

FORWARD IN CHRIST

February 2003

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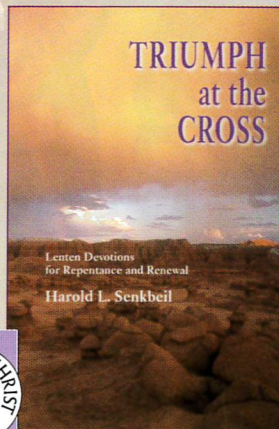
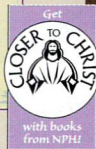
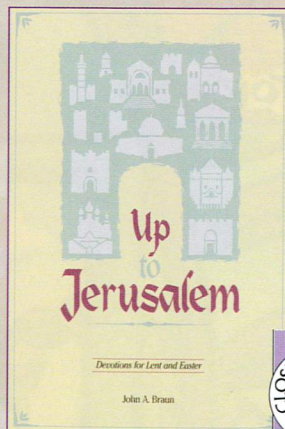
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I owe, I owe

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8

Paul M. Janke

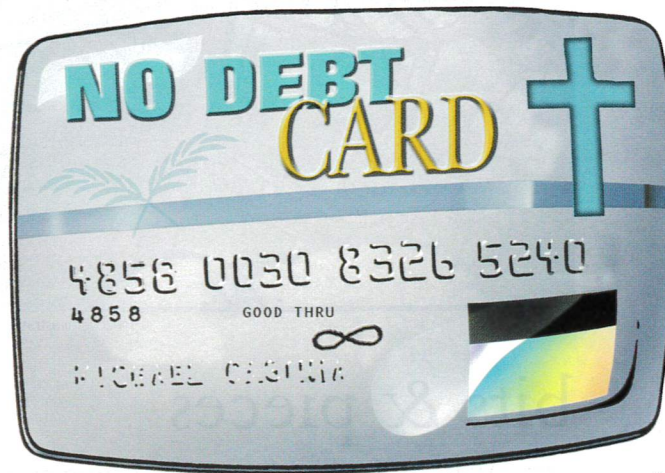
America is a nation of debtors. In May 2002 the amount of consumer credit debt owed by Americans stood at \$1.59 trillion. That figure becomes more meaningful when it's broken down to individual households: The average American household has credit card and car loan debt of about \$14,500.

As he guides believers in applying the Christian faith to their lives, the apostle Paul writes about our attitude toward our financial obligations. The principle is a simple one: "Give everyone what you owe him" (Romans 13:7). A verse later, it becomes even more simple: "Owe no man any thing" (KJV). The apostle appears to say both, "Pay your debts" and "Don't incur any debt." How are we to understand him?

The debt paid for me

We were all once horribly in debt. Our failure to fulfill God's law had us in over our heads. Our best efforts at trimming that debt were too little, too late. Spiritually speaking, we were deadbeats. Our only prospect seemed to be the debtor's prison of hell.

But God is a merciful creditor. He did more than reduce the outstanding balance or lower the interest rate. In Jesus he forgave all our debts. By his death on the cross, Jesus took down that shameful reminder of our indebtedness. Paul uses the language



of lenders when he writes, "[God] forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us . . ." (Colossians 2:13,14). Through faith in Jesus, who shed his priceless blood for us, our sin-debt is paid in full.

The debt I pay

Enriched by God's forgiveness, a Christian seeks to serve God in every area of life. Realizing that refusing to repay our debts is another form of stealing, we seek to pay what we owe. A believer cannot in good conscience ignore student loans or cheat the landlord out of the rent or file for bankruptcy to evade financial obligations. That we might be able to get away with it—or that it may even be legal—doesn't make it right.

Some have seen in Romans 13:8 a biblical injunction against incurring any debt—no credit cards, no car loans, no installment purchases. In that case, however, Jesus' command—"Do not turn away from the

one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:42)—would make us partakers in the sin of those who ask us for a loan. Though there is no absolute prohibition of borrowing here, it certainly warns against irresponsibility in financial matters. The sad fact is that the poor financial decisions of many Christians have sentenced them to paying interest to their creditors rather than using a greater share of their income to support the gospel ministry.

