

FORWARD IN CHRIST

October 2002

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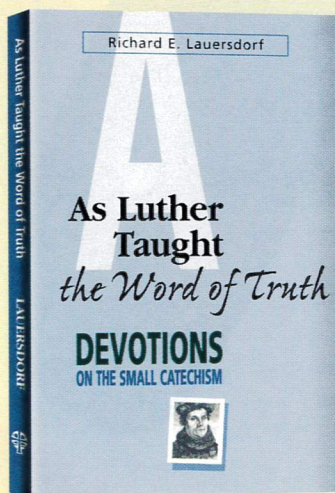
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By day or by night

After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Acts 16:23-25

Eric S. Hartzell

The sainted Missionary William Schweppe used to say in mild frustration in Africa, “We’re always getting ready to do mission work.” The implication was that we needed to get busy and actually do mission work.

Conditions aren’t always ideal

The conditions weren’t ideal for mission work in Philippi. Paul and Silas’s backs were congealing from a severe flogging. Their wounds needed washing. Their feet and ankles were jammed into wooden holes. In the stocks they sat in their own filth or that of previous prisoners. They were stripped. They had seen the magistrates condemn them to this unjust whipping . . . and the magistrates were still “out there.” It was pitch black in the inner cell where they were. It was midnight. The adrenaline was seeping out of their bodies. The jailer was sound asleep.

It was not an ideal set up for mission work. It wasn’t even daytime. But in their praying and singing the disciples were following the Lord’s command to work while it was day . . . even while it was night! The other prisoners were listening—maybe even more attentively than good parishioners listen while sitting on padded pews in comfortable churches.



You wouldn’t think that this would be the crowd to talk to about Jesus. You wouldn’t think that this jailer who was quick to think of taking his own life would be concerned for his soul. You wouldn’t think that you would hear him say, “What must I do to be saved?” You wouldn’t think that he would immediately roust his group at home out of their beds to a sermon and baptism in the middle of the night.

Witness wherever you are

Mission work that dark midnight was simple. Two men were living their faith. They were praying and singing. God provided a sleeping jailer and a captive audience. This

unlikely place and this simple procedure had its effect. After the earthquake came and shook the jail like a terrier shakes a rat, there wasn’t a mad dash for freedom when the chains came off and the doors opened.

Mission work is God’s work. He does it, or he works through others to do it. Paul and Silas couldn’t anticipate receptive hearers. They could only point to Jesus when the jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas couldn’t get out of other people’s jails. They couldn’t get a meal by themselves that time of night. God provided it all!

But what they could, they did. They prayed, and they sang. We can do that too. We can pray for those who beat us up with whips or with words. We can pray for the success of the message. We can pray for courage. We can pray for others in the work. We can pray for our hearers. And we can sing in devotion and in praise. We can do it wherever we are—even the unkind and unlikely places of our lives.

With healthy backs and unfettered feet we pray, “Lord, let others hear me singing and praying . . . by day or by night.”



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

FORWARD IN CHRIST

formerly Northwestern Lutheran

Official magazine of the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

October 2002 / Vol. 89, No. 10

www.wels.net

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Wegner, p. 18; Rubberball Productions, p. 20;
Gregory Times Advocate, p. 22; Susan Jaekel, 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.

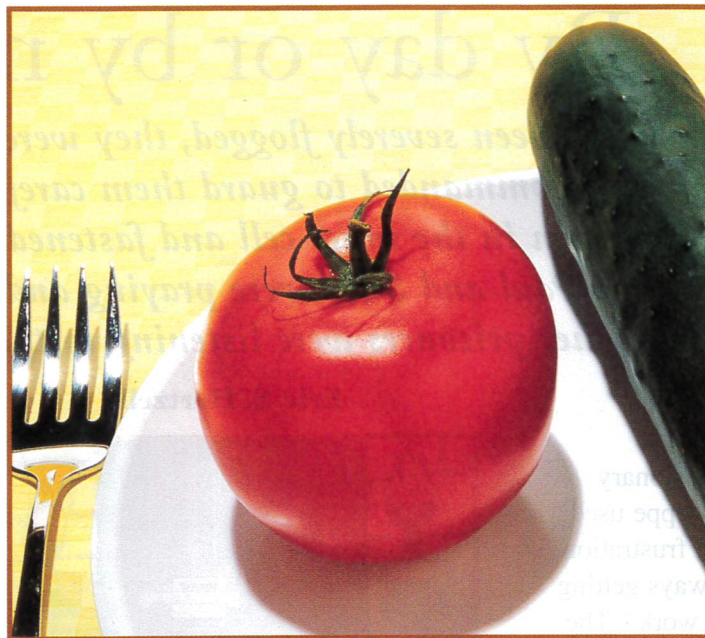
Rates: USA—\$12; single copy—\$1.50. Canada—\$12.84;
single copy—\$1.61. All other countries—air mail \$43.20.
Postage included, payable in advance to NPH. Write for
multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. For single issues,
Wisconsin add 5% sales tax; Milwaukee County add 5.6%
tax. Also available on audiocassette from Mission for the
Visually Impaired, 559 Humboldt Ave, St. Paul MN 55107.

Subscription Services

1-800-662-6093, ext. 5785. Milwaukee
area 414/615-5785. Or write NPH, 1250 N 113 St,
Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Order on-line:
<www.nph.net>

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 photo by Brice Photography

Marketers promote VeggieTales with the slogan: "Sunday morning values, Saturday morning fun!" But can we call VeggieTales "Christian" videos?

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bits & pieces



Although your kids may not like to eat cucumbers and tomatoes, they probably will want to watch them on TV—especially if it's Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber of the popular VeggieTales series. But are these Veggies good for our kids? Or for us? Tadd Fellers explores that question in "Are Veggies good for you?" (p. 8).



When we think of our WELS elementary schools, we thank God for giving us a way to train and teach our WELS children and to nurture their faith. But can these same schools be used to reach out to children who don't know Jesus?

- Jim Brandt, the new associate administrator of parish schools, gives us a real-life example of how this happened in "Lutheran schools: On the road to Tyre" (p. 10).

- Forward with Lutheran Schools, a program that works to strengthen existing WELS schools and start new ones, can help congregations and schools with both of these goals. Learn about the program and meet its new consultant in "Moving forward with Lutheran schools" (p. 23).



Travel to Africa with Owen Dorn and listen in as he interviews a national pastor about the blessings and challenges for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Malawi Synod (p. 18).



How did Daniel witness to the truth? Find out in our new eight-part Bible study series on the book of Daniel. Phil Kieselhorst begins his stint on our editorial board with "Youth resolved to witness" (p. 30).

—JKW

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Believe it or not?




I read with great interest the article "I will never forget you" [July] written by Amy Schultz concerning a mother finding peace after miscarriage.

My husband and I have had two miscarriages in the past year and a half, and we've finally found our peace with God over them.

Like Amy, I too felt alone in the weeks following my first miscarriage. That first week our pastor came to our house for a devotion and to pray with us. It really helped me to understand how it was God's will that this happened to us, and not that we were being punished. As time has passed and we've studied God's Word, it has made our faith in him and our marriage even stronger. We are very thankful to God.

Thank you, Amy, for a wonderful article.

Glenna & Brian Ferrell
 Mesa, Arizona

As I read Gary Baumler's editorial on melancholy [July], I glanced at my wall hanging of my favorite Scripture and thought, "Surely he is familiar with John 14:1-3: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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' "?

I always experience a physical and emotional (spiritual) reaction, and the dark mood is lifted.

Before I discovered this peace, my confirmation verse (1 Corinthians 3:16) was my favorite. But now that


opening sentence, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," washes more cleanly!

Sunday, I heard an inspiring message on "contentment," and both verses flashed through my mind.

Irene Zeilinger
 Frankenmuth, Michigan

Thank you for the insightful article "Time-out for principals" [Aug.]. As a school board member for seven years and chairman for four of those years, I found out firsthand the time demands placed on our principal and the need for time away from the classroom. I am aware of the ups and downs of a grade school principal in today's social climate. I also found out what a great privilege it is to serve God alongside one of these gifted, dynamic, and diligent individuals.

We parents need to remember that we are the primary educators of our children and that our Lutheran elementary schools exist to assist us in that endeavor. The work of a principal and all teachers is certainly challenging. The rewards for this work are eternal. Parents need to work together with our principals and teachers to bring about the ultimate result—young souls bound for heaven. Our prayers, cooperation, and involvement are vital to the success of our schools. Thanks be to God for principals, teachers, and parents whose hearts are firmly rooted in his Word.

Bryan H. Meyer
 Tomah, Wisconsin

In regard to the reader who was disappointed in the *Forward in Christ* article "A dirty, not so little secret" [Aug. readers forum]. Many Christ-centered books on the market deal with the problem of sexual impurity. I would recommend *Every Man's Battle—every man's guide to winning the war on sexual temptation one victory at a time* by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker. It offers a solid Bible-based action plan for

achieving sexual integrity and is available at <Amazon.com> [and Northwestern Publishing House, <www.nph.net>].


Name withheld

Thank you for an excellent issue of *Forward in Christ*, August 2002. The articles were straight to the point and informative, with down-to-earth practicality.

"Making little disciples" by Pastor Eich is definitely the ultimate guide in child rearing. Rather than using a wishy-washy, make-your-own-decisions-about-what-you-want-to-believe approach to raising your children without any direction or guidance from your parents, passing down firm values, commitments, and a sound belief system in the knowledge of our Savior is focused and to the point for eternal salvation.

And I was glad to read "Today is the day" by Linda Buxa. It is great to know that pregnancy counseling can be extended to men as well as women. It was refreshing to know that men have the same concerns, fears, and trepidations as women do when confronting unexpected, unplanned, and unwanted pregnancies.

Thank you, again, for an excellent issue.

Laura Borchin
 Flower Mound, Texas

Send your letters to Readers forum, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; FAX, 414/256-3862; <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.

CORRECTION:

Hildegard Hannah Wilhelmine Kell died in Watertown, Wis., not Watertown, S.D., as was reported in the August obituaries (p. 32).

Selfish parents

Kenneth A. Cherney Jr.

“There is nothing new under the sun,” said Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:9). I wonder what Solomon would say about an incident reported in the *Washington Post**. It seems that a lesbian couple used artificial means to conceive a child. Only they weren’t going to be happy with just any child. This couple belongs to the radical handicapped-rights movement, which looks with horror on any suggestion that living without a physical handicap just might be better than living with one. Because the couple is deaf, they took steps to ensure that “their” child would be born deaf, too. When it was, they were elated.

Don’t misunderstand me. The hearing-impaired are infinitely precious in God’s sight, and millions of them lead full, rewarding lives. But this is outrageous! That this child will be raised in a “family” which is not a family isn’t even the worst of it. In an act of almost unbelievable selfishness, this couple deliberately designed their child without one of his five senses. Their child, so they decreed, had to experience life exactly as they do.

It’s horrifying—but is it new? I’m not sure.

I wonder whether it isn’t just an unusually clear example of an attitude toward children that permeates our society. You hear it in all the talk about “reproductive rights”—as though children are an entitlement for us to demand, instead of a blessing that God bestows or withholds as he sees fit. If I have a right to reproduce, then surely I also have the right to design the kind of children I prefer. The only barriers are technological—and once we have the technology, why not?

But society’s attitude—“My children are mine, to do with as I please”—doesn’t just affect its treatment of those not yet born.

Nor is technology the only method used by parents to shape their children as they choose—sometimes selfishly.

As a parent, I have a God-given responsibility to bring up my children “in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). That means rules and discipline, along with plenty of love and forgiveness. At the same time, I have to recognize that my children aren’t little extensions of me. In a sense, they’re not even really mine. They are separate persons genetically and physically. They are also unique spiritually, with their own relationship to their Savior God and their own place in his plan.

Therefore, in attempting to shape a child’s developing personality, there are limits beyond which Christian parents will not go. They know that what has been placed into their hands isn’t a lump of clay, but a human being—a unique, infinitely precious individual who belongs, not to his parents, but to his Creator. To violate my children’s individuality in order to mold them in my image is to usurp their Creator’s role. It’s appallingly selfish. And it is not only the openly godless—like the couple in the *Post* story—who occasionally succumb to that temptation.

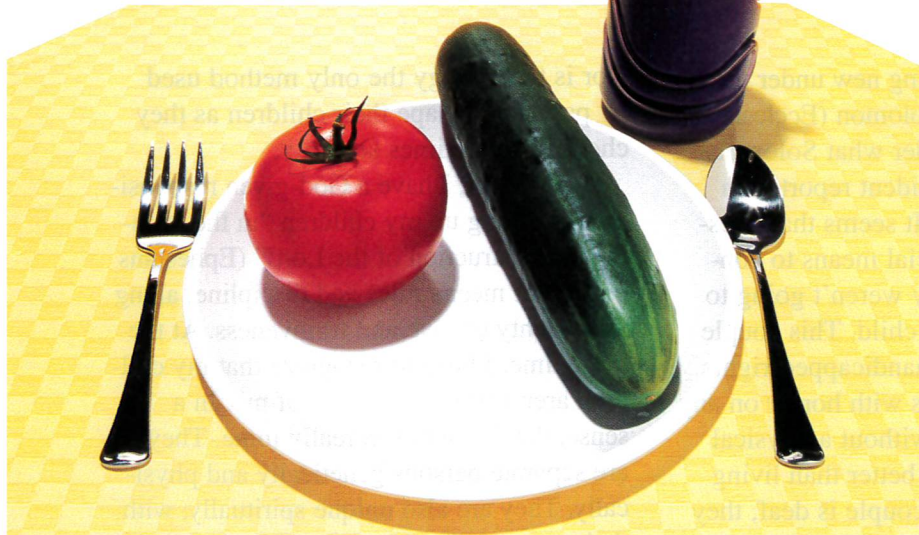
“Nothing new.” It appears Solomon was right after all.

