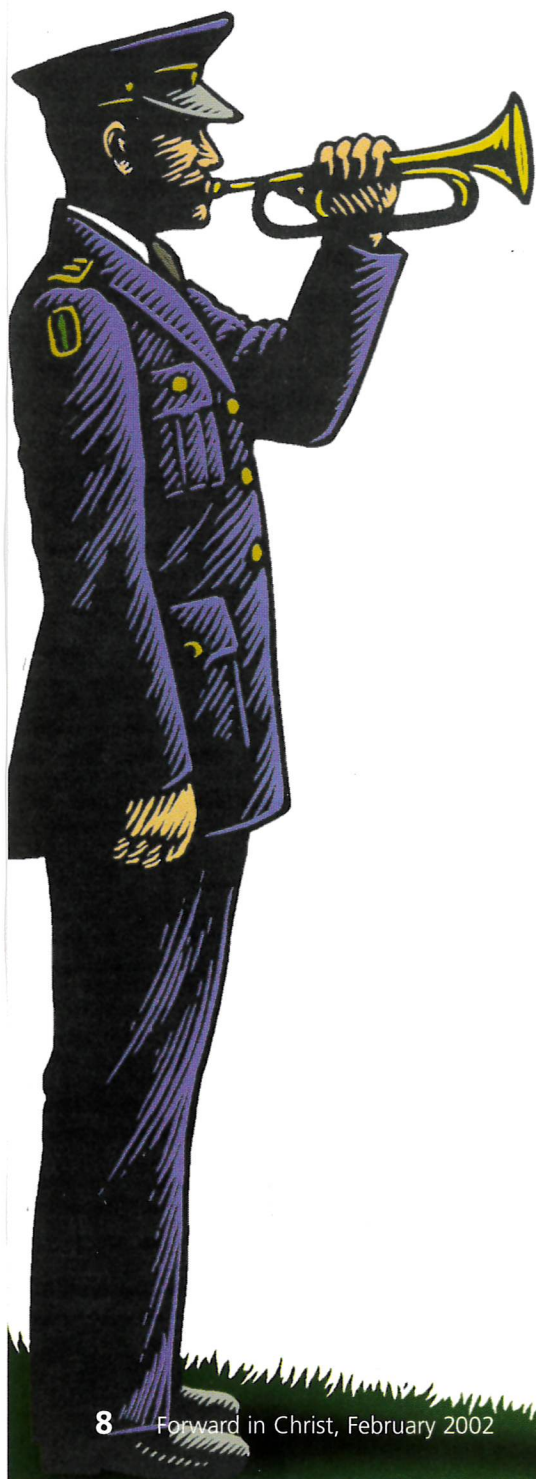
So, how do  
we make sure  
that when we  
“cross over,”  
we will find  
ourselves in  
heaven and  
not in hell?



# UNITED WE STAND

As citizens of the United States have come together since Sept. 11, so have WELS members.

Nicole R. Moline



American flags wave from windows. Billboards proclaim, “United we stand.” Red, white, and blue is plentiful, and tributes to firefighters and policemen are common.

I could have been in any city in the United States post-Sept. 11. Yet, I was not in just any city. I was in *the* city—New York City. The city that has been affected more than any other since Sept. 11—which is why I was there.

### The how and why

I was one of eight WELS members who traveled to New York City to discover how WELS can help the people in this hurting city. We were able to go because of the generosity of WELS members across the synod.

As soon as the tragedy occurred, WELS’ Committee on Relief established an Attack on America Fund. As of Dec. 10, members donated over \$700,000, the largest amount ever collected by WELS’ Committee on Relief.

“People do have a great capacity to show love,” says Philip Schupmann, chairman of the Committee on Relief. “They just need an opportunity to show that love.”

As the money rolled in, decisions had to be made about how to distribute it. Often the Committee on Relief works through a local congregation after a tragedy occurs. So, \$400,000 was given to Sure Foundation in New York City, a

home mission with 25 members. A committee of area congregation members was formed to accept applications for the money. That committee is distributing the money to those in greatest need, while also bringing gospel comfort.

WELS Kingdom Workers (WKW) received \$100,000 so that they could bring volunteers to New York. Richard Warnecke, administrator for WKW’s Faith in Action program, explains three reasons for the team traveling to New York. “First, we wanted to find ways to help—whether it be working with trauma/grief counseling through the Red Cross or some other way. Then, we wanted to find out how our congregations around New York, specifically Sure Foundation, could apply tools like counseling and listening as part of their ministry. Finally, our church body often uses money and prayers to help those in need. Here we were also able to show acts of charity. We can—and should—do more with that. After all, if we say we’re loving, but our actions don’t support that, we’re missing something.”

### The work

With our mission defined, the team of WKW volunteers worked in New York City from Nov. 13-17. We gained experience by volunteering for the Red Cross, which began with a two-hour training session in Brooklyn to teach us





Tara Brennan, a WELS Kingdom Worker volunteer, shows her support by signing a banner offering sympathy to those in New York City.

the dos and don'ts of counseling someone after a tragedy.

"The Red Cross gave us direction," says Warnecke. "They reminded us that we weren't there just to talk about Jesus, but to listen. It was also important for us to learn from those who went before us and for us to see an organized system at work. Perhaps in the future we can have a volunteer relief team from WELS that can mobilize itself for future disasters."

After the Red Cross training session, we were assigned to counsel either at Pier 94's Family Assistance Center or at Ground Zero's morgue.

Although we treasured our time volunteering with the Red Cross, we missed being able to openly share our faith. We shared our thoughts and feelings with representatives from the congregations closest to New York

City, Sure Foundation in particular. We explained that if we want to help people as they are meant to be helped—by using God's Word—we need to operate our own efforts, and we need congregational support in New York to make that happen.

The result is that another team of WKW volunteers traveled to New York City in December (look for details in the March issue). Counselors from Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc., and members at Sure Foundation helped coordinate a three-day counseling service for those struggling with how to deal with the events of Sept. 11. At the same time, volunteers distributed information about Sure Foundation's Christmas Eve service and other church information so those who are counseled have a place to turn to after WKW volunteers leave.

### The conclusions

The Sept. 11 attacks brought citizens of the United States together. It also brought members of our synod together by allowing us to put our Christian love into action.

As Pam Wilke, one of the volunteers to New York, explains, "All of WELS is involved with this. Even if you aren't able to go to New York, you are there with us when we are there. We are representing you."

We truly are united in our work for him, which means even more

## Making a difference

Steve Gabb, pastor at Sure Foundation, New York City, writes: "Your love and generosity are making a difference. A widow of a Cantor Fitzgerald employee who was killed in the World Trade Center attack wrote the following letter. She is a prospective recipient of Committee on Relief funds."

*Thanking you for your consideration of financial assistance for my family.*

*Your letter was very uplifting and timely. There are days when I can cope. Today was not one of them.*

*My girls seem to be falling apart. I had just returned home after four trips to their school. Their teachers are at a loss to comfort them. They cry for me and want to stay home. I asked my daughter Paige what I could get her for her birthday. She said just her dad. People like you restore my faith in humanity.*

*Please don't be discouraged. You are our angels. It does not matter how much you can help each family, it is simply your love, spirituality, and devotion that matter most. God bless you in this awesome task.*

*Thank you from all of our hearts.*

than billowing flags and brightly colored billboards.



*Nicole Moline is a communications assistant for Forward in Christ magazine and WELS Communication Services. Read a daily journal of her trips to New York at <<http://www.wels.net/sab/frm-bhm.html>>.*

*To contribute to the Committee on Relief's Attack on America Fund, make checks payable to WELS Committee on Relief and send to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. Clearly mark your gifts for the WELS Committee on Relief, c/o Attack on America.*

## Reflections of a volunteer

Pam Wilke, a wife and mother of three grown children, attends St. John, Watertown, Wis. In October, she heard Richard Warnecke of WELS Kingdom Workers preach about a visit he'd made to New York City after Sept. 11.

"I'd been watching everything unfold since Sept. 11, trying to find a way to help," explains Wilke. "Pastor Warnecke's sermon told me that this was my chance. Something prompted me to talk to him and ask him what I could do to help. He handed me an application, and before I knew it, I was on my way to New York with seven other volunteers.

"I'd never done anything like this before, and I wasn't sure what to expect," continues Wilke. "I didn't feel I had any credentials to qualify me to do this, but I wanted to help. One way I could do that was by showing my Christian love for people. Even if I couldn't tell those at the Family Assistance Center too much about my faith, I could show them I cared by smiling and talking to them. . . .

"I learned that people in the pews can do this," concludes Wilke. "It's not that hard or that scary once you do it."

Pam Wilke on a New York subway train.



# Building bridges



**Friendship with an eternal goal starts with the witness of your daily life and blossoms into a conversation about Jesus.**

**John P. Huebner**

**A**s I travel to WELS congregations around the country, I often speak to groups and Bible classes about witnessing. I always ask two questions:

1. "How many of you have been encouraged by your pastor to share your faith?"
2. "How many of you have done it within the past six to eight weeks?"

The answers I get aren't pretty—about 100% say they ought to witness, while about 10-12% say they actually have done it recently.

God puts it into us Christians to talk about him. Jesus said, "you will be my witnesses . . ." (Acts 1:8). One way to witness is by naturally sharing our faith with our friends and neighbors.

## **Friendship witnessing defined**

Friendship witnessing is friendship with an eternal goal: you want to share Jesus because you want the best for your friend in this life and for eternity.

This sharing of faith shouldn't be an "in your face" memorized presentation, but should flow as naturally as a conversation about the family or about your favorite sports team. It can flow, because you're not talking to a stranger, but a friend who has come to know you. She has learned that you are pretty much like others. You struggle. You sin. You laugh. You aren't judgmental. You encourage. You're honest. You're there for her. You're reliable. She can trust you with her problems and private world. She has noticed that something about you is special. You're not trying to "fix" all the things that are wrong in her life. You just care. We call it friendship witnessing because it starts with the witness of your daily life and blossoms into a conversation about Jesus.

It's much like building bridges. In witnessing, the "bridge" is the relationship over which your communications and actions flow with your friend. You want her to know you, and you want to know her well

enough so that you have the opportunity to share Jesus in a natural way. Here's how you go about it.

## **Get ready**

- **Identify your F.R.A.N.s.** Fill out a list of your **F**riends, **R**elatives, **A**cquaintances, and **N**eighbors who do not know Jesus or don't currently attend church. This is your "mission family." Post your list where you will see it every day.

- **Pray.**

- ⇨ Daily.

- ⇨ Specifically: Pray for your mission families' needs and ask for opportunities to use those needs in your witnessing.
  - ⇨ Dangerously: "Jesus, put me in a situation where I can witness."

- **Focus** on one or two persons on your list who seem most open to a discussion about spiritual things.

- **Do things together so you might understand them better.** Play golf. Go shopping. Invite them to a barbecue. Help build their new deck.

• **Remember five “Be’s”**

- ⇒ **Be a good listener.** Work with the questions as your friend asks them. If she asks a question you cannot answer, rejoice! It’s an opportunity to come back with an answer.
- ⇒ **Be sensitive to times of change or need in people’s lives.** Problems are golden opportunities to talk about the real, underlying problem (sin) and the only solution (Jesus).
- ⇒ **Be patient.** Jesus didn’t reveal himself as Savior until a second meeting with the man born blind (John 9). It’s God’s timetable, not yours. We are not responsible for the conversion—just for the conversation.
- ⇒ **Be joyful.** Joy equips us to deal with the discouragements of this world. We have an abiding hope because of our risen Jesus.
- ⇒ **Be yourself.** Normal. Natural. Growing in Jesus. Not better, just forgiven!

**Just do it**

In our hearts we want to witness. But often we are afraid. Ask yourself this: “Am I afraid about how I will look to others or how they will respond to me?” Then ask Jesus for one gift—“Help me to think mainly about you, Lord. Just you.”

Jesus said believers are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). He was talking about the witness of our lives and words. Here are ongoing abbreviated examples of “salty” conversations:

**S=SAY SOMETHING.** “Sorry to hear you’ve lost your job.” “I’m really glad to hear about your wedding. Isn’t love grand?” “You have neat kids.”

**A=ASK QUESTIONS.** “How do you handle the stress and worry?” “Have you ever wondered about absolutely unconditional love?” “It’s

a neat privilege to be responsible for shaping a life, isn’t it?”