The debt I can never repay

But let's suppose that our bills are always promptly paid in full. Are we free and clear then? Not quite. There remains what Paul calls "the continuing debt to love one another." There is no exact amount to this debt. There is no point at which I can finally say to my fellowman, "There! Now we're even. I don't have to love you anymore." In this regard, we're always debtors.

But this debt isn't a crushing burden or an annoying obligation. It is the joyful response of those who know that in Christ they've passed over from death to life. It is the humble recognition that even at the height of my charity, I can't outgive God. We live in love for God and our fellowmen, knowing—gratefully—that we'll always be indebted to him for the gift of his Son.

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

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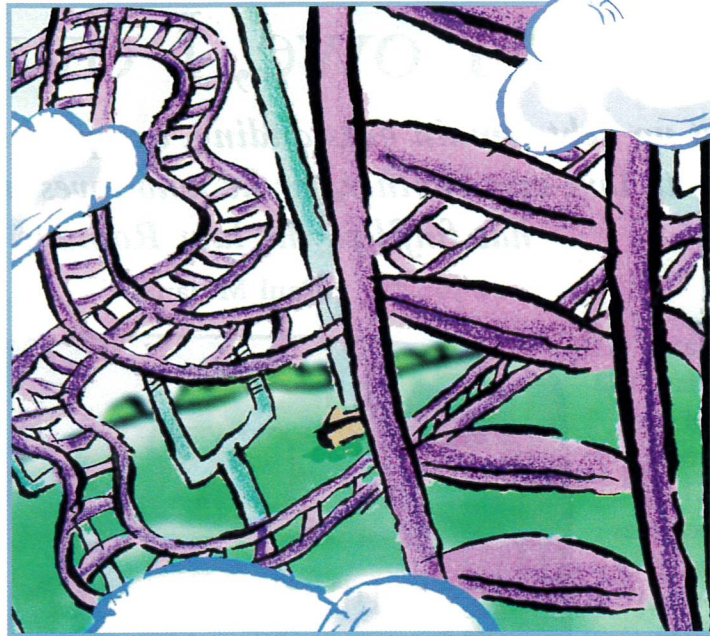
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Cover illustration by Dean Lindberg

The teen years are a wonderful and blessed time, but there's a good reason why they are called the roller coaster years.

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bits & pieces



Valentine's Day is a special time to celebrate love—love between spouses, family, friends, and relatives. Several articles this month focus on love—God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for our fellowman.

- Love is an important ingredient in marriage, but not just between husband and wife. God must be included in that marriage bond. As it says in Ecclesiastes, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." That cord will get twisted and turned though, especially when you have teenage children. Learn some ways to cope in "Life on hold: the roller coaster years" (p. 8).
- It is important that our love is active, not passive. This is especially true in our churches. John Eich talks about how important it is to show love—both God's love and our love—to others in "Full-service churches" (p. 18).
- Sharing God's love can be a daunting task. But God has provided all the tools we need to complete the job. Donald Patterson tells us more about these tools in his article, "Work with the means of grace in your hand" (p. 10).
- Love isn't always easy. It involves sacrifices and hardships. President Gurgel talks about God's sacrificial love for us, the painful cuts we must make in the synod, and what we individually can do to serve our Savior (p. 31).

—JKW

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Church and change



“Schooling the home” series



The article in the Nov. 2002 issue by Prof. Richard Gurgel really caught my attention [“Church and school can’t replace parents”]. Finally someone is saying the home is where it begins, nurtures, and grows, and the home should be the primary training ground for our children. In this age of wanting the church to be everything to everyone and trying to meet all of the needs of families through many programs, it is apparent that we are all still failing. Children continue to leave after confirmation, and parents continue to seek a church where there is a lot of excitement, enthusiasm, and “stuff going on,” hoping that this is somehow going to keep their children “in the church.” Your articles are thought-provoking and interesting, Prof. Gurgel. Keep up the good work.

Shirley Schneck



Benton Harbor, Michigan

Prof. Richard Gurgel’s four-part series on “Schooling the home” [Sept.-Dec. 2002] is excellent! It reminds me of some of the scrip-

tural teaching I had at home when I was young. Bible reading was done every day from a solid Bible storybook. After I was confirmed, I was instructed by my parents to carry on the task of a daily Bible reading by myself. I was taught that Bible reading was something you did each and every day whether you felt like it or not. It was not based on your feelings but on Scripture’s gospel urgings.