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

*Re-reported by James Langton, “Lesbians: We Made Our Baby Deaf on Purpose,” *This Is London* on-line journal, 04/08/02.

To violate
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Are Veggies good for you?



Though VeggieTales videos are entertaining and encourage moral, biblical values, a steady diet of them may not be healthy.

Tadd D. Fellers

“Bob.” That was one of the first words my son learned to say. Not “Mama.” Not “Daddy.” But “Bob”—for Bob the Tomato, the host of the children’s video series VeggieTales.

What’s VeggieTales?

Colorful, squeaky-voiced vegetables sing and banter in these computer-animated videos. Characters include Junior Asparagus, Laura Carrot, the French Peas, and Bob’s goofy sidekick Larry the Cucumber. Imagine cartoon vegetables putting on a variety show.

The *Chicago Tribune* wrote of VeggieTales: “Smart writing, catchy tunes, characters with a Monty Python sensibility and a self-referential sense of humor that have won over as many adults as children.”¹

My kids like watching these videos over and over again. I don’t mind. The songs are so infectious I sing them to

myself now and then! The sharp humor makes the videos bearable for adults. In *Lyle the Kindly Viking*, Larry muses, “When do I have to share, why do I have to share, whatever happened to Sonny and Cher?”

Veggies teach values

But the videos are more than entertaining. Each episode encourages a moral, biblical value such as honesty, kindness, or courage. Sometimes the characters reenact stories from the Bible. At other times the story is original but drives home a particular virtue. Most videos end with a Bible verse that emphasizes a moral lesson.

Cocreators Phil Vischer and Mike Nawrocki wanted to make quality entertainment for children that rises above what kids usually watch that models sarcasm and aggression. They tell stories in a “God direction” rather than away from him, without seeming preachy.

Vischer once compared Hollywood

glitz and values-affirming entertainment to two men on a playground:

One guy has a bucket of apples and the other has a basketful of Twinkies. The kids need the apples, but they want the Twinkies. Hollywood says, “Hey, you can’t blame us. The kids want Twinkies, we’ve got to give them Twinkies.” We say, “No, here’s an alternative. Let’s make an apple that tastes like Twinkies.” If we do that, the kids will choose that.²

Has Vischer succeeded in creating a Twinkie-flavored apple? The popularity of VeggieTales speaks for itself. They are the second best-selling kids’ videos; the first VeggieTales feature film, *Jonah—a VeggieTales Movie*, hits theaters this month.

Marketers promote VeggieTales with the slogan: “Sunday morning values, Saturday morning fun!” Vischer emphasizes, “God is at the heart of what we’re talking about.”³

For example, *Where's God When I'm Scared?* stresses, "God is bigger than the bogeyman." We can be thankful that God is favorably referred to in VeggieTales and that the videos promote biblical values.

Veggies fall short

But can we call VeggieTales "Christian" videos? Do they truly honor the Lord's name and his Word?

In some videos—and in the current movie—the veggies reenact Bible stories. However, their versions make adjustments. *Rack, Shack, and Benny* retells the three men in the fiery furnace. But these followers of God don't live in Babylon; they work in a chocolate factory. And the company president, Mr. Nebbly K. Nezzzer, demands that workers bow down, not to a golden idol, but to a giant chocolate bunny.

Some fans defend such changes. They explain that these versions could be understood as wacky veggies putting on a play. The veggies never say these are how the events happened exactly. The creators contend that, while the message is important and serious, the sharing of that message can still be fun. Yes, I chuckle at some of the humor, yet I find it difficult to commend changes made to God's Word. Plus, the VeggieTales' versions might confuse viewers over what is true and what is not.

Each video ends with a Bible verse, emphasizing a moral lesson. But be careful. Sometimes a passage is used incorrectly. In *Larry-Boy and the Fib from Outer Space*, Bob quotes Jesus, "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32), and reminds the audience to always tell the truth. The Bible does teach honesty, but Bob misapplies this verse. Jesus wasn't saying here that we shouldn't fib. He was speaking of the truth in his Word, which frees us from sin.

The videos' biggest shortcoming is that they present a Christian veneer yet lack the gospel. Most themes in the VeggieTales series are law statements, like "God says we should be nice to people," and, "A thankful heart is a happy heart." But there's no gospel. That's moralizing. In other words, it tries to encourage good, biblical behavior without the motivation of the gospel. At times the videos come close to introducing the gospel, but then they stop short. Even in the lesson on forgiveness (*God wants me to forgive them!?!*), the veggies sing that we forgive others because God forgives us. The statement is right on, but the characters never explain why God forgives.

You never hear about grace or Christ dying to take away sins. In fact, Jesus is mentioned only a couple of times in the entire series. The Christmas video says that Jesus was born at Christmas. Another time Bob merely quotes Jesus' name in passing: "[Jesus said], 'Love one another'" (John 13:34)—a law verse! To call the videos "Christian" is a misnomer. How can we label something "Christian" that does not have Christ and the full gospel?

VeggieTales' official Web site, <bigidea.com>, lists the company's purpose as "to markedly enhance the moral and spiritual fabric of our society through creative media." I applaud the push for morality, but the company's mission is off base. Morals and the law do not enhance spirituality. The videos will not make society more Christian. Only the gospel can do that. For without Jesus, hearts cannot grow to be more spiritual.

Using Veggies


Does this mean we should ban Bob and Larry from our homes? Not necessarily. My family still watches

VeggieTales. While I would not recommend the videos for Christian education "as is" (that is, for Sunday school, vacation Bible school, etc.), Christians can derive some benefit. Believers need to hear the law, which the videos provide, but you will have to add the gospel.

You have better resources for teaching God's whole Word to your children. Use them. But you can also use VeggieTales as a springboard for Bible discussion. Watch *Josh and the Big Wall* with your children and discuss it, but also read together the account of Jericho's fall from a faithful Bible-story book before and after. Then ask your kids to point out discrepancies between the real event and the VeggieTales' version.

You can also use VeggieTales as a means of evangelism. Maybe you know an unchurched parent who has seen one of the videos. If not, loan her one. Then talk about it with her. Take the video's moral lesson as a lead-in to talking to her about sin and your faith in Jesus.

VeggieTales gets kids' attention and can be entertaining. However, don't regard the videos as "Christian," but as videos that promote morals. View them with discretion, just as you would with other media.

By the way, I'm happy to tell you that my son is almost two and his vocabulary has expanded. Now he can also say, "SpongeBob." 

Tadd Fellers is pastor at Grace, Charlotte, North Carolina.

¹<bigidea.com>

²"Onward, Christian produce" by Carla Barnhill <beliefnet.com/story/35/story_3598_1.html>

³*Detroit Free Press*, David Lyman, May 2, 1998

Lutheran schools:

ON THE ROAD TO TYRE

A Lutheran elementary school principal hears a door to the gospel opening when a mother calls to enroll her difficult kindergartner.

James A. Brandt

“**A** Canaanite woman from [the region of Tyre] came to him, crying out, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering . . .’” (Matthew 15:22). Lauren’s mother echoed this biblical mother’s request as I took her call one afternoon.

As a Lutheran school principal, one of my roles was to serve as its gatekeeper, and, to be honest, my initial reaction was to tell Vaelene that we couldn’t meet her daughter’s needs. Her emotional plea prevented me from closing the door.

Considering the request

I could easily picture her tears as Vaelene asked for my help. She was worried about her little girl. Lauren was having an extremely difficult time in kindergarten. The situation was digressing with each passing day. Angry outbursts were becoming a regular occurrence. Lauren was throwing chairs, hitting other children, hiding under tables, and refusing to comply with the teacher’s requests. In spite of the school’s efforts to intervene, the problem had gotten worse. Vaelene believed it was time to make a change.

A friend had suggested Lutheran schools—they were safe, caring, and had good academics. Vaelene told me that she didn’t know much about Lutheranism.

She also spoke about her family. She and her husband were separated,

but she didn’t believe the separation had anything to do with Lauren’s trouble in school. They still had an amicable relationship. She told me that Lauren’s father would be involved with Lauren’s education and would want to meet me before she was enrolled.

As I listened to Vaelene tell her story, I could hear the door of opportunity opening. Was I willing to enter?

Vaelene, Lauren, and Lauren’s father all needed what we had to offer. I could only wonder whether we needed what they would bring.

Seizing the opportunity

God was presenting my school and church with a perplexing opportunity to share the good news of salvation. Vaelene, Lauren, and Lauren’s father all needed what we had to offer. I could only wonder whether we needed what they would bring.

I knew Lauren’s presence would have a potentially negative impact on the children in our kindergarten. I was also fairly certain other parents would be upset when Lauren’s actions disturbed the classroom. I realized

Lauren would greatly challenge our kindergarten teacher and would certainly cause her frustration. Still, I scheduled appointments with Vaelene and Jeff to tell them about our church, to learn more about Lauren, and to discuss enrollment requirements.

When I walked over to the kindergarten room to discuss the situation with our teacher, I knew I wouldn’t need to do any convincing. She clearly understood our school’s mission and recognized the opportunity God was placing before us. Together we formulated plans for addressing Lauren’s needs. We both placed our trust in the Holy Spirit to carry us through. We talked about the teachable moments Lauren’s presence would provide both for the other children and for their parents.

My next trip was to our pastor’s office. I alerted him to the situation, and he agreed to give Vaelene an encouraging call. Everyone on the team was doing his or her part.

Within a few days, Lauren was attending our school. Positive visits with both of her parents afforded me opportunities to witness to my faith. I encouraged them to attend our Bible information course, and both agreed.

My call to Lauren’s previous principal confirmed what Vaelene had shared about Lauren’s troubles—we would have our hands full. Professional counseling for Lauren became a condition of enrollment. The excitement began.

Following through with love

A fair number of days Lauren's actions disrupted the classroom. Some days Lauren was willing to walk down to my office to talk about her behavior. Others required the flexibility of advanced lesson planning. Lauren's teacher had alternate activities prepared that took the children out of the classroom while I calmed Lauren down. We spoke with her mother on a daily basis those first days and weeks.

Most important, throughout every interaction with Lauren, we purposefully used the double-edged sword of Scripture. We responded to her defiance with love—not a wishy-washy, feel-good love, but rather one that included the preaching of the law and the gospel. We firmly pointed out her sins and followed that message with the sweet, comforting promise of forgiveness in Christ. I had the privilege of watching this little girl's anger melt into tears and then finally transform into a beautiful smile on several occasions. Every time the miracle happened I knew we had made the right decision.

Watching God work

God promised in Isaiah 55:11 that the Word that goes out from his mouth will accomplish his purposes. That promise was fulfilled with Lauren and her mother. By the spring of her kindergarten year, Lauren was able to participate in all class activities without disruption. It was a joy to see her smiling face in the classroom and on the playground. And what a privilege to observe Vaelene seeking the same joy and comfort her daughter was experiencing! Angels rejoiced on a Sunday morning when Vaelene and Lauren became members of our church.

Lauren's father never completed the Bible information class. His response to the Word was not what

we desired. Still, we were thankful that we had a direct opportunity to tell him about his Savior, and we looked forward to other opportunities to reach him in the future.

Enrolling Lauren in our school meant taking a risk. But that risk paid temporal and eternal dividends. My experience with Lauren made me a better principal and a more effective minister. Her presence further sharpened our kindergarten teacher's classroom skills. We both progressed in our ability to correctly distinguish law and gospel. The following year, our first-grade teacher became more effective in modeling God's love to her children. Parents and students developed a better understanding of the mission of our school. Best of all, Lauren and Vaelene received the blessing of faith.

Some would say Vaelene didn't come to our school for the right reason. Maybe she didn't. But if she was

only looking for a safe environment where her daughter could achieve academically, she found much more.

Today's Lutheran schools are in a unique position to use God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. Whatever the reason, we should be grateful for those parents who seek our schools. We need to carefully evaluate the mission opportunities they present and faithfully present God's Word in its truth and purity to those who are willing to hear it.

Within walking distance of Lutheran elementary schools all across our country are thousands of children who don't know Jesus. Like the Canaanite woman who brought her daughter's need to Jesus on the road to Tyre, I fervently pray that their parents will bring them into contact with our schools. May God give congregations and teachers the courage to lovingly welcome such families into the waiting arms of Jesus, their Savior.

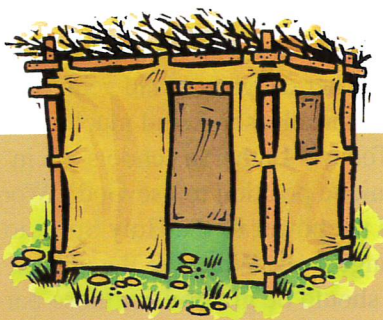


James Brandt, former principal at St. Mark, Citrus Heights, California, is the associate administrator of the Commission on Parish Schools.