**L=LISTEN CAREFULLY.** (responding to their answers) “It’s tough right now.” “It’s hard to know how to say the right thing every time.” “You love them a lot, don’t you?”

**T=TAKE IT DEEPER.** (moving from your friend to our best Friend) “I’ve met someone who is teaching me how to worry less and be more content.” “I’ve found something that has helped me to learn to love better and more openly—it’s called forgiveness.” “Lots to think about—keeping them safe, education, helping them grow spiritually. . . .”

When you get to the deeper part of the conversation, you might want to say, “I’ve met someone who has helped me.” Wait for them to ask, “Who?” (This shows they are interested, and it gives you permission to continue.) Then mention Jesus. Follow your heart and instincts at this point. Speak about Jesus as someone you know intimately, not somebody about whom you once had a history lesson. Speak joyfully about how Jesus has lived a perfect life for you, died to pay for all your sins, and risen again to prove he has conquered sin and death and reserved a place in heaven for you.

**Keep going**

Once you have tasted the joy of sharing Jesus and watched the Holy Spirit use you, things will never be the same! So keep going:

- **Invite your friend to Bible information class or to worship.** Offer to pick him up. Attend the class with her. Sit with them.
- **Study together with others in your congregation who are interested in friendship witnessing and Bible study.** Ask your pastor to help.



• **Hold a friendship worship service.** Work with your pastor to plan a special Sunday service designed for members to bring friends.

• **Help plan a year of special events and worship with outreach themes.** Examples include Valentine’s Day/Sunday focus on Christian love, Easter breakfast and festival service, Mother’s/Father’s Day services, Christmas Eve candlelight service.

• **Attend a School of Outreach.** These weekends, sponsored by your district commission on evangelism, equip congregations for outreach.

Picture this: judgment day comes. Our glorious Savior returns to take all who believe in him to join him in heaven forever. There, just inside the gate of heaven, is a group of friends who hug you and joyfully exclaim, “We thank God for using you to introduce us to Jesus!”

Jesus turns to you and says, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” ✨

*John Huebner is mission counselor for the Michigan and North Atlantic Districts. Any questions? Contact him at 410/340-3536; <miscjohn@aol.com>.*

For more resources on friendship witnessing, check out <www.shopWELS.net>. Click on Areas of Ministry, then Evangelism.



# Growing in faith

**Kettle Moraine, Manitowoc, and Shoreland Lutheran high schools are growing in many different ways. The common thread, though, is that the students in each of these schools are growing in faith in their Lord.**

**Betsy Lentz**

**C**hildren grow throughout their lives. Physically, that growth is nurtured with healthy foods. Spiritual growth comes from hearing the Word.

When our children attend a WELS high school, they are exposed to the Word of God, shown Christian examples by teachers and staff, and are surrounded by the love of fellow Christian students.

Students grow in many ways, but certainly they are growing in faith at our WELS schools.



## **Growing in size and enthusiasm at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School (KML)**

**Located in:** Jackson, Wis.

**Established:** 1974

**Size in 2001-02:** 405

**Web site:** <[www.kml.k12.wi.us](http://www.kml.k12.wi.us)>

Kettle is in the midst of adding to its facilities. The school's board approved a large project that will

include seven classrooms, a second gymnasium, locker rooms, a cafeteria, and an overhaul of the outdoor athletic facilities, including an area where Kettle's new football team can play. The proposed building project is sectioned into four phases, with an expected \$15 million investment.

The student body at Kettle also continues to grow. The school is located in a rapidly growing community. Principal Keith Bowe hopes that the improved facility and broader curriculum will increase the percentage of students who attend from within the school's federation.

Teacher Jerry Zeamer cautions, though, that "any time a school grows larger, it presents new and unique challenges."

He also reminds us that even when presenting challenges, God brings blessings into our lives. "Each new teacher brings with them unique gifts from God," says Zeamer. "Our new superintendent, Dave Bartelt, has brought a tremendous amount of enthusiasm with him from California.

Enthusiasm is catchy, and it is certainly catchy in the hallways and classrooms at KML this school year."

The students share in that enthusiasm. Bowe says that the

students at Kettle share their faith proudly and boldly in many school activities, including sports teams praying before games, food drives for the community, volunteer work, and mission collections.



## **Growing in spirit at Manitowoc Lutheran High School (MLHS)**

**Located in:** Manitowoc, Wis.

**Established:** 1956

**Size in 2001-02:** 355

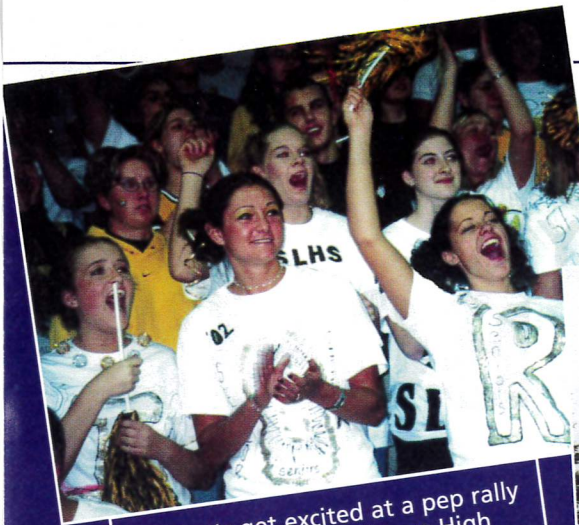
**Web site:** <[www.mlhslancers.com](http://www.mlhslancers.com)>

Manitowoc Lutheran High School is situated in northern Wisconsin, known for cold and blustery winter weather. But the hearts of students at MLHS are afire with a love for their Lord, and they proudly show their faith within their community.

Their Homecoming celebration this year became a wonderful Christian witness. Weeklong festivities were set to begin on Sept. 12. After the tragedy on Sept. 11, the students changed their plan from one of celebration and mischief to one of prayer and appreciation. The student body followed a patriotic theme. They reviewed their schedule to determine if each activity would be appropriate given the tragedy.

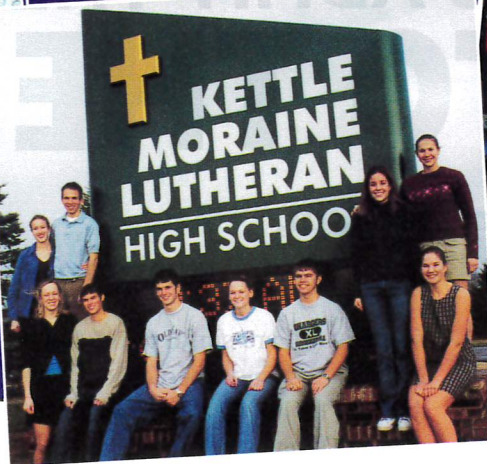
Many asked how they could help. Principal Dennis Steinbrenner explains "that while the team played their homecoming game, some stu-





Students get excited at a pep rally for Shoreland Lutheran High School's football team.

These students have caught the enthusiasm that is spreading at Kettle this year.



A performance by Manitowoc Lutheran High School's Concert Choir.

dents were on the other side of the school holding a car wash to raise funds for those in need in New York City." That single car wash generated more than \$1,000 that was forwarded to the WELS Committee on Relief.

In an effort to bring comfort to those in the community, the students made large placards that were placed facing major roadways. The placards included verses that reminded passing motorists of God's everlasting love.



### Growing in service at Shoreland Lutheran High School

**Located in:** Somers, Wis.

**Established:** 1971

**Size in 2001-02:** 325

**Web site:**

<[www.shorelandlutheranhigh.org](http://www.shorelandlutheranhigh.org)>

When asked about his favorite aspect of being associated with Shoreland, teacher Bruce Heckmann says, "It is the all-encompassing view of our school as a Christian workshop—a workshop where teachers shape and mold students with Christian values, principles, and Scripture."

The lessons learned at Shoreland are carried through a lifetime by those who pass through its doors. Long-time supporters of the school comment that Shoreland graduates are now volunteering in their churches, coaching school teams, and singing in church choirs. Many students have gone on from Shoreland to become pastors and teachers of the Word. That is how important the lessons learned at this workshop are.

And, although the school just completed a major addition to its building a year ago, Shoreland hopes to expand its workshop again soon. Principal Jeff Wiechmann hopes to have a chapel-arts facility within the next five years. Enrollment may increase in that time, too, but Wiechmann and other faculty members will be sure to keep Christ crucified as the center of the school.

As a senior recently noted, "Everyone at Shoreland has faith in the Savior. That really makes our school special. At Shoreland, people don't need to worry about being

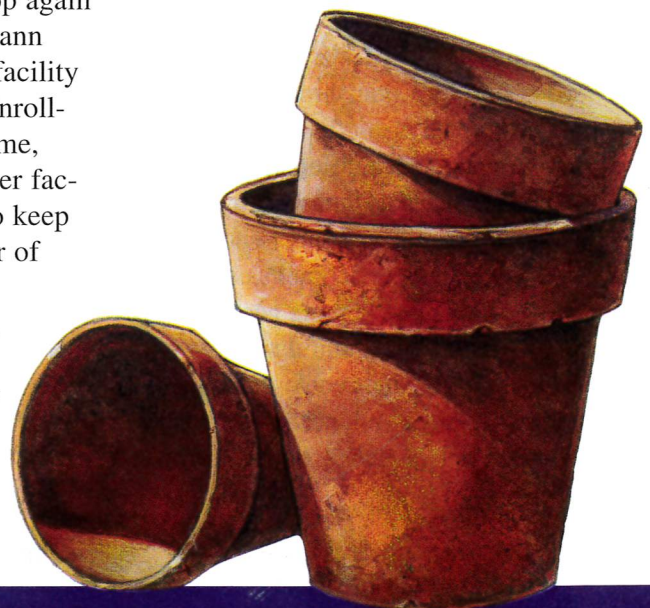
'in the crowd,' because everyone's in the same crowd."

### Growing in faith

Kettle Moraine. Manitowoc. Shoreland. Each of these schools is growing. They may be growing in different ways and that growth may take different shapes, but you can be assured that the students entrusted to these schools are growing in faith in their Lord.



*Betsy Lentz is a member at St. Martin, Watertown, South Dakota.*



The 12 attributes presented in this series reflect what makes Lutherans unique. Although each attribute on its own may be shared by other religious groups, when all the attributes are studied together, a uniquely Lutheran image emerges.

# LUTHERANS ADMIT THEY'RE BAD TO THE BONE

Wayne D. Mueller

**Instead of denying original sin, Lutherans receive God's power to overcome it.**

Leaf through the hymnal *Christian Worship*, and you will see an ecumenical potpourri—gleanings from all different Christian bodies of all ages. Music and wording is borrowed or adapted from Roman Catholics, Methodists, the Reformed, Evangelicals, and Episcopalians.

But on the first page of the Common Service, you will find something uniquely Lutheran. In the confession of sins we admit that we “are by nature sinful” (p. 15). Most Christian churches include some form of confession in their public worship. But outside Lutheranism, people confess only sins they have actually committed. Lutherans alone admit to being bad to the bone. We know that we have a sinful flesh, an innate sinful nature for which we bear guilt and liability for punishment.

The hymnal is not the only place you will notice this difference. I have seen tel-evangelists thump their Bible on all points of law. But not once have I heard them quote St. Paul's confession: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7:18). This confession is also strangely absent in the Christian pop literature in Evangelical bookstores.

## **Dramatically important**

What's the big deal about admit-

ting that we are sinful to the bone? Isn't that a minor theological detail that can be left to ministers to debate? Won't even the thought of original sin make the everyday Christian less optimistic about his ability to lead his life for God?

**What leads people to deny the reality of their sinful nature is the sinful nature itself.**

Lutherans do not judge the relative value of Bible teachings on the basis of personal analysis. Our Savior commissioned us to teach people to obey everything he commanded us. In other words, if it's in the Bible, it's important.

Original sin, or original depravity, is not an obscure teaching. The Old and New Testaments give ample witness to the reality that sin adheres to our bones. God sent the great flood because the “inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). King David confessed the origin of his sins of adultery and murder: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Jesus put an exclamation point on the Old

Testament teaching of mankind's depraved nature when he told Nicodemus, “Flesh gives birth to flesh” (John 3:6).