My parents also talked during supper about Scripture’s applications in our daily lives. This had a profound effect on the whole family.

Now that I have a family of my own, I have felt the urgings of the gospel to do the same to my own children. My wife and I started with a Bible storybook when they were young, and now that they are teenagers we have moved onto the teaching and proper application of justification/sanctification and law and gospel that they can use now and in the future. We adapt it to their understanding and age level so they keep interested and anchored on the power of God’s Word.

May all of us instruct our children and urge them to carry out this instruction faithfully and by example to the third and fourth generation of those who fear and love him and his holy Word!

David J. Schlossin



Duluth, Minnesota

“Filling the void” [Nov. 2002], which was about Thoughts of Faith’s mission(s) in Eastern Europe, was accurate and informational. Regarding Ludmyla, whose name means “kindness to others:” Ludmyla was called as a deaconess by the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) and is also paid from its synod budget. Ludmyla attends advanced Bible classes at the seminary and is supervised by ULC pastors. Because the ULC “owns” the evangelism outreach at Gift of Life Clinics, they have taken a special interest in the opportunity provided there. Ludmyla belongs—both

to the family of God and to the ULC at Gift of Life.

Nicholas Laper,

Gift of Life Director



Ternopil, Ukraine

Can editorial writing get any better than that demonstrated in the article by Pastor Baumler in the Dec. 2002 issue [“What price peace?”]? [It was] exceptionally perceptive, deeply instructive, emotionally stirring, spiritually satisfying, and biblically faithful. Thank you.

Donald Schmechel

Hatfield, Pennsylvania

Please send your questions and comments about the current revenue shortfall in WELS (see January issue of Forward in Christ) to Wayne Mueller, WELS’ vice president for mission and ministry, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; <budget@wels.net>. Vice President Mueller or other Synodical Council members will answer your questions and post them on the WELS Web site, <www.wels.net> (jump word “budget”). The Web site will allow for a quicker response time than can be accomplished through Forward in Christ magazine. We will include a sample of these questions and answers in WELS news. See p. 22 for the first letters.—ed.

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:

In the financial statements on p. 28 of the January issue, an incorrect figure was listed under the current operating fund statement of activities. In the 2003 budget column, the World Missions expenditures should have been \$9,087,116, instead of \$987,116.



The numbers game

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

The doctor steps into the examining room and says to the young man, “I have bad news for you. You’re dying.” “What did my tests show?” the patient asks.

“Well, your blood pressure is 120/80, and your heart rate is 55. Your cholesterol is 125; your triglycerides, your HDLs and your LDLs are excellent. Your lungs are clear, there’s no sign of diabetes, and there’s no sign of cancer.”

“So why do you think I’m dying, Doc?” asks the young man.

“Because you’re still 5’11”. You haven’t grown an inch since your last examination!”

The young man leaves the doctor’s office with his chin on the ground, convinced that the doctor was right—he is dying.

Would any of us (adults) be convinced that we are dying simply because we haven’t grown an inch since our last check-up? Hardly! My blood pressure may be a matter of concern, and I may need to work on getting my cholesterol down, but the fact that I haven’t grown beyond 6’3” since I was a senior in high school doesn’t cause me to walk around with my chin on the ground, convinced that it’s only months before I’m pushing up daisies.

When I see people walking around with their chin on the ground, convinced that our church body is dying because we haven’t grown much numerically since our last “check-up” (read *Statistical Report*), I get a little disturbed. A church body’s health is not measured by how fast or even if it grows numerically.

As a society, we have become too “growth” oriented. I just read that Home Depot is hanging its head because its third-quarter report shows that it is making a profit—but not as big a profit as they had projected. This age of “bigger is better”

(60-inch-screen TVs are inherently better than 27-inch ones, and a Hummer in the driveway is a true sign of success) has warped our thinking, even when it comes to the success of the gospel. It has led us to believe that the success of faithful preaching of law and gospel is measured by head counts and full parking lots.