Lauren in second grade (above) and with her mom, Vaelene (right), as she now enters third grade. Three years ago, Vaelene came to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif., to find a safe and nurturing environment for her daughter to go to school. She and Lauren found much more.





An Old Testament sukkah for celebrating God's forgiveness.



Jesus won the forgiveness and prepared an eternal shelter to celebrate.



Heaven awaits us for the final celebration.

The final reformation

One way Old Testament believers looked ahead to Christ's coming was by celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. Christ's coming "re-formed" that celebration, just as his second coming will provide our final reformation.

John C. Lawrenz

The widower Eliab looked skyward with a tear in his eye. Hannah. It had been 13 years. The ground beneath Eliab's feet was rock hard. But the rains had always returned to his fields and to those of his Temple-going neighbors near Emmaus. The night before, there was no moon. Tomorrow he would see the signal fires proclaiming a new moon, the sixth since Passover and fourth since Pentecost. The local priest would blast his ram's horn. It would be the same everywhere in Judea.

Eliab had two weeks to get ready for the walk to Jerusalem with his two newly married sons. The pilgrims would carry sturdy poles to plant in a plot of ground that Eliab had revisited every year since his first trip 31 years ago, the year the Roman census was taken. Branches would link and cover the poles and provide a crown for their sukkah.

This temporary shelter would be the family home for eight days. It didn't matter that you could see the stars through the sukkah's top. It would not rain. It never rained until the Feast of Tabernacles was over.

This year 13-year-old Shammua would take his grandfather Obadiah's place on the pilgrimage. He had died the night the rains stopped five months ago. Old Obadiah's journey through life had been a hard one. His wife had died in childbirth, too. That year the procurators came to Judea, replacing Herod's incompetent son.

Those were troubled times. Soldiers burned the family house and confiscated their crops. Eliab's sister had never married, and there was little in the family coffers for a dowry. Then there was the desperate theft to which Obadiah confessed. His children were starving. Still, stealing was not right. Obadiah made a repentant trip to the Temple to bring

his guilt offering and its six-fifths restitution. Venal priests inspected Obadiah's ram and rejected it on a technicality. They sold him a ram of their own instead. Never mind. Obadiah knew. God had forgiven him. Now the old man had been "gathered to his fathers" in peace. He was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Obadiah had taught Eliab to love the appointed days of the seventh month. Eliab was teaching his sons and their wives to do the same. There was the trumpet blast. It signaled that something extraordinary was about to unfold. Ten days of remorse over sin followed. Then on the Day of Atonement God's high priest confessed the sins of all the people over the head of a goat and sent the animal with their sins away from God's Temple far, far away.

What followed was party time. Under the full moon of the seventh month pilgrim families were united



God provided three yearly pilgrim festivals at the temple in Jerusalem for the ancient Hebrew farmer.

- Passover recalled the night in Egypt when the angel of death passed over homes whose doorposts glistened with lamb's blood. This feast anticipated the coming of Jesus, God's Lamb. The Hebrew Passover became our Easter. Read more at <www.wels.net/sab/nl/nl-pass.html>.

- Pentecost recalled the Lord's kneading of slaves into a special people through the commandments he gave them. The day and the loaves with yeast celebrated the Holy Spirit's working in the hearts and souls of all who hear God's Word and keep it. Read more at <www.wels.net/sab/nl/nl-pent.html>.

- The Feast of Tabernacles recalled the Lord bringing Israel through the wilderness into the Promised Land. It's the one pilgrim feast whose fulfillment we don't celebrate. The days of the seventh Hebrew month are really about Christ's second coming and how he will bring believers to the final Promised Land.

in celebration. Fathers opened their rucksacks and spilled out a banquet of summer fruit. Under each sukkah there would be eight days of feasting on figs, dates, olives, raisins, nuts, and newly bottled wine. At the Great Feast the long, hot, dry days of summer didn't seem so bad after all.

The Feast reformed

Jesus of Nazareth looked around him. It was the Feast of Tabernacles. King Herod had made the Temple in Jerusalem the number one tourist attraction in the East. Herod widened the Temple courts, expanded its walls, and gilded its gates. Giant candlesticks sent light into the night sky, illuminating the Mount of Olives. In all of the Roman world there was no city like Jerusalem at this, the Great Feast.

Jesus noted that priests, as was their custom, had just poured water from the Pool of Siloam before the Lord at his altar. It was a prayer for rain. Worshipers on all sides lined up for a procession. In each left hand was a sweet summer fruit. In each right hand were leaves and palm fronds bundled together. All would soon dance for joy around the altar.

"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:38), Jesus of Nazareth exclaimed with a loud voice that cut

through the clamor. Eliab noticed.

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Eliab listened.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Eliab would hear these and other truths from the Galilean prophet.

This Jesus made sense out of God's feasts, God's prophecies, God's everything!

Jesus' words agreed with everything that Old Obadiah had taught Eliab over the years. Would the Day of the Lord come with the blast of a trumpet? Yes.

Did he believe Messiah would be the scapegoat to take away the sins of the world? Yes.

Would God call upon his children to deny themselves, accept life with all of its troubles, and follow God's Anointed One unafraid? Yes.

Would true believers find everlasting shelter in a heavenly Jerusalem? Yes.

Would deeds endure if done out of thankful love for God? Yes.

Would there be joy over such fruit forever? Yes! Yes! Yes!

Rabble-rousers were calling for reform. This Eliab and his family knew well. Evict the Romans! Move the family of Herod aside! Cleanse the priesthood! Set Jerusalem free!

A real reformation was what Jesus of Nazareth preached.

The final, great reformation

Eliab and his clan lived to see "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) fulfill the pilgrim feast of Passover. They put their faith in the risen Lord, the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

They would "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38), fulfilling the promise of Pentecost. When their earthly pilgrimage was over, they were "gathered to their fathers" like Obadiah and Hannah. Today they all stand white-robed alongside saints "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9). They circle the Lamb who was slain, leafy branches of victory and sweet fruits of faith in hand. At the Great Feast there is real reform: "No more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). Only joy! Only celebration!

Heaven is the real, the final reformation.



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

A HIDDEN MISSION

The Lutheran Home Association discovered a hidden mission field right in front of them—and the same mission field is in front of you. Can you see it? Do you even know it's there?

Nicole R. Balza

It's easy to forget about them. They usually live in group homes, somewhat separated from the rest of society. They have special needs, and many of us do not know how to handle dealing with these needs. So we ignore the needs and, subsequently, we ignore the people with those needs.

But ignoring people with special needs does not make them go away. It also does not fulfill Jesus' command to spread his Word to all people.

"It's like a hidden mission field that is right in front of us," explains Michael Klatt, president and chief executive officer of The Lutheran Home Association (TLHA). "It doesn't get attention. Some people call it 'ministry to the margins.' It's like looking at a piece of paper. You're always looking at the words in the center. These are people that are on the margins of society. They're hidden away in group homes and institutions."

In fact, 1.7 million people in the United States live in nursing homes at any given time, and at least 30 percent of these residents are unchurched. Another six to seven million people with developmental disabilities are unchurched. As Klatt notes, "The outreach potential is phenomenal, but there is not a lot of interest in this area."

TLHA is interested in this area, though. They are interested in serving

people with special needs, including the aging, and those with developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, traumatic brain injuries, Alzheimer's, and other forms of dementia. Here are just a few of the people on the margins that TLHA has ministered to.

Ministering to seniors

Charlie* was an elderly, ill-tempered man whose health was going downhill. A resident of a TLHA facility, he often grumbled about being at a *Christian* nursing home. He never attended the worship services and Bible classes that TLHA offered. However, Charlie couldn't escape the daily devotion that was given at breakfast each morning. No one at the nursing home knew whether Charlie was listening to God's Word or not—until the night that Charlie's health took a dramatic turn for the worse and the nursing home chaplain's beeper went off.

"Charlie's asking for you," a nurse told the chaplain.

The surprised chaplain hurried to Charlie's bedside, where Charlie managed to say, "I've been bad."

With those words, the chaplain knew that Charlie had been listening to God's Word during the breakfast devotions, and he learned that the Holy Spirit had worked faith into Charlie's heart. The chaplain stayed with Charlie all through the night, reading the Bible to him and pray-

ing for him. Charlie died the next night, grateful to be in a *Christian* nursing home.

Ministering to people with developmental disabilities

Because of his mental retardation, Stan* could not speak well. However, he was able to express his fears about dying. He would say, "No die! No die!"

As those at TLHA's Hope Residence shared their faith with him, he became calmer about death and was able to sing his favorite song, "Jesus loves me," with more confidence.

A Hope Residence staff member bought Stan an electronic "Jesus loves me" book for Christmas. On New Year's Eve, Stan sang along with his new book as he prepared for bed. Stan never awoke from his sleep that night, but those at TLHA are sure that he is singing "Jesus loves me" with the angels in heaven.

Ministering to those with Alzheimer's

"Because Fern is receiving such good care at The Lutheran Home in Belle Plaine, I have done some traveling this year [2001]. The staff at the Home have urged me to go," writes Ken Crane. Ken's wife, Fern, suffers from Alzheimer's Disease and lives in TLHA's Special Care Residence.

Although admitting Fern to TLHA was somewhat difficult, Ken says,

FIELD



Rena (pictured above) is one of 1,400 residents cared for by The Lutheran Home Association.

“When I leave here, I know that she’s in good hands and that the Lord is taking care of her. The Lord takes care of people in many ways, and this home is doing it for her.”

Ministering to all

One resident with developmental disabilities once asked a TLHA chaplain, “Is it true that only smart people will go to heaven?”

His chaplain was quick to assure him, “No, Jesus died for all of us.”

That is the message of The Lutheran Home Association. Jesus died for all of us. Likewise, when he said, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” he intended us to include those who are developmentally disabled, aging, and ill.

Even though you may not often see those with special needs, don’t forget about them. Their spiritual health is as important as yours is. They need someone to bring God’s Word to them. The Lutheran Home Association is doing that, and they’d love for you to join them.



Nicole Balza is a communications assistant for Forward in Christ magazine and WELS Communication Services.

*Name has been changed.

Thanks to John Zeitler and *Link-Age*, the newsletter of TLHA, for the stories included in this article. For more information about the services that TLHA offers, call 1-888-600-8542 or e-mail <info@tlha.org>.

What is The Lutheran Home Association?

The Lutheran Home Association (TLHA), based in Belle Plaine, Minn., began in 1898 as a home for orphans and the elderly. In 1998, Jesus Cares Ministries, located in Milwaukee, merged with TLHA. The two Midwestern groups are now working together to serve people with special needs across the United States and Canada through a system of nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior apartments, group homes, and other support services.

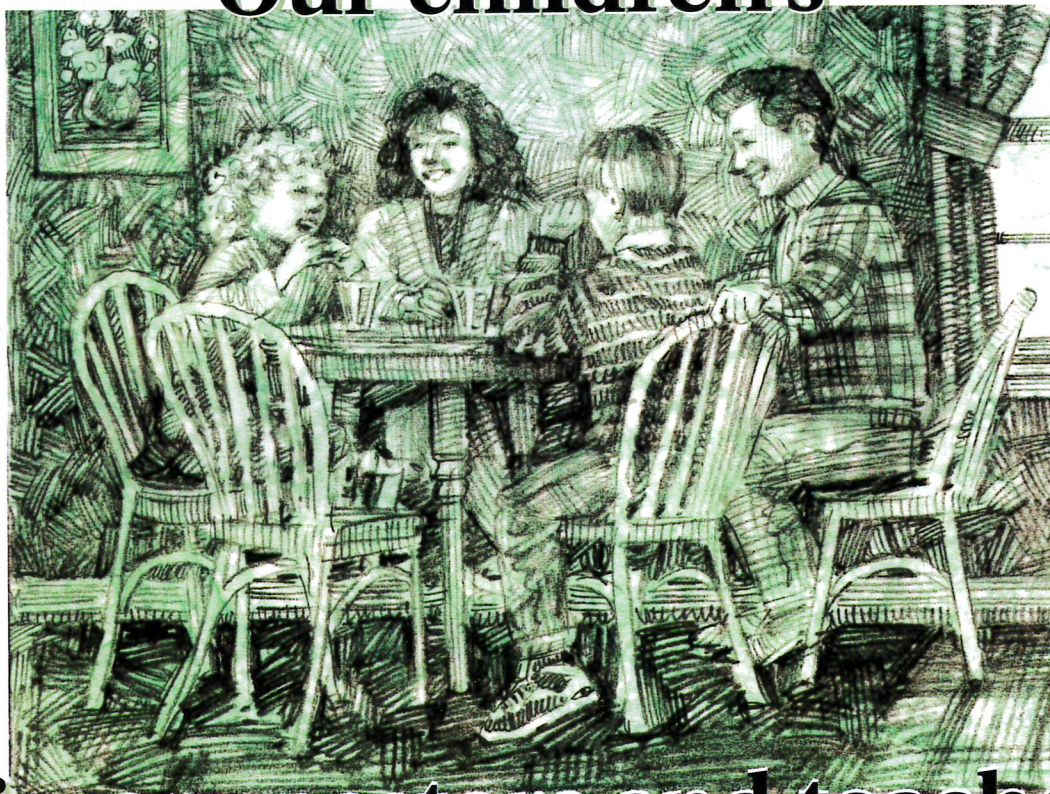
These three Milwaukee programs are thriving:

1. The **Wisconsin Lutheran Learning Center**—a place where struggling students can receive one-on-one tutoring help from experienced teachers and qualified education student interns.
2. The **Inclusion Program**—a program that assists parents, principals, and teachers in creating a plan of action so that children with special needs can attend WELS elementary schools and high schools. Beginning its third full school year, the Inclusion Program has led to pursuing the idea of other inclusive ministries, such as Sunday school classes and urban outreach.