## **Domino effect**

The denial of original sin has a domino effect on other key Bible teachings. Those who downplay or deny our natural sinfulness also elevate our human ability to do good. The phrase “There's a little good in all of us,” flies in the face of Bible truth. Yet the Roman Catholic church teaches that when God infuses grace into the little bit of good in us, we can work at saving ourselves. Their denial of original sin effectively cheapens God's saving grace. But Paul enriched our appreciation of God's grace by contrasting it with our sinful nature. “We were by nature objects of wrath. . . . 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 2:3,8,9).

Evangelicals say that the remnant of good in us enables us to make our own decision for Christ. This contradicts what the Bible teaches about conversion. Jesus told his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). Lutherans who regularly confess their natural depravity give all glory to the Spirit, who alone can turn them to Jesus. “No one

## BY NATURE SINFUL



can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Not only is God's grace in salvation and conversion diminished, but to deny our sinful nature also hurts our understanding of the sacraments. Almost all Protestant churches view Baptism and the Lord's Supper as mere church ceremonies. They emphasize human commitment, dedication, and participation, not God's gracious means of communicating his forgiveness. The Reformed teach the Holy Supper as a "remembrance" and no more. The Baptists who deny that babies have original sin likewise deny their infants the forgiveness that Baptism offers.

### A positive truth

What leads people to deny the reality of their sinful nature is the sinful nature itself. Sinful sense leads people to follow popular opinion. "Babies are so innocent looking. How can they be sinful?" "Even in the worst of us, there is a spark of good." The American ideal of doing our own thing and pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps infiltrates our religious thinking. But that is only our childish sinful flesh screaming at God, "Mommy, I'd rather do it myself."

At the heart of Christian faith is our trust that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). So when God says something and inscribes it in his Holy Word, we trust no matter how hard it is to swallow that he did it for our good. God's words are not only true; they are always loving.

The same is true of God's clear message about our inherited sinful nature. Instead of allowing our flesh to deny its own existence, we look for the loving reason God repeatedly calls on us to acknowledge our innate sinfulness.

We don't have to look far. Jesus warned about the evil that lurks within us: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'" (Matthew 15:19,20). But he compassionately offers full remedy: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

With his frank warnings, God seeks to wean us from our stubborn self-reliance so that we will flee for refuge to his infinite mercy. Every week Lutherans hear the good news along with the bad

news. No consciences are left burdened. No pessimism is allowed to brood. No one can do more than he who does all by the power of God. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Instead of denying original sin, Lutherans receive God's power to overcome it. Even Paul struggled with his sinful nature. "The evil I do not want to do," he wrote, "this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). At his own wits' end, he meets his frustration with God's own answer: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24,25).

The teaching of original sin that evokes our weekly confession strips us of self-righteousness and work-righteousness. Then God clothes us with the righteousness of his own Son. Suddenly, his full grace shines through Christ's salvation and the Spirit's conversion. Suddenly, the power of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to convey forgiveness draws us to the font and to the table. Suddenly, we have a new confident urge to make the rest of our lives a thanksgiving. Our daily motto becomes, "I can do everything through him who give me strength" (Philippians 4:13). This is the good that God alone produces in those who trust he is loving even when he says the hard things.

Wayne Mueller is first vice president of WELS.

# GOING THROUGH THE DARKNESS

It takes faith to enter pitch blackness, faith that may lead you to a place you would never have gone on your own, a place that you would never have guessed held the promise of something strange and wonderful.

Fred Fedke III





disappeared into the darkness above.

"Follow me," I said to Jackie and the rest.

"Where are you?" she asked.

**Once more I was surprised that a person could be plunged into complete blackness so suddenly.**

It is like passing through a veil. On one side it is the usual, as light as every day, such a normal experience we never think about it. The following moment it is pitch black.

"Just step forward into the dark," I told Jackie. "Then stretch out your arms. You'll hit a wall on each side. After the first step you'll find a railing with your right hand. Grab the railing and come on up."

The steps curved counter-clockwise. After climbing one whole circuit I emerged out of the ink into a dim light. I could see the railing—just barely, but it was there, a thin curl of gray in the darkness, winding from my hand up and around my head.

"Are you coming?" I said back to the darkness.

"I can't see," said a voice.

"This is scary," said another.

"Just keep coming," I said back to the dark. "It's like faith. Hold on and trust. And keep coming."

**We were in the spiral staircase of the massive church called, oddly, a chapel.** It was the Rockefeller Chapel on the campus of the University of Chicago. Wide enough for only one person, the staircase led to the top of the bell tower. Going up and around was like being inside a giant corkscrew.

Another circuit of stairs and I saw above me a small window. It was a narrow rectangle set deep onto the wall. Nearly a century of dust and grime rendered it barely translucent, but it was enough. When I reached

it, I saw the steps for the first time. They were gray and solid pie slices. Where the point should be was a circle. All the circles were stacked on top of each other with each wedge fanned slightly to form the spiral. All those stacked circles in the center formed a column, a straight shaft going right up the middle of the coil.

**[God] bids us follow, to step up, to trust even though we don't see, to press on, to have our own solitary journey.**

I walked on, my right hand holding the railing along the outside, my left grasping the center column. My leg muscles ached. The people behind me would see only the gray wedges and perhaps the heels of the person in front of them, behind, only voices of those following.

"Are you OK?" I asked down the spiral.

"Yeah, I can see now." It was Jackie's voice.

**Confident they would make it, and getting the rhythm of the steps, I hurried up, around and around, not slowing for the dark portions on the sides opposite the windows.** Higher up was a different style window. It was the same thin rectangle, but instead of being flat on top it had a cloverleaf design, "trefoil," as it is called, symbolic of the Trinity.

Beyond that I came to a little room off to the right of the steps. I left the staircase and went in. It wasn't much bigger than a closet, but it had three casement windows. The room was flooded with green light. The ivy on the building had grown all the way to

this height and encircled the windows. It was garden-like. I waited for the others. I could hear their voices.

"This is neat."

"Isn't this something!"

"My legs hurt."

"I just love this!"

Then Jackie emerged from the stairs. Holding the rail and smiling she said again, "This is neat."

"Come in here and take a break," I said. Behind came her daughter and the other kids, and then the adults. We all crammed into the little room and looked out the windows.

"Wow!"

"I didn't think we were this high."

"When my daughter was here last spring," I told them, "she called this 'Quasimodo's Room.' You know, the hunchbacked bell ringer at Notre Dame." Some laughed.

"Cool!" someone said.

"Let's go on," I said.

**I stepped out of the room back into the spiral.** It got even brighter as I went up. I came to three windows, each with a trefoil. Just past that I came to the three doors. Two had padlocks. They led outside to the buttresses. The center door led to the catwalk that extended over the vaulted ceiling of the church. At the end, around the corner, was the room with the mechanism for ringing the hours on the bells. It was all valves and hoses and electric wires. The thing clicked and snapped and hissed before each clock chime.

Beyond that room the staircase went on and up, past another room that had two Liberty Bell-sized bells, then up another circuit and another room with two more bells not much smaller.

Up again and there was the Carillon Room with that strange organ-like instrument that had large wooden pegs jutting out where the

*continued on p. 18*

keyboard should be, played with the fists and not the fingers.

Beyond that, still more steps, up and up, at last emerging at the top of the tower. A doorway led outside, and a narrow walkway led around the parapet. It was in the open air. The sun was shining. The breeze was blowing, fresh and heavenly after the stifling heat and stale air of the staircase. And the view. That beautiful view from the top.

"This is neat!" I said out loud to myself. It is like faith! The reward comes at the end. The way is hard, sometimes scary. You press on alone, but for a voice of encouragement ahead and a hope there are others following.

"The scariest part was the best part," my daughter said to me later. "It's going through the dark," she explained.

I smiled at her and nodded in agreement. It's going *through* the dark. The scariest part becomes the best part after you've passed it, when you simply trusted and took that first step into the darkness and kept going. After the dark comes the surprise.

**I suppose some never enter the darkness, prefer not to.** But then they miss it—the thrill of that first dim light, the neat windows, the green room, the catwalk, the popping valves chiming the hours, the gigantic bells, the wonderful music of the carillon, and at last, that lungful of clean air, the sunshine, that gorgeous view of the sky, and the sight of all those miniscule things going on below.

Missing it, a person would still be standing down in that gloomy corridor staring at a

deep shadow that someone said is a way up.

It does take faith to enter that pitch blackness, that place where you would never have gone on your own, a place you would never have guessed held the promise of something else, something more, something much more, something strange and wonderful. It was a place you would never have even known about except someone who had been there before you told you about it, showed it to you, revealed it to you.

Stretch out your arms.

Like a cross. Like the one who went before.

And believe.

"Whoever lives and believes in me will never die," Jesus said (John 11:26). Then he died. He stepped beyond the veil and was gone. He entered the darkness. Those left saw him no more. They gave up. On the third day, all to their unbelieving surprise, he reappeared.

"Don't be afraid!" he said.

And he bid them follow. He bids us follow, too, to step up, to trust even though we don't see, to press on, to have our own solitary journey, in sweat, in fear sometimes, fatiguing, often feeling alone, but knowing we are not. There is the railing with all hands on it, linking, surrounding, and embracing all. There is the encouraging voice ahead.

We have the Scriptures. We have the faith of our fathers. We have the fellowship of believers, a railing through time as well as space, linking, embracing, enfolding. There is the stairway itself, a connection from earth to all beyond, to that garden, to paradise itself.

The column. The stairway. The way up. "The Way," Jesus called himself. The way to God and heaven and home and to those gone before, that new Jacob's ladder to heaven's throne. Trust and believe, even when you don't see. It is faith that is evident when not seeing.

**Then come the surprises.** We didn't go up, he came down. He came down to our murk, he punctured our darkness. He lifts us. In him life's journey grows light and leads up. In him we find the dirt and grime and stale failures and spent human futility left far below. With him the world's concerns seem mundane and small. He brings us from darkness to light, from fear to joy, from death to life. He brings us from the scariest part to the best part.

"There's something you've gotta see," I told my daughter last spring.

"There's something I'd like you all to see," I told the people signing up for our bus tour.

It was the chapel stairway.

**There's something better than the chapel I want you to see, and I want to see it with you.** That other big view. The fresh air of lasting forgiveness and love eternal. A sky's worth of blessings above for an earth full of hurting people below.

Come on.

Jesus says it.

"Follow me."

You'll find a railing and a voice of encouragement.

Grab hold and just keep on.

The best is still coming.



# God is love

**The world thinks of love as an emotion, a feeling in the heart. God speaks of love as action—what we do rather than how we feel.**

James L. Hoff

**V**alentine's Day is well established in our society. Almost everyone will go out of the way to give some token of love and affection to his or her sweetheart this month.

I read that St. Valentine was a priest in Rome during the third century. At that time Emperor Claudius II tried to foster a single-minded dedication among his soldiers by forbidding them to marry. When the Christians in the army spoke to Valentine about being denied the godly rite of marriage, the priest began secretly marrying young soldiers to their beloveds. Valentine was found out, arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed for treason. St. Valentine has been held as a symbol of romantic love ever since.

## Love is a verb

Romantic love and all other forms of love are gifts from God. We do what God wants when we love those whom he has placed close to us on this earth.

If we are to truly love, God and his Word must foster and guide our love, not the world and its ideas about love. The world loves only what is beneficial to self. But God says love is not self-seeking. The world thinks of love as an emotion, a feeling

in the heart. God speaks of love as action—what we do rather than how we feel.