God says in Isaiah 55:11: “[My Word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God said that to a prophet who powerfully and faithfully preached both law and gospel to the nation of Judah. I don’t recall seeing his success rate in the 586 BC *Statistical Report*. God’s Word achieves the purpose for which he sends it, even when it is rejected by those to whom it is preached.

Would I like to see the number of baptized souls in WELS grow to 500,000? A million? Of course! Do I believe that there may be better ways and methods to share the gospel with those who live without hope in this world? Indeed, I do! But am I going to walk around with my chin on the ground, convinced that WELS is dying, because the 2002 *Statistical Report* might show that WELS is still about 405,000 souls? No, no more than I am going to give up on life just because I’m still 6’3”. That’s not a measure of my health! I will die when my life breath leaves me. Our church body will die, not when the numbers get smaller, but when our life breath, the preaching of the law and gospel, leaves us. Let’s do everything we can to make sure that that doesn’t happen—and leave the numbers to God.

Doug Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.

God’s Word achieves the purpose for which he sends it, even when it is rejected by those to whom it is preached.

LIFE ON HOLD: THE



A husband and wife must buckle up together and with Jesus to ride out their children's teen years.

Joel A. Nelson

In the 1950 Oscar-winning movie *All About Eve*, Bette Davis, as Margo Channing, speaks one of the most-quoted lines in big-screen history. After gulping down another martini, she marches to the staircase and warns, “Fasten your seat belts, it’s going to be a bumpy night.” That quote has taken on new meaning for my wife and me as we fasten our belts and navigate our marriage through the sometimes-bumpy ride with teenagers.

The teen years are a wonderful and blessed time, but there’s a good reason why they are called the following: the try-on years, the next steps on the journey to independence, the period of puberty and hubcaps, hell with attitude and acne, and (my favorite) the roller coaster years.

Every family life-stage brings unique positive and negative stresses to the marriage relationship. While many events in each stage nurture a stronger marriage bond, Satan, sin, and self also thrust events and attitudes into the mix that cause tension.

The frequently used wedding text that stresses the importance of Christ in the marriage—“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12)—is absolutely true, but it cannot be denied that the dynamic of family life causes the cord to twist, tighten, and turn. Having

teenagers in the family is one such dynamic that can seriously impact a marriage. A husband and wife must buckle up tightly together and with Jesus in order to ride it out. Let me illustrate with three examples.

Teens are idealistic. They expect the world and the people in it (especially mom and dad) to be solid and true. However, teens’ newly developed abstract thinking also slaps them in the face with the knowledge that what mom and dad say and what they mean and do frequently don’t mesh. In the teens’ heroic search to ferret out hypocrisy in adults, they sometimes gleefully ferret out that mom and dad are hypocritical in the way they deal with each other:

Teen son with righteous fervor: “Hey, Dad, you blasted Mom last week for talking behind somebody’s back. You even made her cry, but you just did it yourself!”

Teen son later—playfully: “Mom, you’d have been floored by what Dad said about Mrs. Speakwell!”

The marriage cord takes a hit, and if it is to remain strong and intact, mom and dad must work this out with God’s help. They need to confess their sins to each other, ask for forgiveness, and pray for a Christ-like spirit of unconditional love. **When the marriage partners live in harmony and treat each other honestly, the journey with teens is less bumpy.**

Teens are indecisive and emotional. Did you know that the frontal lobe of the brain, the place that helps us make decisions and manage our

emotions, is the last brain part to be wired? Did you also know that the period in which this final wiring occurs is in adolescence? This helps to explain why it is such a challenge for teens to make good decisions and control their emotions. One minute they are towers of mental acuity and emotional mastery, and the next minute they are screaming, blubbing idiots.

Research pretty clearly indicates that strong, healthy marriages produce happy, healthy children.

Husbands and wives who are not aware of and sensitive to this, and who are not unified in their approach to dealing with this intellectual/emotional ebb and flow, can find themselves sucked in, taking sides, and losing credibility with their teens and each other.

Mom to fuming Dad in front of weeping teen: “You’re overreacting. Melissa can’t be expected to do everything right. Maybe you put too much pressure on her to achieve.”

Dad: “Cheating on a test is wrong, no matter how you slice it. If I bend here, what’s next? Tax evasion?”