Kim Warning, director of the Inclusion Program, says, “The way we are delivering education is changing, which means that ministry is wide open. We can serve those that we couldn’t before.”

3. The **Wisconsin Lutheran Special Needs Resource Center**—a center that provides special needs information, materials, and resources to people around the world. Some of the resources help parents, teachers, and pastors teach God’s Word in an easy, understandable way, while others educate people about those with special needs. Clients can order resources in person, on-line, by phone, or by mail; 877/505-3675; <www.jcministries.org/resources/resources.html>.

Our children's



primary pastors and teachers

The sharing of the gospel in the home is the foundation of God's plan to bless the next generation.

Richard L. Gurgel

God's beautiful plan of schooling the home is to enable Christian parents to leave an eternal legacy for their children and their children's children. As much of a blessing as Christian public ministers are to God's church, the role God has given to moms and dads will always make them the most spiritually influential people in their children's lives.

Make no mistake about it, the strength of God's Church has always been homes that are rooted deeply in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is no accident that Paul could write

this about his dearest co-worker, Timothy: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5). Remember, Timothy's home was no perfect Christian refuge. His father appears to have been a gentile unbeliever (Acts 16:1). Timothy was the product of a "spiritually single" mother. God used the powerful gospel witness of a believing grandmother and mother to fan into flame a sincere faith in Timothy.

Such is the power of the gospel shared in our homes. Certainly, Christian churches and schools are wonderful gifts of God to assist in the nurture and strengthening of present and future generations of God's people. But churches and schools will not long remain spiritually strong without strong homes behind them.

Strong homes were God's plan

Such has been God's plan from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, God established home and family as his first social institution.

Although God established other institutions such as churches, schools, and governments to be blessings for the spiritual or temporal welfare of his people, the sharing of the gospel in the home has been the foundation of God's plan to bless the next generation. People in that generation in turn use the gospel to bless those that follow them and the world around them as well.

Long before God's other institutions began to function, parents in the home were the pastors and professors, the providers and protectors for their children. As society grew and became more complex, God blessed man by establishing church, school, and government. Yet Scripture never relieves moms or dads of their responsibility to be their children's primary pastors, professors, providers, and protectors.

Abraham serves as an example

Our spiritual father, Abraham, serves as a wonderful example of this principle in action.

Pastor: As Abraham's life is painted before us on the canvas of Scripture, we find this refrain again and again: "There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 12:8). To "[call] on the name of the LORD" was the way God inspired Moses to describe the public worship of the LORD and the proclamation of his saving promises. Genesis 4:26 mentions the beginning of such public proclamation of the Word when Enosh was born to Seth. As families grew, fathers would lead worship for their extended families. Such were the beginnings of the first organized congregations of believers. In this way Abraham also served as both father and pastor for his family and servants.

Professor: Abraham provided some powerful faith-life lessons as

professor to his son as well. Consider the words between father and son as Isaac and Abraham walked toward the mountain on which Abraham had been commanded to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. In answer to Isaac's question about the lack of a sacrificial animal for worship, Abraham assured Isaac that "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8). Do you think Isaac would ever need a review test to remember that lesson taught by his professor father on what it means to live by faith in God's grace?

Provider and protector: Read Genesis 13 and 14. There you see Abraham as provider managing the family business. There you see Abraham as a mini-nation springing into action to come to the aid of his nephew, Lot, who had become a prisoner of war. The functions of employer and government are also fulfilled within the boundaries of Abraham's household.

Mom and dad's school is always in session.

Parents still are the best teachers

In his Large Catechism, written for public ministers *and parents* to help them train the next generation, Martin Luther caught well this primary emphasis of Scripture on the responsibility of the home. In his discussion of the Fourth Commandment he writes, "It belongs to the discussion of this commandment to say something also about the various kinds of obedience toward those superiors whose function it is to command and govern us. *From the authority of parents all other kinds of authority flow*

out at various angles" (Luther's *Large Catechism: A Contemporary Translation with Study Questions*, St. Louis, Concordia: 1978, p. 35).

Long before there ever was church or Christian school, there were moms and dads sharing the gospel of a promised Savior. Just picture for a moment Adam and Eve speaking to their children about their eager anticipation for God's promised "offspring" who would crush the serpent's head.

Here we enter the picture. Long after God has blessed us with Christian congregations and schools, the gospel in the home still is God's most basic plan for passing on the faith to the next generation. In the home the greatest amount of contact takes place between real life and God's real answers of law and gospel.

Although a skilled teacher works hard to bring "life" into his classroom through good discussion and application questions, the home is life where the questions are not simulated but real. Although a pastor or teacher will value the few hours of instruction in the Word he has with children at church or school, parents log countless hours of teaching where there are no bells to signal the end of learning. Mom and dad's school is always in session. And although we may not always be aware of it, children are always learning. That is why the most influential pastors and teachers our children will ever have are those who already bear the titles "dad" and "mom."



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

STRONG, but weak

“Strong, but weak” may seem like a strange descriptor for a church body, but from what I had learned during my short stay in Malawi, it made perfect sense.

Owen A. Dorn

We were sitting in Pastor Liwonde’s sparsely appointed living room, sipping the tea his wife quietly placed at our table. I asked Pastor Liwonde if he could describe the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Malawi in one sentence. He offered the puzzling response, “Strong, but weak.” Then his eyes twinkled with a hint of sadness, and I understood.

“Strong, but weak” may seem like a strange descriptor for a church body, but from what I had learned during my short stay in Malawi, it made perfect sense. I understood even better a few days later, when a women’s choir sang, “We are poor, but we have the Word.”

Examining the dual nature of the LCCA

The Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) is strong because thousands of people in Central Africa

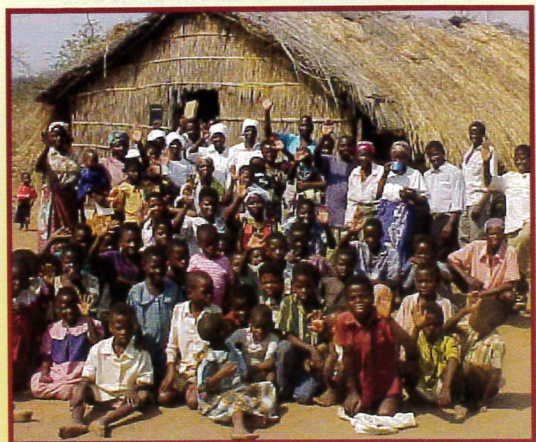
are passionate about their Savior. The gospel has had a phenomenal effect in Central Africa. More than half the baptized members in WELS world missions belong to our sister synods of the LCCA. And the LCCA continues to grow. People are begging to be fed the Word—in Malawi, in Zambia, and even in neighboring Mozambique. A new congregation could blossom in another village every month.

This potential for growth is exciting—but it’s also problematic. For example, one pastor may serve as many as five congregations. In many cases, he is the only messenger bringing the light of the gospel into these congregations. How can such a pastor find time and energy to shepherd the members of all these congregations? If he chooses to serve additional congregations, the problem only intensifies. Mem-

bers who are not nurtured become open doors for Satan and his allies.

Pastor Liwonde—together with two nearby WELS missionaries—is addressing this concern. Liwonde and the missionaries have initiated monthly meetings to teach the leading men in the church. A handful of men from each congregation in the area gather together for “Schools for Elders.” At the meeting, the pastors cooperate in teaching Bible studies and leadership classes. The leadership classes help the elders grow in their understanding of topics such as stewardship, church discipline, record keeping, and evangelism.

I asked Pastor Liwonde why these Schools for Elders are so important to him. Again his calm and confident eyes spoke first. Then he quoted Jesus’ words in Luke 6:39: “Can a blind man lead a blind man?” He didn’t finish the passage, but



An exploratory congregation at Mtiza—Central Region. Since congregations can spring up overnight, national pastors and expatriate missionaries serve more than one congregation each.



Offerings are a regular part of every worship service. Here the congregation’s monthly report sheets serve as an offering plate. Stewardship of God’s gifts and trust in his provincial care are difficult issues for poor Malawians to grasp.

the last half reads, “Will they not both fall into a pit?” Pastor Liwonde knows the importance of developing a cadre of strong Christian lay leaders.

The problem of spiritual weakness is also being addressed in other ways. The Malawi Synod, with help from WELS, is developing new educational materials. One publication will introduce basic Bible stories to the adults of the congregations. Another will educate the leading women of the congregations at meetings similar to the Schools for Elders. And the LCCA worker training system continues to put out more pastors every three years—adding more workers to help with spiritual training.

Working together to strengthen the LCCA

Yes, the LCCA–Malawi is strong. It has the all-powerful Word, and its people are hungry to hear it. Elders are being trained to strengthen congregations. But strong negative forces threaten to weaken the church. Poverty—magnified by recent drought—impedes growth in congregational

giving. Lack of education narrows the pool of congregational leaders. AIDS and other diseases decimate families. False religions confuse weak Christians. Many members still expect “rich” foreigners to finance their congregations—a difficult mindset to overcome in such an impoverished country.

Despite these challenges, Pastor Liwonde is hopeful. He has faith that the God of grace will bless the LCCA–Malawi. He feels that some top-down strategies have not always fit well with the Malawian culture. However, he is confident that, working together, the WELS mission in Malawi and the national church leaders can forge strategies that will glorify our Lord and strengthen the LCCA.

The road Pastor Liwonde and the LCCA must walk is formidable. Please keep them in your prayers.

Owen Dorn, a member at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the youth curriculum editor at Northwestern Publishing House.



Pastor Liwonde and his wife. Pastor Liwonde serves Beautiful Saviour’s, Zomba, Malawi. He also is the secretary of the LCCA publications committee; helps develop teaching materials; and is a member of the LCCA–Malawi Synodical Council.

Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Malawi Synod

Members: 30,000

Established congregations: around 100

Mission congregations: around 20

National pastors: 24

Evangelists and preseminary students: 11

Expatriate missionaries: 12

Did you know?

- With over 30,000 members, the LCCA–Malawi Synod has more members than all our other world missions combined.
- Thirteen million people live in Malawi, the majority in the southern third of the country.
- Malawi is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world and has little or no exports except for tobacco and tea. Due to overpopulation and lack of any real natural resources, hunger is a constant concern.
- On June 16, 1963, WELS worship services began in Blantyre, Malawi. Pastors Edgar Hoenecke and Arthur Wacker first came to Africa in 1949. A church was founded outside of present-day Lusaka, Zambia, in 1953. In November 1955, the “Rhodesian Lutheran Church Conference” was founded. It was renamed the “Lutheran Church of Central Africa” in 1962. Exploratory trips were then made from Zambia into Malawi in 1962.
- The LCCA–Malawi heads the Lutheran Bible Institute in Lilongwe. The LCCA–Zambia runs the seminary in Lusaka.

WHATEVER

My two worlds

My life is so different being in a public high school compared to the Lutheran grade school I was in just a year ago.

Laura Schoephoester

It is 7:40 AM, and I am headed to my first class of the day. As I walk down the overly crowded halls I begin to wonder what the day will be like. Will I get a good grade on my German test? Will I hear about another fight that went on in the cafeteria during lunch? Will I get to my classes on time? How many times will I hear profane words? These thoughts often go through my head.

My life is so different being in a public high school compared to the world that I lived in just a year ago. Last year at this time I was in eighth grade at Jerusalem Lutheran School, Morton Grove, Ill. My eighth-grade class had just four students. This year the freshmen class at my school is over 640 students. That is one huge adjustment that I had to make. I'm still not sure if I have adjusted.

At Jerusalem I shared the same faith with all of my classmates. It was easy to talk about what we believed in. I did not feel like I had to hide my faith. Now I am going to a public high school, and people believe in all different religions. Many say they do not have a religion that they follow. I find myself keeping my thoughts about the Bible to myself and not telling others about God even though I want to share it with others. It is even hard to pray at lunch because I think that people might look at me strangely.

I think this is the hardest part about going to a public high school. I have run into many things that I do not agree with because they contradict what I have reaped from the Bible.