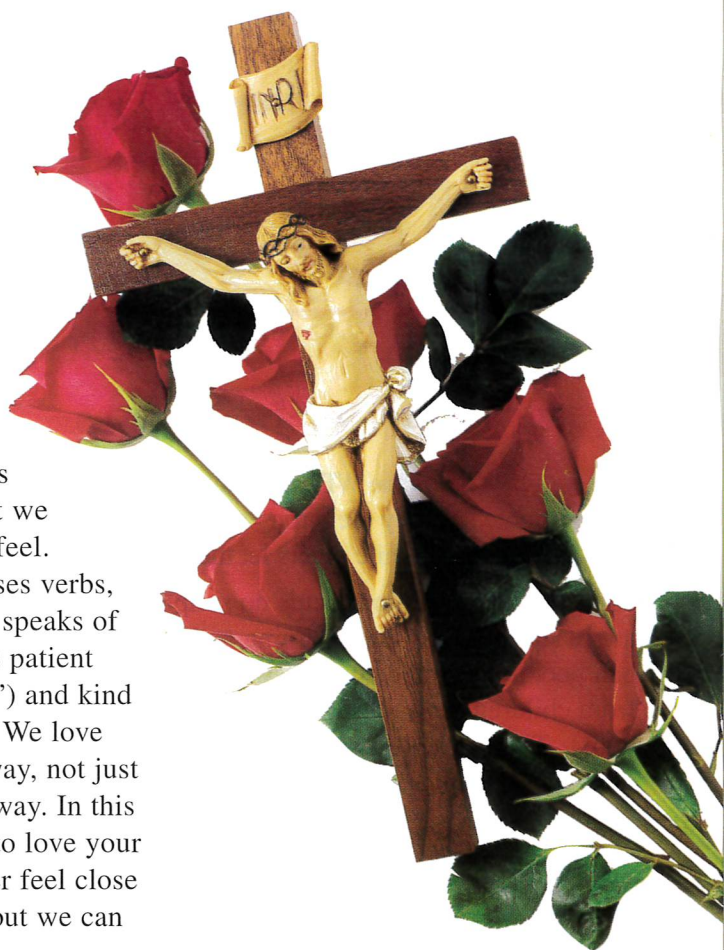
For that reason God uses verbs, actions words, when he speaks of love. Love, God says, is patient (literally “being patient”) and kind (literally “being kind”). We love when we act a certain way, not just when we feel a certain way. In this way it is even possible to love your enemies. We could never feel close to people who hurt us, but we can love, be kind, to them.

## When we love, it is only because God first loved us.

### Love comes from God

Love is certainly not a human invention. Love did not and does not originate in man. “God is love,” the Bible says (1 John 4:16). When real love is present, God has already been there to give his blessing and gift of love. When we love, it is only because God first loved us.

It is fitting that Lent often begins in February. In the month of love we are reminded that “greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). We are also reminded that love among humans—as wonderful



a God-given gift as it is—is not enough for us. People could have wonderful human relationships here on earth and still spend an eternity in hell. Because we so often fail to love as God demands us to, we need that divine love that accomplishes our forgiveness and restores our relationship with the Almighty. Lent is all about how God demonstrates his own love for us in this: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us closer to him.



*Jim Hoff is pastor at St. Paul, Livonia, Michigan.*

# IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

## TOPIC: HARRY POTTER

**Question:** What is the WELS position on the Harry Potter series? Some say they are wrong and won't allow their kids to read them, while others let their kids read them.

**Answer:** Your question yields no simple answer. Some are ready to hold a book burning and want our synod to ban books. They need one answer. Others see no harm from children (or adults) becoming absorbed in these books. They need quite a different answer. Allow me to offer answers for both extremes.

### Banning isn't necessary

First, let me address those who lean toward condemning any reading of such books except to refute them. Most literature contains large quantities of things with which we disagree. Other than the Bible, we need to exercise discretion whenever we read. Developing spiritual discretion is an essential skill in an unbelieving world: "Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Much of what we disagree with in Harry Potter is quite obvious compared to far more subtle influences. When Satan wishes to do his worst, he doesn't wear wizard's robes but "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Much of what comes out of Christian publishers, containing subtle mixtures of truth and error, is far more dangerous than Harry Potter because the Christian may read it with his guard down.

Couldn't a Christian parent read a Harry Potter book with a child and sort through what is right and wrong? Might that help children toward a lifetime of better discernment of what comes at them from all media?

What's more, we would not say that every flight of a child's imagination is evil. A child (or adult) can find enjoyment in make-believe. In one of the talks I had with my 11-year-old about these books, I reminded him that there is no such thing as good and bad magic, but

all such claiming of powers apart from God is stealing God's glory. My son reminded me that he understood Harry to be literature, not life, by saying, "I know, Dad, but he's fake!"

One final warning: to set up as many rules as possible is not the heart of our faith. We would not necessarily be stronger Christians if we could boast that nothing tainted by the world has ever entered our homes or minds. Listen to what Paul said to those who were becoming a little too enamored by rules and regulations: "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:20-23). In the immediate context, Paul isn't addressing banning books, but a false asceticism that labeled as evil all physical things in God's creation.

However, there is a principle for our discussion. As we work hard to keep evil from getting at us from the outside, the danger is that we forget our real problem is sinful hearts on the inside. My heart needs a daily humbling dose of the reality of my own sinfulness so that I run, not to find better rules, but to the cross of Christ for free forgiveness and for power to live in the world but not of it. Remember: those who caused Jesus the greatest trouble were the most scrupulous moralists of the day. "Taste not! Touch not! Handle not!" was the Pharisees' theme song.

### Caution is needed

But now for the sake of those who may be waving high their Harry Potter books in triumph that *Forward in Christ* magazine has given its approval, allow me to sound some real cautions in your direction.

Although fantasy books and movies have existed for years, the culture in which those books and movies appear today is vastly different from our parents' and grandparents' culture. We have moved from an outwardly Christian culture to one that loves anything "spiritual" as long as it isn't biblical. Wisconsin Christians were rudely awakened to the shifting sands of our "spiritual" brave new world when my state hired a Wiccan priestess (the Rev. Jaymi Witch!) as a prison chaplain.

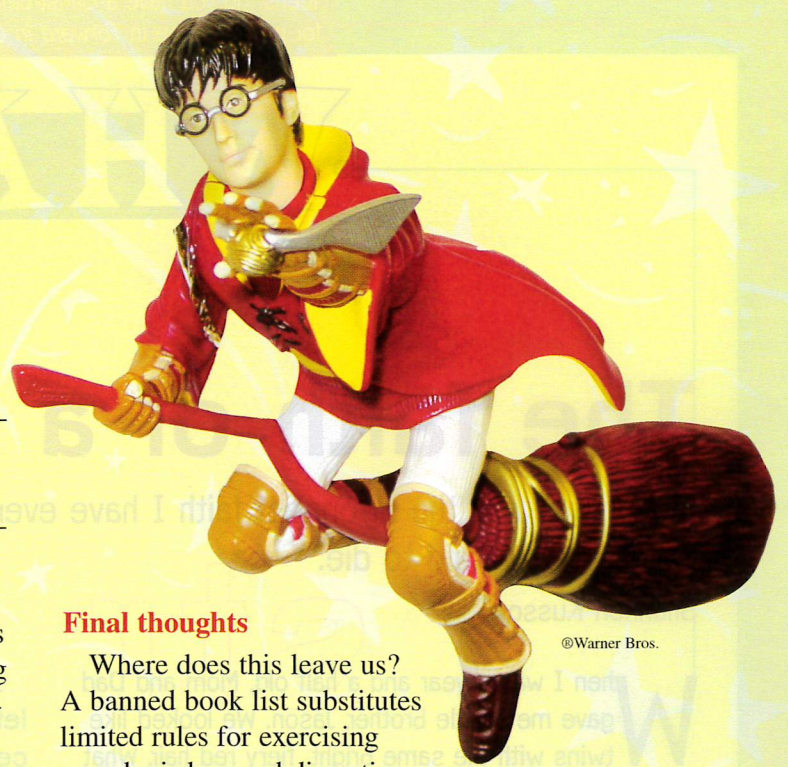
It is particularly among adolescents and young teens that interest seems to be on the rise in things bordering on the occult. In such a spiritual smorgasbord environment, isn't there reason for concern if our children idolize someone whose triumphs are riding his Nimbus 2000 broom and becoming as adept at casting spells as his schoolmates? The danger is one of developing a spiritually unhealthy fascination with things magical and superstitious. The apparent progression of the intensity of the magic in the successive books of the series also bears watching.

Allowing our children to read what may confuse and disturb them with little or no Christian guidance is spiritual child abuse, even if the vast majority of those children never try to make a feather levitate or run out to buy a how-to book on casting spells.

The most deadly combination is a home without many words from Jesus but with plenty of words about Harry. Christian discernment doesn't flow naturally from sinful hearts. Discernment is a spiritual gift nurtured by frequent contact with the Spirit's inspired words. It's a gift best "tested" under the loving guidance of mature Christians.

Our sinful nature loves to twist Christian freedom into a "cover-up for [doing] evil" (1 Peter 2:16). To soar above other supposed "weak" believers by proudly boasting that potential spiritual traps can't bother us, leaves us sounding ridiculously similar to a fellow named Peter who crash landed amidst the flames of his boasts. Against such proud arrogance Paul wrote: "So, if you think that you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12)!

**Neither a blanket condemnation nor a blanket endorsement is the "Christian" answer.**



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### Final thoughts

Where does this leave us? A banned book list substitutes limited rules for exercising sound wisdom and discretion. Nor is the answer to repeat the proud mantra of some in Corinth: "Everything is permissible for me." To that Paul answered: "'Everything is permissible for me'—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me'—but I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Neither a blanket condemnation nor a blanket endorsement is the "Christian" answer. Christians need to wrestle with such questions without imposing their best solution as the only suitable response for every Christian family. We must heed the warnings Scripture speaks both to those who *add* and to those who *subtract* from it!

We don't need our synod to supply us with an Oprah Winfrey reading list nor a banned book registry. We need Christians well-versed in Scripture and growing in Christ's saving love for them—who then share that regularly with their children. We need Christians wrestling in prayer for spiritual wisdom to live in the world but not be of it—who then model that for their children.

*Richard Gurgel is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

*Have a question you want answered? Send it to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; <fic@sab.wels.net>.*

# WHATEVER

## The faith of a child

My brother had the strongest faith I have ever seen.  
He was not afraid to die.

Shannon Kussow

When I was a year and a half old, Mom and Dad gave me a little brother, Jason. We looked like twins with the same bright, fiery red hair. What more could I ask for? I now had someone to play with, someone to help me get in trouble, and someone who would always be there for me.

**But there was something different about my little brother.** He was born with a hole in his heart. When he was just five days old, he had his first of four surgeries. From birth, he never lived a "normal day," but despite that he was the happiest little boy. He had the biggest and the strongest faith I have ever seen in my 18 years. He had "the faith of a little child" that God says all of us should have.

Every time he went into surgery, I knew that he might not survive. But I knew, too, that he would fight to the end. He was a tough little guy. We both had a strong faith and trusted that God would help him.

Just before his sixth birthday, Jason had to go to Children's Hospital of Milwaukee one last time to have surgery. It was his very last surgery. He did not survive.

That day, Valentine's Day, I was staying at my aunt's house. I had gone to bed around 8:30 PM, and I just lay there worrying about my brother. I dozed off. Suddenly, I woke up and knew. I could tell the instant that he had died. I felt as if I was alone. I kept on telling myself, "Don't cry. You don't know if it is true." But I knew.

Later I told my parents, and we found out that about the time he had died was when I had awakened. My brother and I had a special bond that was broken that night, and it is something that I will miss the rest of my life.

**I wondered why God would let this happen to such an innocent boy.** He was not a bad kid; in fact he was a well-behaved child. I was

taught in my Lutheran grade school that God was a loving and gracious God, but I just couldn't understand why he allowed this to happen. Why?

It bothered me a lot, but then I realized something that helped me through the tough times. My brother "had the faith of a little child," the strongest faith I have ever seen. No matter what was wrong with him or how sick he felt or how many tubes he had stuck in him, he was always smiling and always trusting God to help. He was not afraid to die. Yes, I am sure he knew that we would miss him terribly, but he knew that he would be in heaven with Jesus. He knew that he would be happier there than anywhere else or with anyone else on earth.

If you think about it, he was a very smart child. It took me a long time to realize what he had figured out from the beginning. You may be 103 years old, or you may be six. But no matter how many years you have on this earth, you should always trust in God to do things for your benefit and live your life to the fullest, bringing glory to God's name in everything you do.

Shannon Kussow, a member at St. Luke, Little Chute, Wisconsin, is a senior at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wisconsin.



# faith

## Learning in the Lutherlands

During the summer of 2001, five Martin Luther College (MLC) students traveled to Germany for a project funded by the Forward in Christ thank offering. This German Language and Culture Immersion Pilot Project was designed to increase the students' German proficiency as well as their knowledge of German culture.

Nathan Fager, Jonathan Bare, Dustin Sievert, Philipp Janke, and Dave Berg each lived for four weeks with a different German family in Munich while attending the EF International Language School. These future pastors experienced the culture of the land through excursions to local museums and palaces planned by the school and through weekend trips to Hamburg, Ulm, Rome, and Venice.

They had ample opportunity to practice their German even outside the classroom. Fager said, "My favorite practice of German was with my host family's four-year-old who talked baby talk with me at every meal." Sievert adds that, "One of our good friends from the EF Schule . . . only spoke German and Spanish. This was beneficial for the group because it required us to almost exclusively speak Deutsch."