The marriage cord gets knotted. If it is to remain strong and untangled, **mom and dad must talk to each other, strategize as a team, and pray together for God’s wisdom.**

What we also know about the brain tells us that if two people,

ROLLER COASTER

like a dad and mom, think and reflect *together* through questions and issues, their individual brains actually begin to physically work better. A wise parent of teens must have coined the old adage “Two heads are better than one.”

Teens are self-centered but need support. In the journey to independence, teens go from being “We!” (part of a family) to being an “I” (becoming their own person) to being “We” (part of a peer group) to finally coming back to being a “We!” person again. As part of this journey, teens need to “try on” and experience different things.

Loving parents agree to set aside significant chunks of their own time and interests so as to ride along on the journey (although we found ourselves having to drive an awful lot—to practices, games, parties, sleepovers, etc!). The “ride” also requires parents to move between a loving, law-giver role and a more counselor/advisor role. Although teens still need to be told, “You know buster/busterette, life isn’t always all about you all the time!” parents also need to be physically, emotionally, financially, and above all spiritually present and supportive in their teens’ lives.

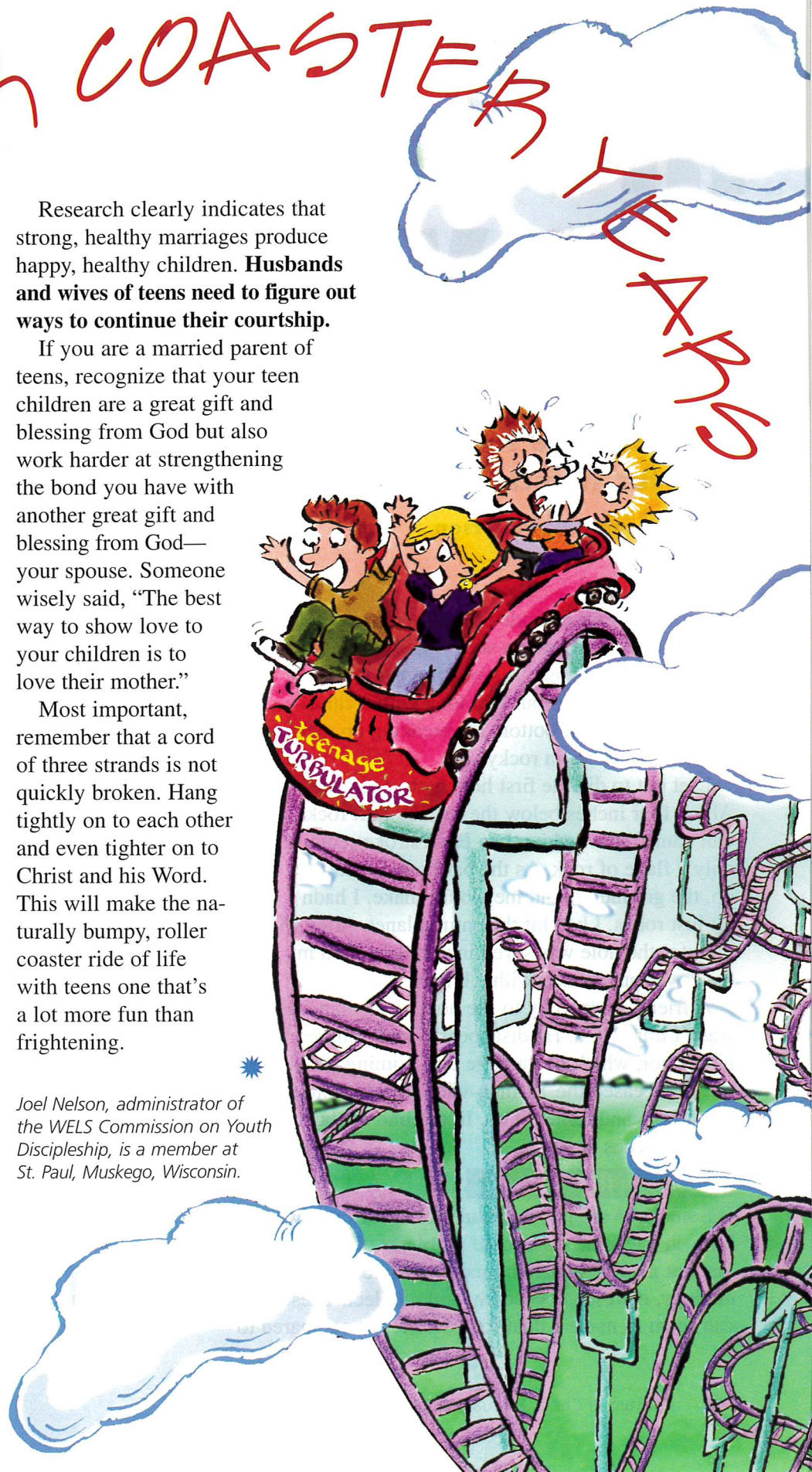
Here the marriage cord gets twisted and tightened because all of this effort on behalf of the teens takes away valuable time for mom and dad to nurture their relationship with each other as husband and wife. When I asked my wife for insights on an article about being married with teens, all she said was, “Title it, ‘Life on hold!’ ”