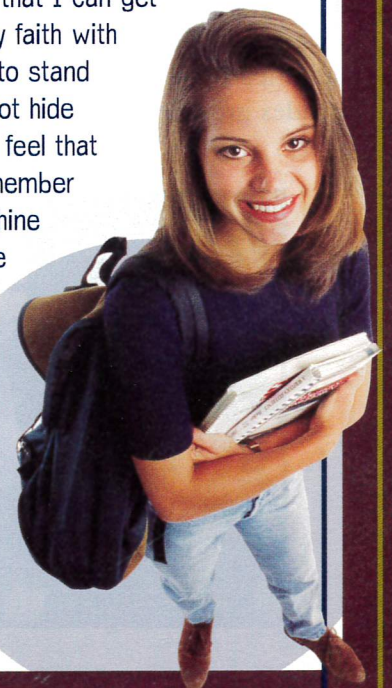
Just the other day in science it came up that the earth was created over millions of years and nothing

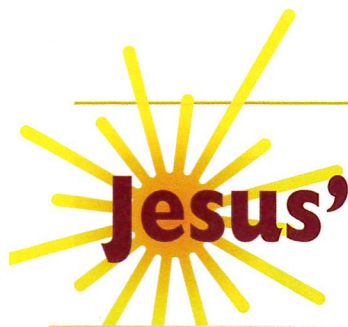
could have survived on the planet at this time because the air was poisonous. I know that this statement is wrong because the Bible says that God created the world in six days and that man and woman were created when the earth was made. I felt that I was not being honest with myself on the test for putting the answer down that my science teacher said was right.

Another thing that bothered me was that my English teacher taught the Bible as a myth like the myth of Zeus. He presented it as a story and did not give me the opportunity to share my thoughts. I would have liked to have said that I believe that the Bible is the truth and not a myth or story.

Life in my new world is quite different from the world I lived in last year, but I think that God wants me in public school so that I can get over my fear about sharing my faith with others. I will try in the future to stand up for what I believe in and not hide my faith. From now on when I feel that I am hiding my faith I will remember Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Laura Schoephoester, now in her sophomore year at Niles West High School, is a member of Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Illinois.





Jesus' miracles: PORTRAITS OF REDEMPTION

Mark J. Lenz

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that approximately 1.3 million people in the United States today are legally blind. In Jesus' day there were proportionately far more. Jesus healed many of them. But Jesus did not come simply to cure people's physical diseases and disabilities. Those miracles, wonderful as they were, serve as a portrait of a far more harmful kind of blindness for which only Jesus has the cure.

TEXT—JOHN 9:1-7,34-38

As [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. . . .

³⁴To this [the Pharisees] replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw [the man who Jesus healed] out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

³⁶"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

³⁷Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

³⁸Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus been? Why had the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus (John 8:58,59)?
2. How long had the man been blind? What did the disciples ask Jesus when they saw the blind man?
3. The Jewish rabbis claimed that a child's soul could sin in a pre-existent state or that terrible punishments could come on people because of the sins of their parents. How did Jesus contradict these beliefs? What did Jesus say was the purpose of this man's blindness?

QUESTIONS, CONTINUED

4. What did Jesus say we must do "while it is day"? Why? What did Jesus mean by calling himself the "light of the world" (John 8:12)?
5. What steps were involved in Jesus' healing of the blind man?
6. Why did the Pharisees put the man out of the synagogue? What did their answer say as to their feelings about themselves?
7. What is the significance of the name Jesus used for himself (Mark 8:31)?
8. What do the man's words and actions reveal about how he viewed Jesus?

APPLICATIONS

1. In what sense are we blind by nature? How has Jesus cured our blindness?
2. Instead of expressing concern, the disciples speculated about the cause of the man's blindness. Give examples of how we are sometimes philosophers when we should be philanthropists.
3. How has the devil blinded many people today (2 Corinthians 4:4)?
4. Jesus spoke of the Pharisees as blind leaders of the blind (Matthew 15:14). Whom might Jesus label in this way today?
5. It has been said that a penny held close to the eye can block out the light of the sun. What does this suggest as to the cause of certain kinds of spiritual blindness today?
6. How is holding a grudge evidence of blindness (1 John 2:11)?
7. The church at Laodicea was afflicted with the blindness of half-heartedness. Think of contemporary examples of that kind of blindness. How does Jesus cure such blindness (Revelation 3:18)?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are the Light of the world. You alone have the cure for spiritual blindness. Thank you for opening my eyes to see you as my Savior from sin and as the Lord of my life. Amen.

Storm destroys South Dakota church

“Take courage. It is I. Don’t be afraid” (Matthew 14:27).

The gospel reading for Sunday, Aug. 11, included these words of comfort from Jesus when he walked on the water to his disciples during a storm. The 60 members of St. John, Herrick, S.D., needed this comfort. Two days earlier a tornado-like storm had destroyed their church.

The storm ripped through Herrick on Aug. 9, breaking windows, pulling off siding, blowing down trees, and destroying crops. Hail created a floor of ice throughout the town.

But the most damage was done to St. John, the 75-year-old WELS church. When the storm had passed through, all that was left of the church building was the basement, the front steps, and the church sign. Thankfully, no one was hurt or injured.

A few hours after the storm, members were able to salvage some furnishings, including a brass crucifix, wooden cross, communion ware, and most of the baptismal font.

“These were all material things.



All that was left of St. John, Herrick, S.D., after an August storm was its basement, the front steps, and the church sign.

Not what our faith is built upon,” says Scott Miller, pastor at St. John, Herrick, and neighboring congregation, Grace, Burke, S.D.

Many members of St. John also had damage to their homes and to their crops. Some will be forced to sell their cattle because the storm destroyed the crops they would have used as feed.

The congregation hasn’t decided if it will rebuild its church or if it will combine with Grace. For now, services

will be held Saturday night at Grace.

Tears were shed on Aug. 11 when members of St. John worshiped with the members of Grace. The congregation was still in shock.

“Human words can’t give us the full comfort our souls needed,” says Miller. “God’s Word on Sunday reminded us all that our faith is not built on the foundation of a building, but on Christ alone. God has a way of making it work.”

Closings and openings

A \$900,000 gift from a church that was closing helped a WELS area Lutheran high school open the doors to a new building.

A few years ago, members of Mt. Calvary, San Jose, Calif., decided to close their church and sell the property due to declining membership. When the property sold for \$2.3 million, the congregation formed a committee to determine where its money would do the most good.

“We’ve been supporters of California Lutheran High School [Wildomar] for 25 years,” says Jimmy Smith, a member at Mt. Calvary. “We’ve been following its progress. We wanted to see it succeed.”

When the members discovered the school needed \$900,000 to finish construction on a new building, the

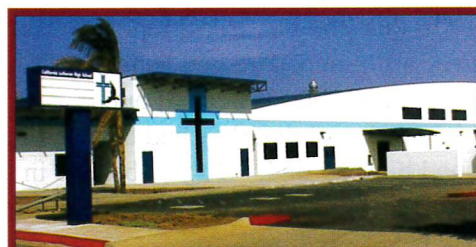
decision was easy.

“[The congregation’s] ministry didn’t end,” says Pastor Gregory Bork, principal at CLHS. “It was just changing hands.”

When members of Mt. Calvary presented the check to the school at graduation day in June, Smith says the day was “bittersweet.”

“But when we saw the smiles on their faces, it made it all worthwhile,” he continues.

California Lutheran High School dedicated its new education center—including the “Mt. Calvary Chapel”—in September. The school, opening this year with a record 122 students, had been in modular buildings since 1994. Before that, classes were held in rented facilities. The school still has a \$1 million loan to repay.



The new education center for California Lutheran High School, Wildomar. A \$900,000 gift from a church that was closing helped the school finish construction on its building.

With the rest of the money from selling their church, members of Mt. Calvary supported our missions in Malawi and Zambia, helped two home missions in southern California, and provided aid to several other WELS organizations. As for the members themselves, most of them joined Apostles, another WELS congregation in San Jose.

Moving forward with Lutheran schools

When George LaGrow celebrated his 40th anniversary in the teaching ministry, he wasn't thinking about the upcoming relaxation and rest of retirement.

He was thinking about how he could share his love for education and his love for kids in his new position as a parish consultant for Forward with Lutheran Schools.

Forward with Lutheran Schools, a specialized service of WELS Parish Assistance, works to help WELS congregations advance their gospel ministry by starting or strengthening early childhood ministries, Lutheran elementary schools, or Lutheran high schools. Since the program's beginnings four years ago, nine congregations have started schools as a result of the program, and many others are working toward that goal. A new focus for Forward with Lutheran Schools is strengthening and expanding the ministry of existing schools, especially concentrating on helping schools reach the unchurched.

LaGrow, a 1962 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is ready for the challenge of



Kristine Heins Pufahl explains a weather station to her students at Mt. Olive Lutheran School, Las Vegas, Nev. In the fall of 2000, Mount Olive was the first congregation to open a school as a result of the Forward with Lutheran Schools consulting process.

helping our congregations and schools expand their ministries. As a teacher and principal at Ocean Drive, Pompano Beach, Fla., in the 1970s, he and his congregation were already concerned about reaching out to the unchurched through their school.

He's also taught "everything from pre-school to graduate school." This

includes studying early childhood education while working on his doctorate at the University of Minnesota—Minneapolis, and helping develop the early childhood education program at Dr. Martin Luther College.

Last school year, LaGrow took a sabbatical from his call as vice principal for Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis., to help Immanuel, Salem, Ore., prepare to open a school in the fall of 2002. Immanuel had decided to start a school as a result of working with Forward with Lutheran Schools.

"I really see the hand of God putting it all into place," says LaGrow.

LaGrow and his wife, Judy, have five children, ranging in age from 19 to 36.

LaGrow's belief that "if I can get [students'] hearts, I can get their minds," demonstrates his passion for people and his love for the ministry. Who needs rest and relaxation if you have that?

To find out more about the Forward with Lutheran Schools consulting process, contact George LaGrow, 920/683-3660; <GeorgeL@sab.wels.net>.



George LaGrow and his wife, Judy, at the Space Needle in Seattle, Wash. LaGrow is excited about working as the new parish consultant in Forward with Lutheran Schools, but according to him, "my idea of heaven is to teach the perfect fifth- and sixth-grade math lesson for eternity."



CONGREGATION MISSION SUBSCRIPTION PERFORMANCE

Six Months Ended June 30, 2002

	Communicants 12/31/01	Total Subscription			Offerings Received		Annld Ave Per Commun
		2002	Year to Date Projected	June Offerings	Six Months Offerings	Percent of Sbscrptn	
Arizona-California	18,043	\$1,116,570	\$607,346	\$83,727	\$621,823	102.4%	\$68.93
Dakota-Montana	8,889	488,262	234,340	30,361	252,970	107.9	56.92
Michigan	36,078	2,240,222	1,124,872	146,630	1,115,551	99.2	61.84
Minnesota	43,194	2,508,035	1,210,949	196,301	1,290,441	106.6	59.75
Nebraska	10,545	679,010	344,644	44,137	344,881	100.1	65.41
North Atlantic	4,445	421,477	217,044	42,308	219,049	100.9	98.56
Northern Wisconsin	60,720	2,723,239	1,369,179	222,757	1,382,135	100.9	45.52
Pacific Northwest	5,278	332,515	168,077	15,886	178,467	106.2	67.63
South Atlantic	7,565	610,145	309,609	53,209	307,667	99.4	81.34
South Central	5,003	549,212	298,377	52,553	300,990	100.9	120.32
Southeastern Wisconsin	56,883	3,595,877	1,733,876	322,227	1,793,829	103.5	63.07
Western Wisconsin	59,204	3,284,671	1,709,769	265,178	1,694,765	99.1	57.25
Total - This Year	315,847	18,549,235	9,328,082	1,475,274	9,502,568	101.9%	60.17
Total—Last Year	316,386	18,182,765	6,458,914	1,593,455	6,196,908	95.9	39.17

CURRENT OPERATING FUND

Statement of activities

12 months ended June 30

	2002 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Budget
Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets			
Revenues:			
Congregational Mission Offerings	\$18,468,488	\$17,331,704	\$18,128,000
Gifts and memorials	9,039,713	7,713,683	10,157,500
Bequest/planned giving	259,577	2,269,766	2,278,000
Tuition and fees	7,643,488	11,669,452	7,931,250
Other	(82,697)	204,430	156,000
Transfers-endowment earnings	278,719	169,201	355,000
Transfers-gift funds	4,585,300	11,465,491	4,585,300
Transfers-continuing programs	-	3,083,691	3,380,600
Transfers-other	-	-	-
Total revenues	40,192,588	52,907,418	46,971,650
Expenditures:			
Home Missions	8,718,002	10,606,637	8,855,679
Ministerial Education	21,151,817	25,416,794	21,887,150
Parish Services	2,262,845	2,166,460	2,305,700
Administrative Services	4,446,977	5,730,208	4,657,370
World Missions	8,220,883	9,101,841	8,873,250
System Wide	291,656	587,781	328,900
Total expenditures	45,092,180	53,609,721	46,908,049
Changes in unrestricted net assets	(4,899,592)	(702,303)	
Changes in Temp Restricted Net Assets			
Gifts and memorials	-	131,000	-
Bequest/planned giving	(2,000)	(9,000)	-
Change in value of trust agreements	-	(85,700)	-
Change in temp restricted net assets	(2,000)	36,300	
Net assets - beginning of year	3,684,500	4,350,503	
Net assets - end of period	(1,217,092)	3,684,500	

Statement of financial position

	June 30, 2002	June 30, 2001
Assets:		
Due from other funds	(5,813,835)	(822,997)
Accounts receivable-cash adv.	367,471	696,588
Other accounts receivable	405,968	256,026
Contributions receivable	3,682,500	3,684,500
Mortgage note receivable	7,093	9,499
Allowance for doubtful accts	(45,100)	(45,100)
Prepaid expenses	149,987	79,836
Total assets	(1,245,917)	3,858,352
Liabilities and Net Assets:		
Due to schools	-	-
Accrued expenses	47,799	118,020
Accounts payable	(76,824)	55,832
Total liabilities	(28,826)	173,852
Unrestricted	(4,899,592)	-
Temp restricted	3,682,500	3,684,500
Total net assets	(1,217,092)	3,684,500
Total liab. and net assets	(1,245,917)	3,858,352

This is an unaudited statement.