After the four weeks in Munich, the students spent a week learning more about our German sister synod, the *Evangelische Lutherische Freikirche* (ELFK). Some of their most treasured time was spent in Leipzig with the ELFK Seminary students where, according to Fager, "There were many opportunities for fellowship and fun with people who are also fighting the good fight, but in a different country."

These students returned to MLC with much more than an understanding of the German language and culture. James Danell, MLC German professor, says, "It is too bad that words on paper are unable to convey the joy that I have heard in voices and seen on faces as some of the



While with the ELFK the students took trips to Wittenberg (as seen here with a statue of Martin Luther) and the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach. Pictured are (back row l to r): John Bare and Dustin Sievert; (middle row l to r) Prof. Kurt Wittmershaus, Nathan Fager, and Phil Janke; (front row) David Berg.

participants told me of the opportunity to testify to Christ while participating in this project."

That is the bottom line. These future pastors learned to share the gospel of Jesus Christ more effectively. Sievert says, "It was really tremendous to see our sister synod striving so diligently to spread God's Word to Deutschland . . . We went to a small country church service with [an ELFK pastor], and only one lady showed up. Yet he didn't complain or cut the service short, but did his work faithfully and presented the gospel with the same enthusiasm we should expect out of ourselves one day."

Laura Warmuth

## Obituaries

### Reinhard Erwin Frederick Bittorf 1930-2001

Reinhard Bittorf was born Aug. 18, 1930. He died Oct. 4, 2001.

A 1956 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Zion, Bristol, Wis.; Divine Peace, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Marion; one son; and one daughter. He is survived by one son, one grandson, and his sister.

### Sylvester L. Quam 1928-2001

Sylvester Quam was born Aug. 12, 1928, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Nov. 7, 2001, in Milwaukee.

He served as teacher at St. Peter, North Freedom and St. Paul, Algoma; and as principal at Trinity, Neenah, all in Wis. He taught English at Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and at Northwestern College, Watertown.

He was preceded in death by his parents and one daughter. He is survived by his wife, Judy; two sisters; four brothers; three children; and one grandchild.

### Karl M. Blauert 1940-2001

Karl Blauert was born Nov. 10, 1940, in Morrison, Wis. He died Nov. 19, 2001, in Milwaukee.

A 1964 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served Christ, Eagle River, Wis.; Zion, Columbus, Wis.; St. John, Mishicot, Wis.; St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.; Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.; St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Calvary Academy, South Milwaukee, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his parents and five brothers. He is survived by his wife, Joan; two brothers; seven sisters; four children; nine grandchildren; and five step-grandchildren.



## Meet the editorial staff—uncut

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

**And now, presenting . . .**

### Doug Engelbrecht

This month is Douglas J. Engelbrecht’s debut as an editorialist for *Forward in Christ* magazine. Look for him to bring a wide variety of topics to the table as he seeks to make readers contemplate contemporary issues. Engelbrecht’s unique background and interests will help feed his articles.

“I grew up in Watertown, Wis.,” says Engelbrecht. “My childhood was normal, but my road to the ministry was, to some extent, not. Many of my friends and classmates were the sons and daughters of pastors and teachers or Northwestern College professors. I was the son of a bartender, not quite the logical link to becoming a pastor that many of my classmates at St. Mark’s had. But, my parents sent me to

a Christian day school, and together with the teachers I had at St. Mark’s, encouraged me to go into the public ministry.”

Engelbrecht graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, in 1972. While there, he met his wife, Gayle. The couple has two children—Jeffrey, 30, and Kristin, 26.

Engelbrecht first served St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn. In 1976 he took a call to Trinity, Neenah, Wis., and he’s been there ever since. In 1994, Northern Wisconsin District pastors elected him to be their district president (D.P.).

“A big part of being a D.P. is helping congregations call pastors and teachers,” he explains. “Providing pastors and teachers with information about what is going on on the synodical level is part of my work as well. Trying to help congregations with personnel problems is all part of it, too. . . . Perhaps the biggest challenge is trying to stay



(From left) Doug Engelbrecht and his family—wife Gayle, daughter Kristin, son-in-law Ethan, and son Jeffrey.

in contact with 156 congregations, 58 schools, and three area Lutheran high schools and at the same time trying to be a parish pastor to a congregation of 1,400-plus people.”

When he has some free time, he loves to fish, golf, and act as a sports official for the Wisconsin Athletic Association. His family adds that he’s a pro at making pancakes—which could be grist for a future editorial. I can see it now—from a box or from scratch—which is best? Stay tuned.

## A broader focus

From an exploratory mission in Springville, N.Y., to a large, established congregation in Brillion, Wis., Bruce Becker has risen to the unique challenges of serving varied WELS parishes.

Becker graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, in 1982 and served as a parish pastor until 1995. At that time he took a call to be the administrator of the Commission on Adult Discipleship of the Board for Parish Services. Now Becker has accepted the call to serve as administrator of the Board for Parish Services.

“I will need to shift from a narrower focus of parish ministry, namely adult discipleship, to a broader focus that encompasses all aspects of parish ministry,” says Becker. “Another challenge is for me to keep current with the needs, trends, and opportunities

in all the areas of parish ministry.”

Becker is a member at St. John, Lannon, Wis. He and his wife, Linda, who is a clinical laboratory scientist at Community Memorial Hospital in Menomonee Falls, are parents to four children, ages 10-19.

With calls out for five administrators for the Board for Parish Services, Becker and the rest of the team are making an extra effort to provide congregations with resources, training, and personal assistance “so that all of God’s people are strengthened, equipped, and encouraged for gospel ministry,” according to Becker.

“One goal I have is to see that our ministry to parishes becomes more individualized,” Becker says. “Congregations are becoming more and more unique in the ministries they carry out. One size just doesn’t fit everyone any-



At Christmas, Bruce Becker was already busy in his new position.

more. Flexibility and options will be key in the development of future assistance, resources, and training.”

In his new office, Becker carries a different title along with new responsibilities. His mindset of service to the Lord, however, is something that he will carry with him through all the changes.

Laura Warmuth



## Stewardship program will show how to use our flood of blessings

With the projected need for an additional \$8 to 10 million for the next two years, many would say WELS is drowning, just trying to keep its head afloat.

But others look at it differently.

"We have so many blessings, our thankfulness can't keep up," says Wayne Mueller, vice president for mission and ministry. "If we're drowning, we're drowning in blessings."

Showing Christians what great blessings and opportunities the Lord has placed and is placing in front of us is just one of the goals of a stewardship program being put together by the synod. Other goals include sharing how we can be involved in these opportunities and inspiring us with the Bible's encouragement to use good stewardship of God's gift of money.

The synod in convention mandated that the Commission for the Com-

munication on Financial Support (CCFS) develop these stewardship materials and visit and train every congregation by 2003. But that's not the only reason for such a program.

"It's a critical juncture in the life of our church," says Ron Roth, CCFS administrator. "The opportunities are there at every level. How we respond will be extremely important."

The first step in this program is a stewardship seminar sponsored by the CCFS and the Conference of Presidents. All circuit pastors (spiritual overseers of six to 12 congregations), CCFS district and synod commission members, and the district officers were invited to this seminar held Feb. 8-10 in Chicago.

After this training, the circuit pastors and CCFS representatives will go out as teams to every congregation and share with members what stewardship opportunities are available and provide stewardship materials for each pastor to use to educate his congregation.

One desired outcome from this program is that congregations will grow in the understanding of God's grace and of the biblical principles of giving in response to that grace.

"We hope to increase WELS members' knowledge that Christian giving is a thankful response to God's grace and a commitment to carry out God's mission in this world," says Roth.

Other hoped-for outcomes include

- that congregations gain a clear picture of the synod's financial situation,
- that members will understand and consider implementing the newly adopted compensation model for called workers, and
- that congregations will have ongoing stewardship education and an annual stewardship emphasis.

God will continue to drown us with blessings and opportunities for ministry. This stewardship program will show us how to use them as wisely and as completely as we can.

## 9/11 update

Although *Forward in Christ* magazine reported correctly in the November issue that no WELS members died in the 9/11 tragedies, we learned that one man was killed who belonged to an independent Lutheran congregation, whose pastor, Lic Canot, joined WELS by colloquy in 2001. Esmerlin Salcedo, a 36-year-old member of Iglesia Catolica Apostolica Luterana, Fort Lee, N.J., died in the World Trade Center crashes. A prospect of that same congregation was killed in the Nov. 12 plane crash in Queens, New York. We sorrow with those who mourn these losses.



**So, God,  
what about ... ?**

Want God's advice, but you're not sure where to look? We'll get you started with the basics. Remember these verses—and share them!

*Are you looking for light in a world of darkness? Read the following to help make your dark days brighter and to bring light to others.*

- Micah 7:8: "Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light."
- 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises to him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."
- Ephesians 5:8: "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord. Live as children of light."
- 2 Corinthians 4:6: "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

### On your own

Look up the following passages for more on the light of the world:

Isaiah 9:1-7; 60:1-3, 19-22

John 1:1-14

1 John 1:1-10

Currently, it is estimated that WELS members on average are giving three percent of their annual income. One more desired outcome of this stewardship program is that out of thankfulness to the Lord, members will, on average, increase the percentage of their annual income they give for the work of their congregation and synod by at least one percent.

Government statistics say that the national median household income is \$40,000. An increase of one percent of that would be \$400 more per year per household.

With this increase, congregations will be able to maintain and even expand local programs as well as increase their congregational mission offerings to the synod from \$18 million to \$25 million, a 30 percent increase.

If all WELS members increased their giving by one percent of their annual income, gifts would increase by an estimated \$70 million annually. If only 10 percent of that came in to the synod through congregational mission offerings, that would be a \$7 million increase.



## District news

### Michigan

**Memorial, Williamson, Mich.**, dedicated a school addition on Sept. 9, 2001. The addition includes three classrooms, a gymnasium, kitchen, lobby, and storage.

### Northern Wisconsin

**Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.**, defeated Waunakee, 23-13, to claim the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) Division III football championship in November 2001. FVL also was awarded the WIAA team Sportsmanship Award for the 2001 fall championships.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

**Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, Inc.**, merged with **Christian Family Counseling** in September. This united endeavor is now known as Christian Family Counseling—a division of Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, Inc. Counseling services will be maintained in Brookfield, Wauwatosa, Germantown, West Bend, and Oak Creek (all near Milwaukee), as well as in other locations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois.

### South Atlantic

**Lamb of God, Madison, Ala.**, with the help of a \$10,000 Aid Association for Lutherans grant, is focusing on advertising and outreach as it moves into a new worship facility and begins an early childhood education program.

**Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla.**, began construction of a five-classroom school on Jan. 1.

On Sept. 30, 2001, **Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga.**, had a "Seeking the Lost" Sunday. The service was shortened so that the elders could visit "straying" members, and congregation members could offer invitations to church to the "lost" in the community. Thirty members participated and made 94 personal contacts. Six prospects were found.

Sixty people from three Louisiana churches—**Trinity, Abita Springs; Crown of Life, New Orleans; and Cross of Glory, Baton Rouge**—participated in an annual family retreat hosted by Trinity, on Nov. 9-10, 2001. The retreat included singing, volleyball, fishing, lots of food, and Bible studies on the challenges and blessings shared as members of God's family.

Over 400 people gathered at **St. John, St. John's, Antigua**, for a special Mission Festival on Nov. 11, 2001. Two

new missionaries to the island of Grenada—Mike Kober and James Radloff—were commissioned at this special English/Spanish service.

**Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.**, added a 1,600 square-foot modular building to accommodate their growing ministry needs. The building will provide more space for the elementary school, preschool, and Bible classes.

### Western Wisconsin

On Dec. 7-8, 2001, **Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.**, hosted a "Journey to Bethlehem." Attendees took the role of a person traveling to Bethlehem for the census, arriving the night of Jesus' birth.

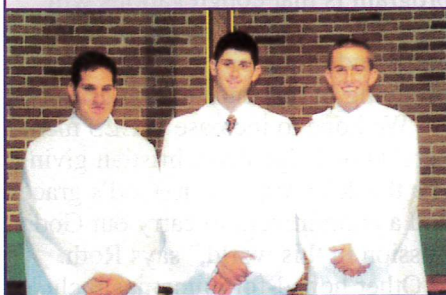
### Happy Anniversary!