Research clearly indicates that strong, healthy marriages produce happy, healthy children. **Husbands and wives of teens need to figure out ways to continue their courtship.**

If you are a married parent of teens, recognize that your teen children are a great gift and blessing from God but also work harder at strengthening the bond you have with another great gift and blessing from God—your spouse. Someone wisely said, “The best way to show love to your children is to love their mother.”

Most important, remember that a cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Hang tightly on to each other and even tighter on to Christ and his Word. This will make the naturally bumpy, roller coaster ride of life with teens one that’s a lot more fun than frightening.

Joel Nelson, administrator of the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship, is a member at St. Paul, Muskego, Wisconsin.



Work with the means of grace in your hand

The tools Jesus created in the means of grace are the most effective tools on this planet for mental and spiritual health.

Donald W. Patterson

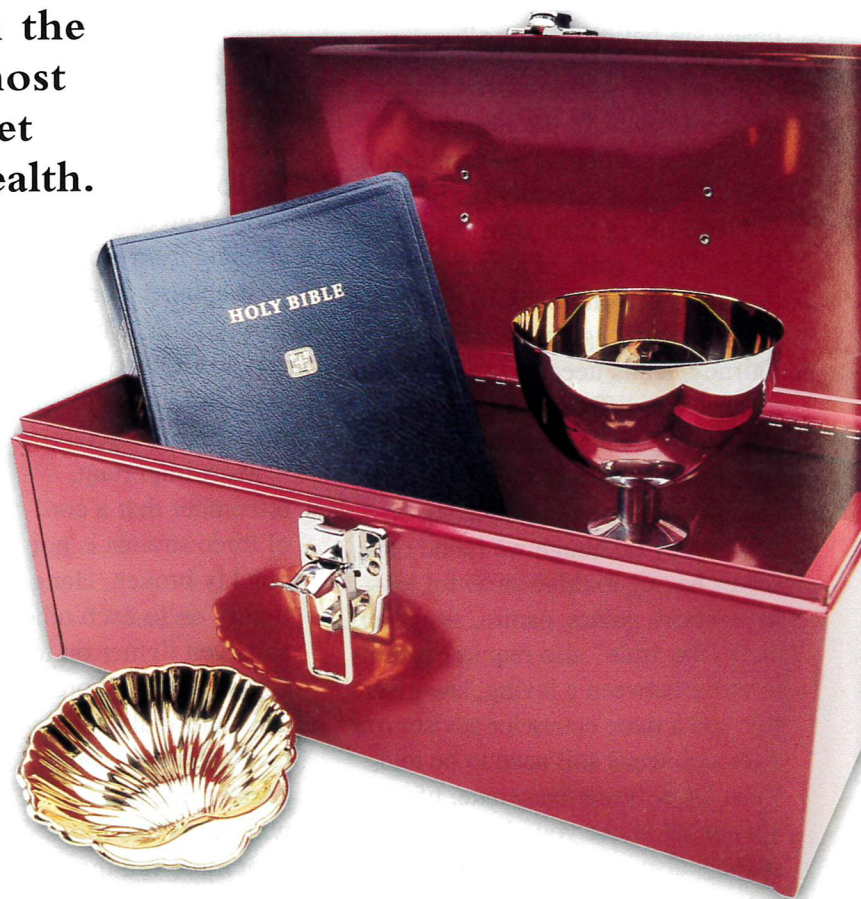
Last spring I decided to dig some postholes in order to build a shed. I had a spade and a wrecking bar. A wrecking bar is a piece of solid steel about four feet long with a chisel-shaped head at the bottom for breaking up rocks and digging holes in rocky soil.