Mark Meissner, director of finance

**Working together
in Latin America**

Latin America missionary families from Antigua, Brazil, Chili, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, and St. Lucia came together on June 24-28 to be revitalized spiritually, to renew acquaintances, and to relax in Mazatlan, Mexico. As the missionaries met, their wives followed a well-planned agenda under the theme "Being Good Stewards of God's Gifts of Life and Health."

Becky Mueller (Dominican Republic) began the women's conference with a Bible study entitled "Life and Health: His Gifts of Love and My Response." From there, Karen Goeglein, Chris Lenz, and Marlene Schlomer (Mexico), three registered nurses, gave presentations on "Health Issues for Missionary Families Living in Foreign Countries." They discussed everything from finding a reliable doctor in the mission field to handling emergencies.

Beth Flunker (Brazil) and Barb Strackbein (Puerto Rico) led the final session about the book on which the Latin America missionary wives have been working. The book will help wives coming into the mission field for the first time and includes tips on moving, getting along with nationals, schooling, and other cultural changes that must be faced. Missionary wives from all fields submitted answers to the questions posed by the book's leaders. The book will be available soon.

Though they deal with extremely humid climates in some areas, rodents and insects in others, and poor health facilities, these missionary wives never complain about their lives. They consider it a privilege to do the Lord's work side-by-side with their husbands, and they become close-knit teams because their goals are the same.

Charlene Lauersdorf

Lutherans worldwide

Prof. Roger Kovaciny, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) missionary in Ternopil, Ukraine, talks about the ELS mission work in Ukraine.

One of the most vibrant Lutheran missions in the world today, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) thrives in a nation situated between Europe and Asia on the north shore of the Black Sea.

The ULC is like other Lutheran synods, but on a smaller scale. Its first full-time worker was Roger Kovaciny, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod pastor who arrived only 10 years ago. He began work in Ternopil, a city in Western Ukraine, and formed a congregation.

When missionaries arrived in Ukraine, they didn't show up with religious propaganda for a country already filled with all types of propaganda. Since nine percent of the four Gospels concern the humanitarian ministry of Christ, the work began with humanitarian projects. The largest project, the Medical Clinic on Wheels, recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. The clinics consist of two medical vans. One contains two doctor's offices; the other contains two dentist's offices. Thousands of children, some of whom have never seen a doctor or dentist, receive free medical and dental care. While waiting for a doctor or dentist, the children

(and parents too) hear the gospel and receive information about the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

Work has been expanded to include protecting the unborn. The ULC's 3,000 confirmed members provide manpower for five life centers. Life Resources International, the international division of WELS Christian Life Resources, manages the clinics and life centers. They also help with the prison ministry, which has returned hundreds of convicts to society with hearts and lives transformed.

St. Sophia Seminary was formally organized in 1995 to train national pastors. The first Ukrainian pastors graduated only five years and nine months after the seminary began. The training program includes one year in the Preparatory Department and three years in the Theological Department. To date, 15 national pastors have graduated and are serving 21 registered congregations in Ukraine. Pastors and professors from the ELS and WELS have taught at St. Sophia Seminary.

Youth from the United States and Canada have helped spread the gospel message in Ukraine by teaching vacation Bible school. High school and college students have joined Project Timothy from Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and have taught VBS for years.



Katie Cordes, a student at Luther Prep in Watertown, Wis., teaching vacation Bible school in Ternopil, Ukraine, in summer 2002.



Bishop V'yacheslav Horpynchuk (right) ordaining St. Sophia graduate Ihor Ratushnyi and installing him in his congregation in Simferopol, Ukraine.

Some said that this experience has led them to choose career paths that include teaching and preaching.

The primary support for the Ukrainian Lutheran Church comes through Thoughts of Faith, a church-related organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Symbols for your life



Symbol: Anchor Cross

Background and meaning:

Just as an anchor holds a boat firm in a storm, Jesus holds us firm in our faith and in our hope of heaven. The anchor cross reminds us that our hope of heaven rests firmly on Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us.

Bible gems:

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where Jesus . . . has entered on our behalf" (Hebrews 6:19,20).

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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).

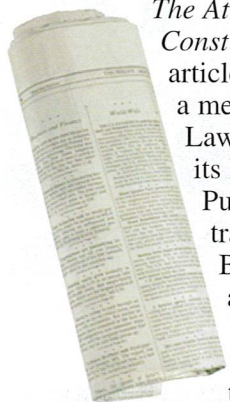
"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Peter 5:10).

A symbol for your life:

Christ gives us a foundation, an anchor, for our whole life. He gives our life purpose and hope. What is our purpose? What is our hope? What comfort is there in knowing that Christ is our anchor?



In the news



The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published an article on **Dave Pursley**, a member of Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga., in its May 12 edition.

Pursley has been head trainer for the Atlanta Braves since 1969 and is retiring after this season. Beginning his work for the Braves in 1951, he has treated a number of baseball players in a variety of cities—from Hank Aaron in 1961 in Milwaukee to Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux in Atlanta today.

The *Daily Tribune* reported that three students at St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., won handwriting awards in the Zaner-Bloser National Handwriting Contest. **Javan Radtke** and **Michael Olaf** were the Wisconsin state champions in the second- and third-grade categories, respectively. Sixth-grader **Carolyn Mayes** won the national contest in her grade category. Mayes, one of 110,000 sixth-graders to enter the contest, copied Philippians 4:3 for her entry.

Amanda Whittaker, an eight-year-old member of Risen Savior, Milwaukee, was featured in the June 27 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Whittaker “has Evans syndrome,

a rare disease in which her immune system destroys her blood cells,” reports the *Journal Sentinel*. Her best chance for survival is a bone marrow transplant, but finding a compatible African-American donor is difficult because they make up a much smaller number of bone marrow donors. Until a suitable donor is found, Amanda must receive blood transfusions every two or three weeks. Amanda’s faith remains strong, though. Her favorite Bible passage is Acts 20:35: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

District news

Nebraska

Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School held its first opening service on Aug. 25. The school, which is being housed at Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo., opened for its first day of school on Aug. 26 with 10 ninth-grade students.

South Atlantic

On Sept. 8, **Hope, Irmo, S.C.**, held a dedication service for its new facility.

Pacific Northwest

Shepherd of the Hills, Anchorage, Alaska, hosted a marriage retreat from May 31-June 1. Dr. John Johnson of Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service conducted the retreat, and couples from Anchorage, Eagle River, Kodiak, Soldotna, and Wasilla, Alaska, attended.

North Atlantic

The new Boy Pioneer train at **Our Savior, Springville, N.Y.**, hosted a “Zoo-mobile” this summer. The Buffalo Zoo brought some of its animals to the church and did a presentation on the animals. Our Savior advertised the event at the local Dairy Festival and God blessed them with 15 prospects from this event.

Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, sponsored a Barbecue and Bible Night on

Michigan



St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich., recently celebrated anniversaries of a brother/sister Sunday school team. Janet Roekle (right) retired after serving 54 years as a Sunday school teacher. Brother Jim (left) is closing in on 50 years as teacher and superintendent.

July 17. After the meal, Pastor Tom Haar taught a family Bible class to the 60 attendees. In August, 16 children attended the Steel Band Camp that Hope hosted during the afternoons of the congregation’s vacation Bible school.

Michigan

To help with the synod pastor shortage, **Grace, Alma**, and **Zion, St. Louis**, both in Michigan, recently merged to become Good Shepherd. Plans to centrally relocate with a new facility are underway.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Fairview, Milwaukee, bid farewell to four of its members on June 16. Each graduated in May and received calls to serve WELS. From left: Jonathan Leach will serve as pastor at Christ the Lord, Cottage Grove, Minn.; Erica Cook will serve Bethany Lutheran Preschool, Gibsonsia, Penn.; Nathan Buege will serve as pastor of an exploratory congregation in Katy, Tex.; and Lisa Oakes will teach primary grades for Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis. This congregation of about 300 communicants has four more members preparing to become pastors or teachers.

A firsthand look at world mission work



Here five WELS members pose in their kimonos during a trip to Japan to learn more about WELS' mission work. From left: Melanie Lynn, Northdale, Tampa, Fla.; Bev O'Connell, Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla.; Erin Connell, Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla.; Anne Barkow, St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.; Rebecca Meyer, Redeemer, Hastings, Neb.

Spending 12 days in Japan and 4 days in Hawaii is not a bad way to spend the summer. Spreading God's Word and learning about mission work made it even better.

Todd DeNoyer, pastor at Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla., and John Hering, pastor at Divine Peace, Garland, Tex., took eight teenagers and two adults on the trip of a lifetime from May 29-June 14. The purpose of the trip was to participate in evangelism work, to create a video and Bible class about WELS' mission congregations in Japan, and to show students firsthand what world mission work is all about. The trip emphasized Japanese culture and religion and WELS' work in Japan. Those on the trip visited WELS worship services and Buddhist temples and shrines. They stayed in the homes of WELS members and ate Japanese food to get a taste for the culture.

The video and Bible study that the group created are available for church mission festivals. For more information, call 407/321-7510.

Western Wisconsin



Members of Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis., collected a full pick-up load of secondhand baby items for New Beginnings—A Home for Mothers in Aurora, Colo. Nicole Guld (left) coordinated the effort. Kevin Riley (right), an elder at Peace, made the 20-hour drive to Aurora to deliver the donated items.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Approximately 25 teens from **Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.**, led the congregation's worship service in June. The teens wrote, sang, led, ushered, played organ and piano, and worked the sound system

North Atlantic



The North Atlantic District Youth Rally, held in Chambersburg, Penn., this past summer, focused on the theme "I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made." The 61 young people and leaders enjoyed worship time, fellowship, "Olympic" games (pictured above), and a day at Hershey Theme Park.

for the service. Our Savior has an active youth fellowship group and a teen Bible study that averages 16 teens a week.

Two high school students from Hope, Louisville, Kent., received recognition at the Kentucky State Capitol for their original music compositions. **Joshua Hein** and **Louis Burnoski** won the first and second place awards, respec-

tively, in a statewide high school composition competition. Both men often play their own compositions during church services at Hope.

Arizona

On Aug. 25, members of **Rock of Ages, Payson, Ariz.**, attended a dedication service for their new church building.

Happy Anniversary!

MI—On Sept. 15, **Peace, Otsego, Mich.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary.

SEW—On May 18, Lamb of God Lutheran School, West Allis, Wis., celebrated the teaching anniversaries of **Marliss Baacke**, 35 years; **Lynnette Blievernicht**, 25 years; and **Belinda Diercks**, 25 years.

WW—**Henry Klug** celebrated 40 years serving in the pastoral ministry on June 24. He was ordained at St. Paul, Sodus, Mich., on June 24, 1962.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Kenneth Pasch; MI—John Eich; NA—Kevin Schultz; NE—Michael Helwig; PNW—David Birsching; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Martin Baur.



Survey: Christian mass media reach adults—More adults hear Christian messages in Christian mass media than in a church service, according to a recent survey by the Barna Research Group, Ventura, Calif.

The study states that 63 percent of adults attended a church service in the past month while 67 percent used at least one of three forms of religious media—books, radio, or television. Seventy-eight percent of churching adults supplement church with exposure to Christian media, according to the study.

The following numbers show who use Christian media in a typical month:

- Fifty-two percent of adults listen to Christian radio, any format. Thirty-eight percent listen to preaching/teaching talk-oriented Christian radio, while 43 percent listen to Christian-music radio.

- Forty-three percent of adults watch Christian television.

- Thirty-three percent read Christian books, other than the Bible.

This data was taken from telephone interviews during April 2002 among a nationwide random sample of 1,007 adults. Sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

[From “Christian mass media reach more adults with the Christian message than do churches,” Barna Research Group, Ventura, Calif.; <www.barna.org>; July 2, 2002]

Rabbi publishes book on salvation—The Library of Congress had to create a new category recently for Rabbi Elliot Gertel’s book, *What Jews Know About Salvation*. The reason: the Library of Congress did not have “salvation” listed as a Jewish subject.

Groups work together to distribute one million Bibles—Zondervan, an evangelical Christian publisher; World Vision, a relief agency; and the International Bible Society have joined forces to distribute one million Bibles to needy children and families.

These groups will work with Christian bookstores to donate a Bible in the name of consumers who purchased a Bible published by Zondervan between Oct. 8 and Dec. 31, 2002. Bibles will be donated in 21 countries.