**SA**—On Nov. 18, 2001, **Christ the Lord, Clearwater, Fla.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special worship service, a meal, and a program.

**WW**—**St. Paul, Platteville, Wis.**, celebrated its 125th anniversary on Sept. 30, 2001.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: MI—John Eich; NW—Joel Lillo; SA—Mark Haefner; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Elton Stroh.

### Northern Wisconsin



Three Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students who are members at Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis., participated in a Synod School Sunday at Mount Olive on Oct. 28, 2001. Darren Knoll (left) preached, Robert Weiss (center) presented the children's sermon, and Collin Vanderhoof (right) conducted the liturgy. During fellowship between services, these students, as well as students from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., answered questions about their training.



## In the news

**Josh Metzger**, a member at Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wis., and a Wisconsin Lutheran College student, tried out for the Milwaukee Bucks in July. Although Metzger did not make the final roster, he did practice with the team during the preseason. In the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* on July 6, 2001, Bucks scout Chris Gilmartin remarked, "We don't consider Josh a Division III player, we consider him a pro prospect. He competed as well as anybody today." Metzger began playing for the National Alliance Basketball League in January.

"**Jacqueline Kenyon** was honored recently by the Junior Federal Duck Stamp program for her award-winning design," boasted the *South Haven Tribune* on Oct. 14, 2001. Kenyon is a member at Trinity, Bangor, Mich., and a seventh-grader at Trinity's school. Her accomplishment is made more extraordinary by the fact that a birth defect caused her to need seven bone and tissue graft operations to create fingers on both on her hands. The *South Haven Tribune* noted, "Jacqueline's deep belief in religion . . . is evident in her positive outlook on life."

**Adam Laird**, a member at St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis., and a senior at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, was a member of the 2001 Kids From Wisconsin. The elite musical group completed a three-month, 90-show schedule this past summer. The *Press-Gazette* featured a story on Laird and his partner, Ashley Dobson.



Adam Laird, a senior at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., and Ashley Dobson were members of the 2001 Kids From Wisconsin.

## WELS news briefs

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

**Board for World Missions**  
414/256-3233

**The second installment of the "World Missions Today" video series is now available.** This series features videos on the Dominican Republic, Malawi, and Zambia.

In a partnership with national leaders, **the Bulgarian mission field published 3,000 copies of the Bulgarian Lutheran Hymnal.**

**The Administrative Committee for Native American Missions, along with the Apache leadership, has proposed a comprehensive ministry plan** to achieve new levels of indigeneity and partnership with Apache Christians. Components of the plan include

- having a full-time administrator on the reservation for one to two years to enhance relationships with Apaches and called workers;
- having a resource developer provide stewardship training among the congregations and research what financial help is available from federal,

state, organizational, and tribal grants;

- adding teaching help to enable the Apache Christian Training School to provide training for future full-time called workers and lay leaders on both reservations; and
- providing on-site training of Apaches for youth and family ministries and peer counseling groups.

**Commission on Evangelism**  
414/256-3287

**Thirteen Schools of Outreach are scheduled for 2002**, including a "new mode" school hosted by the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board and a Native American School of Outreach.

## WELS president visits Latvia and Ukraine



President Karl Gurgel (left) and Neal Schroeder visited some of the CLCL congregations and took a river cruise on the paddleboat "Missisipi" (sic) past the presidential palace and the spires of Riga, Latvia.

WELS declared fellowship with the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia (CLCL) and the Ukrainian Lutheran Church at the 2001 WELS convention. President Karl Gurgel attended the synod conventions of both of these church bodies to announce WELS' fellowship in person.

In October 2001, Neal Schroeder, member of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations and pastor at Divine Peace, Renton/Snoqualmie Valley, Snoqualmie, Wash., joined Gurgel for the CLCL's annual convention.

While in Latvia, Gurgel preached at a worship service. Didzis Melikis translated for the 160 people who attended.

Gurgel spoke at the Ukrainian Lutheran Church's synod convention in Kiev in December 2001. After Gurgel spoke, convention attendees joined in singing a traditional Ukrainian hymn reflecting love between Christian brothers and followed that by singing "Blessed be the tie that binds."

"It wasn't exactly like Pentecost, I had to use translators to be under-

stood," says Gurgel of his speaking abroad. "And yet, just like Pentecost, thanks to God's Spirit, there was a solid bond of faith and fellowship. Side by side, half a world away, WELS, the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia, and the Ukrainian Lutheran Church are united in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ."

### Quick facts

#### CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF LATVIA

**Established in:** 1999  
**Communicants:** 400  
**Congregations:** 9  
**Pastors:** 7

#### UKRAINIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

**Established in:** 1995  
**Communicants:** 3,000  
**Congregations:** 30  
**Pastors:** 15



**Robertson resigns—** Religious broadcaster Pat Robertson resigned as president of the Christian Coalition in December.

Robertson cited a renewed call to Christian ministry as the reason for his move. He plans to devote more time to his role as chairman and CEO of the Christian Broadcasting Network, which he founded in 1960.

Roberta Combs, the executive vice president, has been elected to succeed Robertson as president of the Christian Coalition, an organization that mobilizes conservative Christians to take an active role in politics.

**Jewish population growing in**

**Las Vegas—**According to the 2001 Jewish Yearbook, Las Vegas has the fastest-growing Jewish population in the United States, followed closely by Seattle.

Declines were seen in Miami and Buffalo, N.Y.

The total U.S. Jewish population is about 6 million. Forty-six percent live in the Northeast, 11 percent live in the Midwest, about 21 percent live in the South, and 22 percent live in the West. About one-third live in the metropolitan New York area.

**Charges against the LCMS president dismissed—**

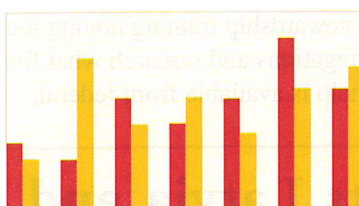
The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Committee on Constitutional Matters has dismissed the charges against President Gerald Kieschnick, allowing him to continue as LCMS president.

Missouri District President James Kalthoff, who is Kieschnick's district president, was asked to terminate Kieschnick's membership in the synod, and therefore his presidency as well. But the committee ruled in December 2001 that only the synod convention—not a district president—has supervisory responsibility for the synod president. That convention meets every three years, the next time in 2004.

A special convention could be called, but chances are slim that it will happen, because most support Kieschnick's decisions.

Charges were brought against Kieschnick because of his support for the decision of Atlantic District President David Benke to participate in "A Prayer for America" at New York's Yankee Stadium on Sept. 23 and Kieschnick's participation in a unionistic service with Evangelical Lutheran Church in America officials following a tour of Ground Zero.

[LCMS News, Dec. 11, 2001]



**Poll: LCMS youth speak out—**

A poll taken at the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's National Youth Gathering reports the following results:

- Regarding personal Bible study—31.7 percent spend very little or no time with it (up 4 percent from 1998), while 34.3 percent said they spend up to 20 minutes in such study.

- Regarding decision-making—92 percent said they sometimes or always rely on God to help them make decisions.

- Regarding abortion—76 percent reported being pro-life (up 7 percent from 1998), while 13 percent said they were pro-choice.

- Regarding homosexuality—70.5 percent said they believe the biblical position that homosexuality is always wrong (75.8 percent in 1998), while 19.7 percent said that it's nobody's business.

- Regarding pre-marital sex—66.5 percent said that it was always wrong and sinful (60.8 percent in 1998), while 25 percent said it is permissible if two people love each other or are consenting adults.

- Regarding church fellowship—14.9 percent thought all religions

are pretty much alike and that people should be free to worship as they want, 55.4 percent said that all Christians should be free to worship at each other's churches, and 20.5 percent thought that Lutherans should only worship and commune with other Lutherans.

- Regarding the ordination of women—40.1 percent agreed with the LCMS stand that Scripture does not allow it, 11.7 percent favored ordination of women, and 46.9 percent said that they aren't sure or don't know if the LCMS position on ordination of women is scriptural.

The poll, conducted by Lutheran Youth Fellowship, the LCMS youth organization, involved 1,870 people—about five percent of those at the youth gathering.

[LCMS News, Dec. 10, 2001]

**Christmas or Holiday Tree?—**

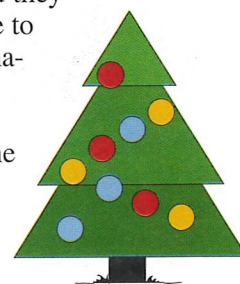
Wisconsin doesn't have a traditional Christmas tree in its capitol city of Madison.

But the state does have the "2001 State of Wisconsin Holiday Tree."

Wisconsin actually has had its non-religious "Holiday Tree" since the mid-1980s battle with the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. This year, however, the debate was on whether religious ornaments could be placed on the tree.

The Family and Freedom Foundation sued Wisconsin state officials over the holiday tree because several residents believed they would not be able to hang religious ornaments on it.

The case was dismissed after the state decided to permit religious ornaments.



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



### CHANGES IN MINISTRY

#### Pastors

- Bartelt, Kenneth D.**, to retirement
- Cares, Gerhardt F.**, to retirement
- Ellenberger, Larry G.**, to Resurrection, Milwaukee
- Stroh, Elton C.**, to Board for Parish Services parish assistant, Milwaukee

#### Teachers

- Bubolz, Amy R.**, to St. John, Fox Lake, Wis.
- Lemke, Peter J.**, to First, Lake Geneva, Wis.
- Martinson, Dawn L.**, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
- Schmeling, Daniel M.**, to Shiloh Retreat Center, Pittsburgh, Tex.

### COLLOQUY NOTICE

John Weaver-Hudson, who came from an LCMS colloquy program, after having successfully completed the steps of our colloquy, including a year of studies at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, was declared eligible for a call into the ministerium of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Wayne D. Mueller, First Vice President  
Prof. David Vallesky, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
John Seifert, Michigan District President

### ANNIVERSARIES

- Milwaukee, Wis.**—Mt. Lebanon (75). Mar. 17. Service, 9:30 AM. Dinner to follow.
- Coleman, Wis.**—Trinity (100). June 23. Service, 10 AM & 3 PM. Dinner served at noon. RSVP by Mar. 31. 920/897-3422.

### COMING EVENTS

#### Martin Luther College choir tour

- Feb. 23, Friedens, Kenosha, Wis., 7 PM
- Feb. 24, St. Andrew, Chicago, Ill., 9 AM; Grace, Indianapolis, Ind., 7 PM
- Feb. 25, Living Word, Johnson City, Tenn., 7 PM
- Feb. 26, Grace, Charlotte, N.C., 7 PM
- Feb. 27, Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C., 7 PM
- Feb. 28, Abiding Hope, Ocala, Fla., 7 PM
- Mar. 1, Crown of Life, Fort Myers, Fla., 8 PM
- Mar. 2, Orlando Lutheran Academy, Orlando, Fla., 7 PM
- Mar. 3, Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla., 7 PM
- Mar. 4, Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla., 8 PM
- Mar. 5, Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., 7:30 PM
- Mar. 6, Star of Bethlehem, Winston-Salem, N.C., 7 PM
- Mar. 7, Living Savior, Asheville, N.C., 7 PM
- Mar. 8, Hope, Louisville, Ky., 7:30 PM
- Mar. 9, St. John, Lannon, Wis., 7 PM
- Mar. 17, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn., 7:30 PM

**Pathways to Christ Women's Retreat**—Hawthorne Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. Mar. 15-17. Brochures available. Dorothy Laabs, 920/235-6495.

#### Luther Preparatory School choir tour—

- Mar. 15—King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 16—Reformation, San Diego, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 17—Living Word, Mission Viejo, Calif., 10:30 AM; Grace, Yorba Linda, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 18—St. Peter, Modesto, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 19—St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 20—Apostles, San Jose, Calif., 5 & 7 PM

- Mar. 21—Hope, Fremont, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 22—Star of Bethlehem, Santa Maria, Calif., 7 PM
- Mar. 24—Prince of Peace, Thousand Oaks, Calif., 8 & 10:30 PM; Messiah, North Hollywood, Calif., 7 PM

**International Girl Pioneers Convention**—Apr. 5 & 6. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Diane Jabs, 952/492-2540.

**WELS-CLO meeting**—for the church librarian's organization. Apr. 13. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. Two representatives from Demco Library Supply will demonstrate computer software for small libraries. Joanne Weber, 414/256-3222.

**Spiritual Renewal Weekend for Women**—Apr. 12-14. Radisson, Rochester, Minn. Bev, 507/931-3945.

**WELS Handbell Festival**—Apr. 20 & 21. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. Cheryl Diener, 715/258-7203.

**Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference meeting**—Gothenburg, Sweden. April 23-25. Information and registration materials available from Armin Panning, 1833 Woodview Cir, Port Washington WI 53074; <panninga@wls.wels.net>.

**Footsteps of Apostles' Tour**—includes Greece, Turkey, Rome, and cruise of Greek Islands. Departs June 15. Sponsored by Camp Phillip and hosted by Pastor Kenneth Fisher and Mr. and Mrs. Mark Krueger. Pastor Fisher, 414/354-7320.

**Summer camps**—Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. Summer camp programs for youth K-12. June 19-Aug. 14. Family camping also available. Call 920/787-3202 for a brochure.

**Special Ministries In Lutheran Education (SMILE) conference**—June 28-30. Ramada Inn-Airport, Bloomington, Minn. Goal is to promote and strengthen the partnership of those involved in the spiritual training of people with developmental disabilities. Includes parents, caregivers, teachers, pastors, and volunteers. Bruce Cuppan, 920/922-8672.

**Northern Wisconsin District Regional Youth Rally**—June 30-July 3. Chilton, Wis. \$150/person. <Survivor2002@nwdcyd.org>.

**National OWLS convention**—July 9-11. Ramada Convention Center, Wausau, Wis. Lester Ring, 507/354-4403.

**"Tap the WELS" Music/Outreach/Spiritual Growth Family & Community Event**—July 18-20. Red Wing, Minn. 414/256-3274.

**National Conference for Worship, Music, & the Arts**—July 21-24. Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis. 414/256-3226; <worship@sab.wels.net>.

**Regional youth rally**—Western Wisconsin District, July 25-27. Wisconsin Dells, Wis. 414/256-3274.

**Sunday school workshops**—Wisconsin area. Sept. 14, 8:30-11:45 AM. A nominal fee will be charged. Workshop will be held at four locations:

- Wausau, Wis.—Preparing & teaching a Sunday school lesson
- La Crosse, Wis.—Classroom management
- Watertown, Wis.—Memory work, mission, and music
- Eau Claire, Wis.—Reaching families through the Sunday school

Plan ahead—workshops will rotate every year and will be held the second Sat. after Labor Day in 2003, 2004, 2005. Debbie Rothe, 262/567-6375.

**2003 WELS International Youth Rally**—July 9-12, 2003. Estes Park, Colo. 414/256-3274.

### AVAILABLE

**Communion kneeling pads**—free for the cost of shipping. Mark Neumann, 608/897-2092 or Dale Roenneburg, 608/897-4295.

### NEEDED

**Volunteer health care staff**—RNs, doctors, or EMTs to work as health care directors for one week or half-week summer camp sessions at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. Jason Wiechmann, 920/787-3202.

### POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Teach English in a foreign country**—Has the Lord ever laid on your heart a desire to share Jesus with people of a foreign country? If so, this may be the opportunity you are looking for. We have English language teaching positions open. Airfare, housing, health insurance, and an in-country livable wage will be paid. Main qualification is a desire to serve Jesus and share your faith. WELS people with teaching degrees and teaching experience preferred but not required. Husband/wife teams okay. One-year commitment minimum. <asia-usa@juno.com>.

**Summer paid staff**—Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. May 28-Aug. 14. Counselors, head life-guard, adventure coordinator, Bible study leader, and junior staff director. Jason Wiechmann, 920/787-3202.

### SERVICE TIMES

**Safford, Ariz.**—Grace, 225 E Main St. Worship, 10:30 AM. Bible class, 9:45 AM. Paul Schulz, 928/428-7620.

### NAMES WANTED

**Lakewood Ranch/Ellenton/Parrish/East Manatee County, Fla.**—Daniel Witte, 941/747-5564.

**McAllen/Harlingen/Brownsville/South Padre Island, Tex.**—Joel Sauer, 956/968-5228.

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

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# King of kings

**When will Jesus fulfill his promise to return for judgment day, and what will that day be like?**

**Jon D. Buchholz**

mount of ascension, they waited for his return. They expected that at any moment the curtain of the sky would be pulled aside to reveal the King of kings returning in glory with thousands of his holy angels to judge the living and the dead.

At the same time, Jesus made it clear that his return would be sudden and unexpected. “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:44).

Just as believers waited for centuries for Jesus to come in humility, so Christians today continue to wait and pass along the promise. When will Jesus fulfill his promise? Only when God’s time is right. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise. . . He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

## **The King will judge the living and the dead**

Back at the cemetery, picture the expressions on the faces of those resurrected bodies. Most of the newly-arisen are confused, aghast, their faces painted with sheer terror. They never believed it would be this way. Their worst fears have been realized. Now they must stand in the presence of their King and their Judge—and he’s none other than the Savior they rejected! The verdict spoken to them, “Depart from me, you who are cursed” (Matthew 25:41), will stand for all eternity.

But a few are celebrating with unrestrained joy. This is the day they’ve been waiting for. Everything they believed has proven to be true. Now they’re leaping and dancing, cheering the arrival of their Savior and Friend, their Lord and their King. They hear the invitation, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus’ victory is our victory—and there is no greater victory. Believers will stand in the judgment dressed in the robe of perfection that Christ has given us. “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). We’ve been washed in his blood, cleansed from every stain of sin, declared beautiful in God’s eyes. Through simple trust in Jesus, we are always ready for Jesus’ return!

What a day to look forward to! Our struggles will be past and forgotten. When Jesus returns, there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away. God will make everything new.

So we join with believers of every age to pray, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

*Jon Buchholz is pastor at Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Washington.*



**T**he cemetery, with its manicured lawns and lovingly tended gravesites is a tranquil place. The stillness is broken only by softly singing birds and the wind whispering through the trees. It’s a peaceful place, a place of eternal slumber.

Or is it?

Imagine the stillness suddenly broken. The shrill sound of countless trumpets fills the air. From underneath that lawn comes a rumbling. Carefully placed headstones tumble askew. The earth is turned inside out. Caskets pop up like mushrooms and fall open to reveal their long-buried contents. Flesh once again clings to corpses. The dead awaken and open their eyes in amazement.

## **Jesus promised to return**

“I am going there to prepare a place for you,” Jesus told his disciples in the upper room. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:2,3).

The disciples held onto Jesus’ promise. From the moment they saw Jesus taken from them on the

# Directing our domestic duties

God isn't naive. He knows, perfectly, our imperfect human nature. No sinful thing we do surprises him. It shouldn't surprise us, either, that he, through his gifts of grace, is able to pardon and empower us. Although we may view our Christian duties as burdens, he, having lifted the burden of our guilt, turns them instead into blessings.

A good example of this transformation is in our next Table of Duties sections, those applying to husbands, wives, and parents. Just see how Christ's love clears our vision, directing our domestic, Christ-like actions.

Luther repeats the inspired words of Paul: "Husbands love your wives." It's not physical affection Paul is talking about, nor even liking someone as a friend. It's a far deeper and higher kind of love, mirroring God's own love for us.

God's love is unconditional. It's all a gift, not grudgingly granted, never given to get something in return. This purposeful love unselfishly seeks only what is best for the object of God's affection—you and me, husbands and wives.

Of course, we very human husbands are not capable of mirroring God's love consistently and constantly. How necessary, then, in view of our failures, for sincere, Christian husbands to reflect God's forgiving love and to display a more unselfish, Christ-like love toward our wives.

Wives need Christ's love, too, so they won't resent what love for Christ asks of them. "Submit" is the English word for it. But no English word cleansed enough of selfish ambition and pride can properly reflect God's meaning here.

The original word for submit implies no inferiority or superiority. Rather it refers to a divine arrangement to promote one single direction for two different people. Its appli-

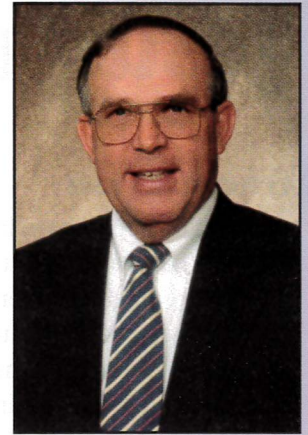
cation is wider than the family, applying to all human relationships. In the family, a wife chooses to agree with the non-selfish goal proposed by her husband. This reflects her faith, a submitting to her Savior's will for her. Our Savior showed the way when he submitted to his Father's will in giving himself into death. When a husband subordinates his sinful self to the needs of his wife and family, that's Christ-like submission too.

The two, husband and wife, come together, with one understanding and purpose as Christian parents, reflecting that same love to their children. Parents, seeing in themselves human resistance to godly directions, know their children have the same natural resistance to directives.

So it comes as no surprise that we will need to correct our children. In doing so, though, we will not make our children bitter by acting arrogantly toward them, giving the impression we are perfect and expect perfection in them. Rather, acknowledging our own failures, we lead our children in appreciation for the forgiving grace of God as well as the Christ-like life it makes possible and desirable.

These Christian duties, then, are not such a bad thing after all, are they? After reflecting on how far short of them we often are and thinking about what God's pardon means for us, what opportunities these duties give us to reflect our thankful love to one another within the home as husbands, wives, and parents.

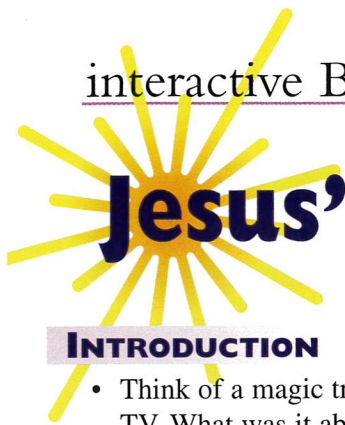
The family table, better the family altar, is an appropriate place for parents and children, husbands and wives, to reflect on these appropriate Table of Duties. May Christ's love fill our hearts and homes with Christ-like love, making all our domestic duties expressions of his love.



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

What opportunities these duties give us to reflect our thankful love to one another within the home.

The Table of Duties is a portion of Luther's Small Catechism that contains "certain passages of Scripture for various classes and stations of men, whereby these are to be admonished of their respective offices and duties" (p. 18, Gausewitz edition). As Luther said, "Let each his lesson learn with care, And all the household well shall fare" (Luther's Small Catechism, p. 21, Gausewitz edition).



# Jesus' miracles: PORTRAITS OF REDEMPTION

Mark J. Lenz

## INTRODUCTION

- Think of a magic trick you have seen in person or on TV. What was it about the trick that amazed you? Why do magicians perform tricks?
- Some suggest that Jesus' miracles were like magic tricks, done only to entertain, mystify, or impress people. They try to explain away Jesus' miracles either as examples of sleight-of-hand magic or as evidence of the gullibility and naiveté of the people who observed them. They say, for example, that Peter's mother-in-law had only a slight fever that had run its course when Jesus arrived. How do the words "high" in Luke 4:38 and "at once" in verse 39 answer this objection? They say that the leper in Luke 5 had improved to such an extent that Jesus was able to pronounce him clean. But how does "Dr." Luke describe the leper (Luke 5:12)? What happened as a result of this miracle (v. 15)?
- Why did Jesus perform miracles? It surely was not to entertain, mystify, or impress people. His purpose was something else entirely.

## TEXT—JOHN 20:30,31

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

<sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

## QUESTIONS

1. What sign had Jesus just given to Thomas (John 20:27)?
2. In whose presence had Jesus performed his miracles? What was his purpose in doing this (John 2:11)?
3. Jesus performed many more miracles than John recorded. Why did he record the ones he did?
4. The name "Christ" means the "Anointed One." Why is it important to know that Jesus is the Christ?
5. Why is it significant that Jesus is "the Son of God" (John 3:16, Romans 8:32)?
6. What is the life that believers have in Jesus' name (John 3:15 and 10:28)?
7. In what sense are Jesus' miracles portraits of redemption?