Media in the news—

- A sequel to *Left Behind: the Movie* will be released in video and DVD in November. *Left Behind: the Movie*, based on the “Left Behind” series of books about the Christian end-times, was a top-selling video in the United States in 2000. *Left Behind II: Tribulation Force* will take off where the first movie ended.

Read more about the “Left Behind” series and what the Bible says about the rapture on our on-line database at <www.wels.net/sab/frm-nl.html>. Just type the words “Wassup with the rapture” in the title box.

- The Evangelical Christian Publishers Association has named *The Prayer of Jabez* as the Jordan Christian Book of the Year for a second year in a row. This is the first book in the association’s history to receive this designation twice. The book, written by Bruce H. Wilkinson, focuses on a prayer in the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles.

For an explanation of this book, its insights, and its shortcomings, check out our on-line database at <www.wels.net/sab/frm-nl.html>. Just type the words “The Prayer of Jabez” in the title box.

- *The Christian Cyclopedia*, originally published in print by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., is now available on-line. This resource is a one-volume compendium of historical and theological data, ranging from ancient figures to contemporary events. Concordia Publishing House presented this electronic version as a gift to the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. It is posted on the LCMS Web site, <www.lcms.org/cyclopedia>.

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.



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!

Persecution of Christians is on the increase around the world. Anti-Christian sentiments are heard more frequently in our own society. Maybe you feel personally persecuted for holding to your Christian principles. Listen to what God has to say:

- “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).
- “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).
- “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8,9).
- “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Peter 4:13-16).

On your own

- In Christ we have our comfort and our hope in the face of persecution. Read Romans 8:31-39.
- The Parable of the Sower reminds us of the importance of being active in God’s Word. Read Matthew 13:1-23.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Haag, Keith R., to retirement
Spiegelberg, Thomas C. II, to Trinity, Castries, St. Lucia, West Indies
Wichmann, Donald P., to Christ Our Savior, Fremont/Garden of Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.

Teachers

Adickes, Kollin L., to St. Philip, Milwaukee
Bauer, Sarah E., to Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.
Born, Mary, to Mt. Olive, Mankato, Minn.
Braun, Jeanne M., to Emanuel, West Saint Paul, Minn.
Breitkreutz, Susan A., to St. John, Watertown, Wis.
Butler, Julie, to Trinity, El Paso, Tex.
Carlovsky, Kathryn E., to St. John, Sparta, Wis.
Christensen, Katherine, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
DePaolo, Sara L., to Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis.
Ellingboe, Martha A., to Christ the Lord, Clearwater, Fla.
Enter, Deborah, to Northland LHS, Mosinee, Wis.
Gouvion, Wendy L., to Hope, Milwaukee
Grow, Stephanie E., to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.
Holz, Richard C., to Mt. Olive, Mankato, Minn.
Hussman, Charles E., to retirement
Kanter, Nancy M., to St. Peter, Helenville, Wis.
Kramer, Theresa J., to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.
Krohn, Shannon, to Trinity, Bay City, Mich.
Lange, Rebecca J., to St. John, Burlington, Wis.
Larsen, Carol J., to Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.
Loersch, Patricia E., to St. Paul, Sheboygan Falls, Wis.
Marohn, Corey E., to Emanuel, New London, Wis.
McCauley, Lesa, to Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.
Meyer, Anne, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Meyer, Sharon J., to Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.
Ohm, Ronald C., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Porter, Jean M., to St. Paul, Sheboygan Falls, Wis.
Radichel, Nathan V., to Lakewood, Tacoma, Wash.
Schoeneck, Mary L., to Trinity, West Bend, Wis.
Sielaff, Ann L., to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.
Sting, LuAnn, to Mt. Olive, Mankato, Minn.
Swenson, Monica A., to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee
Turriff, Janine A., to Lamb of God Preschool, Madison, Ala.
Wiles, Linda S., to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
Wilson, Constance L., to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.
Zahn, Ronald P., to St. John, Wrightstown, Wis.
Zittlow, Sally A., to St. Paul, Moline, Ill.

REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

Rev. Stephen Kurtzahn, Austin, Minn., formerly a pastor of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of entering the pastoral ministry of WELS. Correspondence related to this should be addressed to President Larry Cross, Minnesota District, 4024 Carol Lane NW, Rochester MN 55901-1366.

ANNIVERSARIES

Brookings, S.D.—Our Savior (35). Oct. 13. Service, 10:30 AM. Dinner to follow.
Owensville, Mo.—Peace (50). Oct. 13. Service, 4 PM. Dinner to follow. E-mail RSVP to <grosscheryl@hotmail.com>.

Temperance, Mich.—Apostles (100). Oct. 13. Service, 4 PM. Dinner to follow. 734/847-4711.
Kenosha, Wis.—Bethany (85). Oct. 20. Services, 8 and 10:30 AM. Dinner to follow. 262/652-3574.
Lake Zurich, Ill.—New Life (15). Nov. 3. Service, 9:30 AM. Brunch & program at 10:45 AM.
Milwaukee—Mt. Lebanon (75). Nov. 3. Service, 9:30 AM. Dinner to follow. 414/461-1563.
Eau Claire, Wis.—St. Mark (35). Nov. 3. Morning services, 8 and 10:30 AM. Special service, 4 PM. Dinner to follow. 715/834-2595.
Milwaukee—Redemption (50). Nov. 17. Service, 9 AM. Noon dinner. RSVP by Nov. 1, 414/466-5100.
West Salem, Wis.—Christ (100). Nov. 17. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. Potluck to follow.

COMING EVENTS

Christian Life Resources National Convention—Oct. 4-5. KI Center, Green Bay, Wis.
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Auxiliary meeting—Oct. 5, 8 AM to 1:30 PM. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Registration including lunch, \$10. Jan Lampe, 414/771-4622.
Martin Luther College Ladies' Auxiliary meeting—Oct. 9. Martin Luther College, Minn. Registration, 9 AM. Judy Kruse, 507/354-6915.
Christian Growth Seminar—Oct. 12, 8:15 AM to 1:30 PM. Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. Linda Williams, 888-378-2182.
WELS Alumni Seminar—Oct. 20-22. Marvin M. Schwan Retreat and Conference Center, Trego, Wis. \$200. For alumni of area Lutheran high schools and prep schools. Jerry Kieselhorst, 507/354-6855; <mv15@newulmtel.net>.
Capital Area Christian Women's Retreat—Nov. 1-3. Devil's Head Resort, Baraboo, Wis. Joy Strutz, 262/898-3244.
Retreat—Nov. 2, 8:30 AM to 3 PM. Trinity, Minocqua, Wis. "The church in a changing culture." Registration, \$15 for adults, \$10 for teenagers. Includes continental breakfast and lunch. Sue, 715/356-7542.
WELS National Campus Rally—Dec. 27-30. Michigan State University. 517/336-9293.
WELS/ELS Ladies Retreat—Jan. 10-12, 2003. Woodlands Lutheran Campground, Montverde, Fla. Cost, \$110. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591.
National Sunday School Teachers Conference—Jan. 18-19, 2003. Antiqua Bay Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. 414/256-3274.
Today's Christian Women's Retreat—Mar. 21-23, 2003. Sheraton Lansing Hotel, Lansing, Mich. Laurie Starr, 248/391-1133.
WELS Tech 2003—June 22-25, 2003, at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis. Web site, <www.wels.net/welstech>. 414/256-3210.
WELS International Youth Rally—July 9-12, 2003. Estes Park, Colo.

AVAILABLE

Textbooks—*Heath Mathematics Connections*; *Macmillan Music: The Spectrum of Music and Related Arts*; *Scott Foresman & Company: D'Nealian Handwriting*; and *Houghton Mifflin: Imagine Series*. Free for the cost of shipping. St. John, Burlington, Wis. Tim Mielke, <principal@stjohnsburlington.org>.
Science books—for third through sixth grades. *Discover Science*. 1991 copyright. Free for the cost of shipping. Samuel, Marshall, Minn. 507/532-2162 or 507/537-1188.

SERVICE TIMES

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

NAMES WANTED

U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.—Don Tollefson, 908/876-5429.
Marion County, Fla. (Ocala area)—Paul Lemke, 352/694-1861.

POSITION AVAILABLE

President—for Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Must be eligible for a call into the WELS public ministry; be a spiritually mature servant leader; preferably possess an earned doctorate from an accredited university; have demonstrated skills and experience in resource development, higher education administration, and strategic planning; and have exceptional ability to articulate and communicate the college's mission.

For more detailed information, see <www.wlc.edu>, under employment opportunities. The college's Board of Regents invites inquiries, written nominations, and applicants to contact Clifford Buelow, chair of presidential search committee, Wisconsin Lutheran College, 8800 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226; or e-mail <search_committee@wlc.edu>.

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210; FAX, 414/256-3862; <BulletinBoard@sab.wels.net>. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

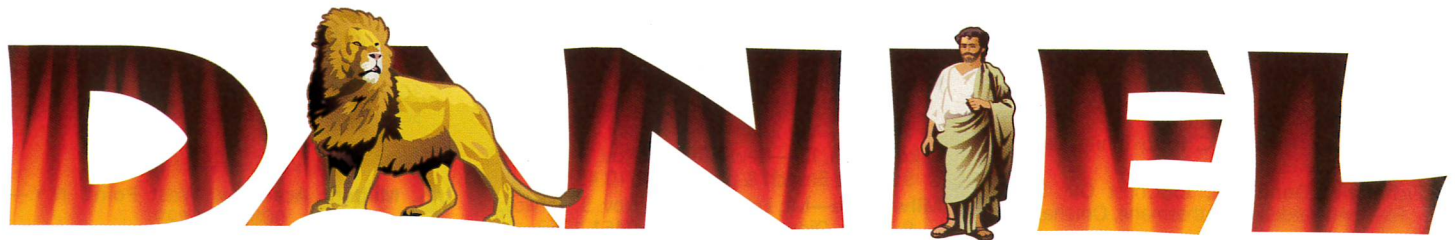
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Youth resolved to witness

Every challenge to God's truth is an opportunity for us to stand up and witness to the truth that we follow a far better King.

Philip L. Kieselhorst

Four teenagers decided to oppose the system. They did not make this decision in order to be rebels. They were not on a mission to stand out and be different. They were only following the principles their God passed down to them through their parents and church. But this made them stand out from the other students. These four young men set themselves up for scorn, intimidation, abuse, and possible expulsion. Why? For one seemingly insignificant principle? Yes. Even for one.

This situation describes the young men of Judah who attended the king's college of ancient Babylon (Daniel 1). But this situation also describes the campus of any high school or college in present-day America where Christian youth are enrolled. It describes the situation wherever God's truth is challenged.

A challenge to God's truth

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah lived through the horror of war. They witnessed the fall of their country and countrymen by the army of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. They were then taken captive and placed in the king's college for future service to the king—the king who had ruined their world!

“Learn the language and literature of the Babylonians,” ordered the king. “Fine,” the four young men responded.

“Eat and drink food and wine from the king's table,” the king commanded.

Daniel recognized the king's command as a challenge to God's command to not eat unclean meat or food sacrificed to idols (Leviticus 11, Exodus 34:15). On the surface this challenge didn't seem threatening. But Daniel realized that much was at stake. He would be forced to disobey a king, but which one?

Today our young people travel far from home to attend schools where they learn skills for future careers. They also meet challenges to God's truth. The real question behind every challenge is: “Who is your king?”

A witness to God's truth

Challenges bring opportunities. Daniel recognized the opportunity to glorify God's name. Strengthened by God's resolve to bless those who obey him (Leviticus 26), Daniel resolved not to defile himself by disobeying God's command. He and his three companions were different. They obeyed a different King, a far better King.

We know that we follow a far greater King than any human philosophy, human creation, or human

being. Our King went to war for us and conquered our enemies even though it cost him his life. The King who died for us and then rose from the dead to rule again, promises that he will bless his people.

Every challenge to God's truth is an opportunity for us to witness to the truth that we follow a far better King. Jesus' promise to bless those who hear and obey his Word (Luke 11:28) strengthens this resolve.

When Christian youth are strengthened by Jesus' resolve to forgive all of their sins and carry all of their burdens, they will become banners of faith and hope to contemporaries who have neither. When they resolve to obey the Ten Commandments in the face of peer pressure, they will stand out and make a powerful statement. When they resolve to defend Jesus' name, they will witness even as they endure slander and abuse.

The four young men in Babylon obeyed the true King's command, and he blessed their witness. The King we trust, respect, and obey will bless our witness as well.



Philip Kieselhorst is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The fragrance of life

When I came home hungry from school as a boy, nothing smelled so good to me as the welcome-home smell of freshly baked bread. Mm, mm good!

It was something like that, one day, for Peter. It was lunchtime and Peter was hungry. While lunch was being prepared, Peter napped on the upstairs porch, with hunger-stirring smells emanating from below.

Just when Peter was overpowered with a desire to eat, he saw a vision of a large sheet let down from heaven by its four corners. It was filled with all manner of animals, many of them unclean for Old Testament believers.

But a voice urged him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (Acts 10:13).

To which Peter replied, appropriately, or so he thought: "Surely not, Lord. . . . I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (10:14).

The voice was insistent. "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (10:15).

The vision was repeated three times. God wanted him to think hard about it. Just when he was wondering what the implications might be, three Gentiles requested Peter to accompany them. God's Spirit prompted him to accept their invitation: "Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (10:20).

Peter went, shared the Word with them, and concluded, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (10:34,35).

Strong words, words we all need to hear and understand. God doesn't play favorites. Our color of skin, the slant of our eyes, and the language we speak don't matter to him. All equally unclean sinners, we've been made equally clean, forgiven, through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Celebrate Luther's Reformation. Defend the gospel, erecting a Wartburg-like castle around it. At the same time, let down the drawbridge, go out, and proclaim the gospel everywhere.

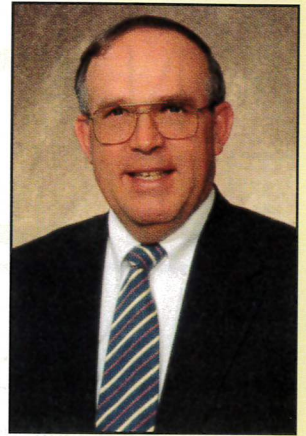
Perhaps we do not always view Luther as mission-minded. That would be a mistake. Luther believed it was a prime reason why God lets us go on living: "But he lets us live here in order that we may lead other people to believe, doing for them what he has done for us" (*What Luther Says* [WLS], 3021).

After we've been fed richly and freely at God's table, Luther sees us as desiring that others be fed: "This noble Word brings with it a great hunger and an insatiable thirst, so that we could not be satisfied even though many thousands of people believe on it; but we wish that no one should be without it" (WLS, 3015).

Luther would conclude, in an age in which mobility was not what it is now, that God may even use it for his saving purposes. "God is wont to deal so with his own that he does not let them stay long at one place. He rushes them here and there, not merely for their own sakes, so that their faith be tested, but also for the benefit of other people" (WLS, 3016).

If you're reading this, God still has a purpose for you. Could it be to share his Word with someone? You've been fed, eating and drinking the eternal sustenance that comes with his Word. Might it be that refreshed, you might refresh others? Perhaps you've moved recently, or others have moved into your neighborhood. Do you have an opportunity to share God's saving gospel with someone new and different?

The fragrance of life, eternal life, is even better smelling than freshly baked bread! Mm, mm good!



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

God doesn't
play favorites.
Our color of
skin, the slant
of our eyes,
and the
language
we speak
don't matter
to him.

IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: STRUGGLING WITH DOUBT AND STUMBLING INTO ERRORS

Question: If a person, because of his study of the earth sciences, cannot accept that the universe is “young” and was created in six 24-hour periods, would this alone prevent him from being accepted into membership in WELS?

Answer: I will answer your question as though you were asking for yourself. However, I cannot answer it without asking you a few questions:

- Are you willing to be instructed by God’s Word?
- Are you willing to thoroughly study what the Bible says about the age of the universe and the six days of creation?
- If you would be shown that the Bible indeed teaches a “young” universe and a six 24-hour day creation, are you willing to consider that God may know better than man how this world came to be?

• Are you willing to approach the Scriptures with the humility of a man in Scripture who, when troubled by doubts, exclaimed in Jesus’ presence, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)?

If you can answer “yes” to those questions, then, in the spirit of the Savior about whom it is said, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isaiah 42:3), I would not have trouble recognizing you as a brother in the faith. Even when we struggle with weakness of understanding, if we are willing to be instructed by the Word, that does not need to stand in the way of outward fellowship in the church. Being united in fellowship does not mean that we never struggle with doubt or stumble into error in our thinking. Being united in fellowship means that we strive to stay faithful to all of Scripture and humbly sit before the words of the Holy Spirit as pupil, not as master.

But do you ask your question even though you are convinced that the Bible does teach a six 24-hour day

creation? Do you ask your question because you value the opinions of men higher than the Word of God? Are you willing to call God a liar in order to agree with the theories of men?

If you must answer “yes” to those questions, then I pray that you take to heart this warning: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD’ ” (Jeremiah 17:5). I urge you to adopt the spirit of Paul, who said, “Let God be true, and every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). It is incompatible with faith, and also with recognizing outward fellowship, to know what the Word of God says and to persist in rejecting it.

The “earth sciences” are worth studying. The Scriptures are worth studying even more. Long after theories of the “earth

sciences” have been disproved or revised (again), the Word of God will still stand in perfect judgment over all man’s theories.

“A voice says, ‘Cry out.’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass . . . The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever’ ” (Isaiah 40:6-8).

What is shared by the perfect Word of God will prove either to be our salvation, or, if we reject it, our judgment.



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>.

Being united in fellowship does not mean that we never struggle with doubt or stumble into error in our thinking.

Picture this



The setting sun's light danced like tongues of fire on the Pacific Ocean when smoke, drifting northward from a major brush fire, mixed with the light. Photographer Al Hains of Gethsemane, Los Angeles, was reminded of the tongues of fire described in Acts 2:3.

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.

Do you see yourself in any of these?

- FUNNY** how people are so consumed with what others think about them rather than what God thinks about them.
- FUNNY** how hard it is to read a chapter in the Bible, but how easy it is to read 100 pages of a best-selling novel.
- FUNNY** how much difficulty some people have learning a simple gospel well enough to tell others, but how simple it is for the same people to understand and repeat gossip about someone.
- FUNNY** how we believe what the newspapers say, but question what the Bible says.
- FUNNY** how everyone wants to go to heaven, provided they don't have to believe, or to think, or to say, or to do anything.
- FUNNY** how people think that they can get more accomplished in a lifetime without God than in an hour with him.
- FUNNY** how everyone seems to lower their standards so they'll appeal to others rather than live the way the Bible teaches so others will want to raise their standards.
- FUNNY** how we can't think of anything to say when we pray, but don't have any difficulty thinking of things to talk about to a friend.

"I CAN'T IMAGINE A MAN REALLY ENJOYING A BOOK AND READING IT ONLY ONCE."

C. S. Lewis (*The Quotable Lewis*, p. 123)

How much more so when it comes to reading The Good Book!



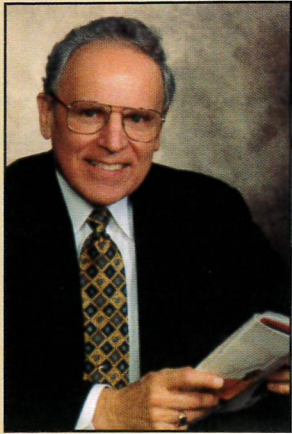
In Hebrews 11 the Lord provides us with a list of people in history who exhibited exemplary faith. Our survey question: Do you have a favorite person in Scripture (aside from Jesus) whose faith holds special meaning for you? Who and why? Be brief. We'll print the results with samples in the February 2003 issue of *Forward in Christ*. Your deadline is Nov. 15. Send replies to Potluck Poll, *Forward in Christ* magazine, 2929 N Mayfair Road, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <garyb@sab.wels.net>.

Luther on reformation:

"Men abolish the command of God and want us to be silent" (*What Luther Says* [WLS], 3805).

"All I have written and taught has been according to my conscience and sworn duty as a humble teacher of the Holy Scripture, for the praise of God, for the benefit and salvation of all Christendom, and for the good of the entire German nation" (WLS, 3775).

"Not from men have I received my gospel but from heaven alone, through my Lord Jesus Christ" (WLS, 3767).



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

The key is to be able to detect the difference between weakness that can be helped and false teaching that demands to stand in opposition to God's Word.

Believe it or not?

In a recent Barna poll, 38 percent of people responding said that they do not believe everything their church teaches. (Gasp!)

That gasp above reflects how I would have felt years ago at such a revelation. In my experience (translate "naïveté"), people were passionate about their religion, believing that the very truth of God was taught there and not to be questioned. Certainly in our Wisconsin Synod, we believed that the church's teachings were all God's teachings from Scripture.

Today my reaction is far more complex, but no longer one of disbelief. I look at that percentage of doubters, and I am not surprised. It's consistent with the religious climate today. And, having shed some of my naïveté, I assume that the same can be said of WELS Christians.

Ah! There's the rub.

If as many as one out of three people do not believe everything our church teaches, what does that mean?

Maybe I am wrong, and our people do not fall anywhere close to the statistical average. Or maybe we have a church full of hypocrites, people who say one thing but do another.

The truth, I think, falls somewhere between the two. Yes, we can hope that our numbers aren't as bad as the Barna statistics. And, yes, we know that the church will always have some hypocrites in it.

Neither of those extremes, however, seems to address the real issue. In fact, true hypocrites might not even answer a poll honestly about not believing all of the teachings.

So, what about those who hold reservations about specific teachings such as fellowship issues or gender roles? Although they say they do not believe everything the church teaches, are they hypocrites?

Some perhaps are confused about exactly what the church is teaching. Sometimes honest differences will arise in how to apply the teachings. For example, does WELS teach

that I simply cannot pray with my dear Methodist Aunt Tillie? (The answer is "no.")

In truth, we cannot be certain that new confirmands know all of our teachings perfectly, even though they were taught them. We need to keep on teaching. We need to keep on learning from God's Word.

Some don't see the importance of some teachings, so believing them is "no big deal." They might argue, for instance, that our salvation does not hinge on whether women vote at a congregational meeting. The argument sounds logical.

But look at the implications of such reasoning. Someone has to decide arbitrarily which teachings are truly important. Baptists I have known say that the difference in how we view Baptism and Holy Communion are not important. Some Lutherans have said it's not important that Jesus actually, bodily rose from the dead. Once we determine that we can decide which teachings of Scripture are important, then none of them really qualifies. It boils down to "my opinion" instead of God's truth.

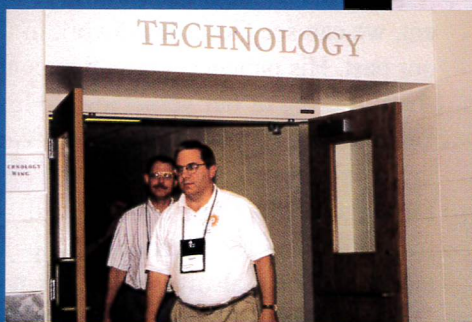
Where does that leave us? All of God's teachings must be taught and upheld in the church. Not all members know fully or uphold all teachings. The problem is as old as the church. Actually, it is as old as sin.

So, we have a challenge. Since the church is composed of sinners, we'll always have sin to deal with. That includes ignorance of and weakness in applying some biblical teachings. The key is to be able to detect the difference between weakness that can be helped and false teaching that demands to stand in opposition to God's Word. The latter we reject and separate from. The former we meet with forbearance and forgiveness, with understanding and instruction. We patiently explain God's truth. Together, we dig ever deeper into God's Word.

Gary P. Baumler



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welstech@wels.net

BROWN EYES AND BOATS

God's patience, correction, and sharp veering of our vessel toward his Word sustained us in every storm.

Victor I. Vieth

It was the brown eyes that got me. The first time I met Lisa, I couldn't take my eyes off of hers. In the 13 years since that brown-eyed woman walked down the aisle to join her life with mine, I have seen those eyes cry, dart playfully, and look at me longingly. I have learned to read in those eyes the deepest of feelings. I know that Lisa can see through me as well.

Brown eyes

As I look back on the years, I suspect that God had me in mind when he made those eyes. After all, if it had not been for the brown eyes, Lisa and I might never have made it past our first date. We are from different political parties, have different tastes in music (to this day Barry Manilow makes me gag), and can't even agree on food. I eat mostly cheeseburgers while Lisa insists on planning healthy menus.

Despite our differences, the Lord knew what he was doing when he brought Lisa and me together. In bringing us so close that we can read the other's eyes, God has impressed on us the need to strengthen one another in turbulent times. We have

come to know when the other needs a hug, prayer, or word of cheer. Our differences have become so unimportant that I can no longer tell where I end and Lisa begins. Surely, the two have become one.

Storm-tossed boats

It wasn't always this way. We were so young, so naïve, and married so quickly that our fragile boat was quickly rocked by the tempests of this fallen world. Once the romantic shine of being newlyweds rubbed off, the devil was quick to point out the faults of the other. The demons visiting our house became adept at convincing us to feel slighted if the toilet seat was left up or down or the television was tuned to ESPN or Lifetime. In the midst of every spat, every act of pettiness or pouting, Satan hissed proudly. Still, our boat did not go under.

When our son was born on the brink of death, when money was scarce, when clinical depression cast Lisa into a deep and long-lasting sadness, when my job kept me away from the family for weeks at a time, our tossed boat stayed on course.

It would be foolish to believe our love is so deep or unique that we are

in any way responsible for the survival of our marriage. We have seen lovers just as committed drift apart for reasons as silly as underwear on the floor. The couple across the street tells us boredom necessitates their divorce. When asked how God views their decision, their blank stares tell us they don't know him or choose not to ask. Pollsters pronounce that marriages founded on Christ last longer and are more fulfilling. Lisa and I, though, don't need a scientific survey to learn the source of our oneness.

From the vantage point of the present, we can see God's handiwork in our past. His patience, correction, and sharp veering of our vessel toward his Word sustained us in every storm. We love each other because Jesus first loved us. Without fail, boats carved from the wood of the cross and captained by Christ always make it home.

I am grateful to God for setting the sail on our journey through this life. I am further grateful that he put in my boat the woman with the brown eyes.



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