## APPLICATIONS

1. Why did Jesus perform the miracles recorded in Luke 4 and 5 and referred to in the introduction above?
2. Incidents of miracles are not spread evenly throughout the Bible. Rather they are clustered in three critical periods of history: when Moses and Aaron led the Israelites out of Egypt, when the prophets Elijah and Elisha spoke out against idolatry, and at the time of Christ and the apostles. What does this suggest as to one of the purposes of Christ's miracles?
3. Those who witnessed Jesus' miracles were challenged to believe in him, but not all were convinced. How is it that people come to faith (Luke 16:31)?
4. The Bible refers to Jesus' miracles as powers, wonders, works, and signs, but never as proofs. What is the significance of this?
5. What do Matthew 20:34 and Mark 6:34 reveal as another purpose of Jesus' miracles? What comfort do you find in this?
6. When Jesus drove out demons, healed diseases, and raised the dead, he was in a sense prophesying the total triumph he would accomplish. Explain.
7. We can assume that all the people whom Jesus healed and raised from the dead eventually died. In other words, the miracles did not permanently affect people physically. How, therefore, should we think about the
  - a. things of this world,
  - b. purpose of our lives in this world,
  - c. purpose of pain and suffering in our lives, and
  - d. work of the church in the world?

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your miracles reveal that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who gives eternal life to all who believe in you. Thank you for your loving compassion on all those who suffer the physical consequences of sin. Help me not to love the things of this world or my life in this world more than you. Convince me that through the crosses in my life you wish to draw me closer to you. Renew my desire to proclaim the wonderful message of the forgiveness of sins you have won for the world. Hear me for your mercy's sake. Amen.



## Wordliness

A study in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* found that sometimes words do, in fact, speak louder than actions. Researchers at Purdue University studied parents' influence on religious beliefs in young people ages 18 to 24. They found that parents who not only walked the walk but also frequently talked about their religious views with their children were more successful in passing on their beliefs to their children. While the study looked specifically at religious formation, it also proves that people who do as they say and often say what they do and believe are better able to win others to their way of thinking.

*Adapted from Spirituality and Health*

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

*Old Irish toast:  
"May you live all  
the days of your life."*

*Jesus in John 10:10:  
"I have come that they may  
have life, and have it to the full."*

*World's End* reveals that less than half of U.S. adults believe the world will eventually end as a result of some kind of supernatural intervention.

*Religious Identification* finds that as the nation grows more pluralistic, the number of people identifying themselves as Christian has dropped some nine percent in the past decade.

 potluck

### In the words of Luther

"The fewer the words, the sweeter the sermon."

"Where God built a church, there the devil would also build a chapel."

### FACToid

#### Fast-growing congregations

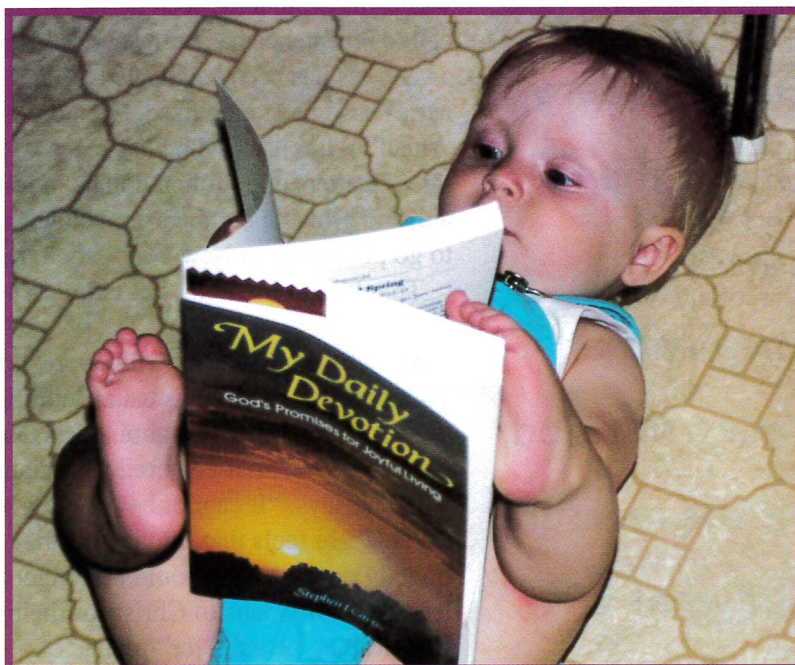
From 1995 to 2000, regular adult participation increased the most among Mega-Churches (81%), Muslims (60%), Latter-day Saints (44%), and Assemblies of God (41%).

(FACToids are based on data collected by Faith Communities Today.)

Oswald Riess: "Beyond—always beyond—lies God for the man without Christ."

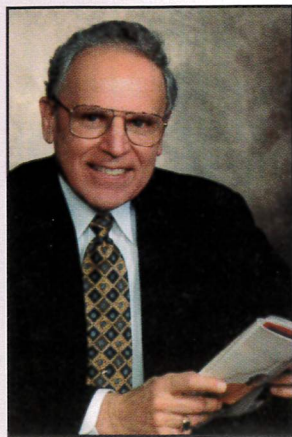
C.S. Lewis:  
"God allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons we could not learn in any other way."

### Picture this



Training your children in God's Word and ways is important, but how many can say that they had their children reading daily devotions by the age of nine months? Nine-month-old Maggie Gabb, daughter of Pastor Mark and Angie Gabb of Marietta, Ohio, appears well-trained in this picture.

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



Gary P. Baumler is editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine and WELS Director of Communications.

What is the  
"intrinsic  
sacredness of  
Ground Zero"  
if not the  
timeworn  
heresy that  
man, not God,  
is the measure  
of what is  
sacred?

## Religion as usual

"It cannot be 'religion as usual,' " insists A. James Rudin in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States.<sup>1</sup>

"We are getting a master lesson in what makes things sacred," asserts Eugene Kennedy, referring to "the mystery of the lives that were lived [at Ground Zero]."<sup>1</sup>

On that fateful day, the level of spirituality in the United States appeared to rise before our eyes. A nation rushed to prayer. Jew, Muslim, Christian, and others joined the chorus. Church attendance charged upwards. We still pray—for safety, freedom, peace, and understanding.

A single event on 9/11/01 has made a profound impact on our lives—socially and religiously.

The religious impact is good, isn't it?

In some ways, yes. People whose faith was slumbering have been jarred awake. A call to repentance has been sounded. Spiritual awareness has been heightened. Mercy ministries have been mobilized. Even our own "small" Wisconsin Synod has received nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in relief aid, and growing numbers are volunteering to go personally to New York City to help.

Thank God for faith that expresses itself in love.

So, why am I writing with apprehension? That phrase, "religion as usual," jumps out at me. Rudin, a Jewish rabbi, takes aim at Bible-based, Christ-centered Christians when he says, "It cannot be 'religion as usual.'" He feels that, in view of the tragedy on 9/11, we should no longer try to lead non-Christians to Christ for their salvation. Rather, he calls for "people of goodwill representing all religions to forge new bonds of solidarity." He speaks of "a new theology" and of "universal spiritual unity."

Kennedy, professor emeritus of Loyola University and long-time observer of the Roman Catholic Church, looks for sacred-

ness "from within human beings." He says that we will "never understand what makes anything and everything sacred" if we cannot see "the intrinsic sacredness of Ground Zero."

And the prayer services? The most publicized one, televised nationally, presented every god as equal, leaving no god as supreme. Crashed airplanes, destroyed buildings, and scores of senseless deaths became the altar on which confessional truth was sacrificed.

Sad to say, what some think is an advance in religious expression and an improvement for confessional Christians to follow is religion as usual, the world's religion. All that has changed is that the events of 9/11 have made it bolder and more popular than ever.

What is the "new theology" if not the old universalism? It sees all religions as equally valid and condemns no one.

What is the "intrinsic sacredness of Ground Zero" if not the timeworn heresy that man, not God, is the measure of what is sacred?

What is the prayer service to every god if not, as Graeme Hunter has called it, "the church of nothing"? Every god is really no god at all.

The unforgettable events of 9/11 are supposed to propel us in favor of such theology, but the unforgettable events of earlier days won't allow it. They are the virgin birth of Christ, the crucifixion of God's Son, and, in particular, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They define religion as usual for people in all nations who have heard and believe.

In addition, one more event is coming that will cause 9/11 to pale in contrast. It will make its spiritual mark on everyone—forever. It's called judgment day.

*Gary P. Baumler*

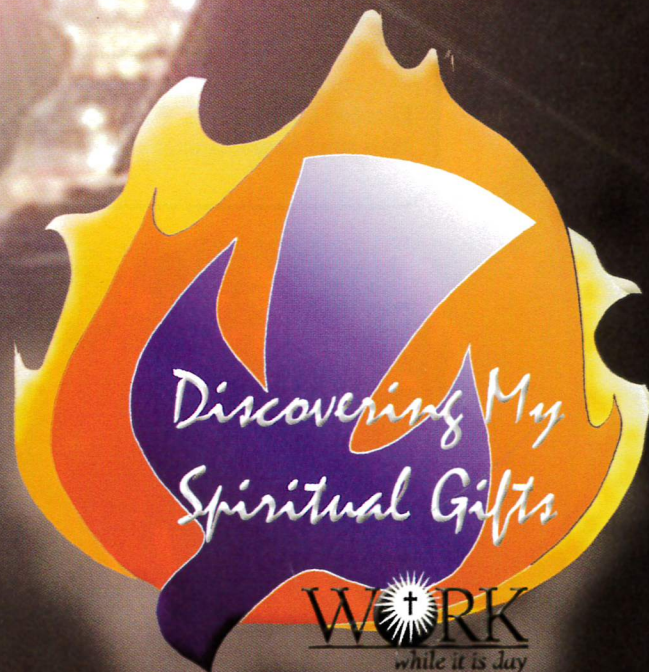
<sup>1</sup>From Religion News Service reports

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# TAKE ME BACK

More than sand and water and trees, Camp Phillip has become a part of me.

Laura Warmuth

The light goes out in cabin three, and I, the counselor, pass the magic flashlight to Melissa. "What I learned today is that Jesus is with me when I jump off a telephone pole." Each pajama-clad girl in the cozy circle waits to hold the light and share her thoughts at tonight's Reflections.

Katie learned that it's okay to sing out even if she doesn't think her voice is pretty. Amanda now knows that God is not the cabin inspector, but he does smile down on neat suitcases and smooth beds.

As the light crawls around the circle, I glimpse a small piece of myself in each of the girls. I remember sitting in that circle, learning to share my feelings and secrets. Standing wrapped in the starry night sky, I found out just how awesome the God who scattered the stars is and how close he is to me.

**When I'm back in the "real world," I pray often that God would take me back to the days of Camp Phillip.**

Let me swing, Lord, next to Katie and remember how I used to flee to that same spot to soar and chat, sing and pray. Hide me in the shade near the afternoon Bible study, close enough that I can gaze into the wide eyes of your little followers.

Pull me out of my comfort zone and back to the ropes course, where, spying on my campers crossing cables and leaping from telephone polls, I can rediscover that it's all right to be scared because it teaches me to trust. As rambunctious campers play Screaming Yellow Zonkers and turn their counselors into human mud sculptures, remind me that acting a little crazy is a joyful blessing from you.

I know I'm asking a lot, God, but if nothing else, grant me this: whenever I'm frustrated, lonely, or afraid, let me plop down in the sandy grass behind the crowd gathered for campfire and hide my tear-stained face in my knees. Silence my lips and my racing thoughts so I can listen closely to the singing and hear all the little hearts praying. *Father, I adore you, they sing; All*

*night, all day, angels watchin' over me.*

Don't let me forget what it was like to be a counselor surrounded by nine sleeping souls that I wished I could take care of forever. Father, would you tuck them into their beds at home for me? Comfort Jessica with the assurance that Jesus paid for all the times that she was naughty. Kayla, who is afraid she does not believe enough, needs to be assured that Jesus saves her, not the size of her faith. I'll let you handle Sarah, who is teaching her dog to pray.

**Thank you, God, for each precious camper with whom you blessed me.** Thank you for using me to teach them about you. And thank you with all my heart for Camp Phillip, for without it I don't know who I'd have turned out to be.

*Laura Warmuth, a member at St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin, is a junior at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. She has spent eight summers at Camp Phillip—three as a camper, two as a junior staff member, and three as a camp counselor.*

## ALL ABOUT CAMP PHILLIP

**Mission statement:** Camp Phillip's goal is to provide relaxation in creation and renewal in Christ to WELS youth, adults, families, churches, and schools throughout the year.

**Located in:** Wautoma, Wis.

**Web site:** <[www.campphillip.com](http://www.campphillip.com)>