I set out to dig the first hole with my spade. About four inches below the surface I hit rocks. Out came the wrecking bar. Each stroke removed only a flake of rock. As the bar bounced straight up, the ground around me would shake. I hadn't hit just rocks. I had hit the entire planet. After 45 minutes the hole was seven inches deep, and my hand was punctuated with a blister.

A friend stopped by to see how I was doing. He wasn't impressed. He disappeared and returned with his tractor, which had a large drill coming off of the back. He eased the 12-inch-wide drill bit into my small hole and turned it on. In no time the posthole was 24 inches deep.

Work with the right tools

Some jobs are just not made for spades and wrecking bars. In the same way, some problems of the soul are just not made for mere human tools like reason, psychology, man-made wisdom, and intellect. These tools can seem to make a dent for a while, but compared to



God's tools, they are spades and wrecking bars.

Our friend, Jesus, is not impressed by our feeble human efforts as he watches us try to rectify our problems without him. He sees the blisters popping up in our minds as we mull over our regrets and guilty feelings. With sadness he watches when people try to resolve their hurts with drugs or alcohol. They are just scooting more dirt back into their own holes. With thoughtful concern he sees the frustration caused by chiseling at guilt with blame and excuses over and over again with no real progress.

Then he comes with his tools. Wow, what a difference they make. They are so much more powerful and effective. They make the job easy. Jesus' tools are the means of grace. You say, "The means of what?" I know it sounds technical and complicated. The drill on that tractor looked a little too complicated for me, too, but it did the trick. Jesus' means of grace is what he uses to eradicate guilt, fear, and shame in our lives. It comes to us in three ways: the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. He designed these tools to make a huge difference in our lives. They do what we cannot do with our own tools. Jesus puts them in our hands so we will work with them.

The right tools worked for Paul

The apostle Paul learned to use the means of grace instead of human wisdom. He wrote to the Corinthians: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Paul was not an eloquent speaker. He was nervous and timid, but with Jesus' means of grace in his hand, he created churches all over the Mediterranean world. Wow! No rhetoric would have done that. Rhetoric without Christ is like a placebo someone might take instead of real medicine. It looks like it will work but that's all. What works is the simple, powerful message of God's incredible love for lost people.

The right tools will work for us

Just like Paul we will see incredible things happen in our lives when we use the tools Jesus has given us. I know a woman who for 10 years attended a group therapy session for post-abortion syndrome. She could stop going two weeks after she learned that Jesus had forgiven her from the cross. That's incredible!

Baptism holds the same power. A 13-year-old boy visiting our church was afraid to die. We taught him that through baptism God would personally assure him that he was included in God's promise of eternal life. The week after the boy was baptized, he told the family bringing him to church that his fear of death was gone. Can baptism do all that? Absolutely. Jesus uses it to give us assurance that our own decisions could never give.

Jesus gave the Lord's Supper to remove the sin that keeps happening in our lives. The Lord's Supper is his tool for removing guilt over a bad week. If you can go to the Lord's table and drink from the well of his forgiveness for sins you have committed, you don't feel the need to drink from the corner tavern just to forget your past. People who know they are about to face their eternal judge can receive his forgiveness right before walking through that door into his heavenly court. That brings peace. When husband and wife hurt each other, they can gather at the Lord's supper and receive together the forgiveness that enables them to pardon one another.

Jesus' means of grace is what he uses to eradicate guilt, fear, and shame in our lives. It comes to us in three ways: the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Use the right tools

Sometimes when we hear how Jesus' tools do such great things, it is hard for us to understand how they work. When we don't understand, we won't use them. I know people who have power tools that they have never taken out of the box. Is it possible that people in the church do that with the means of grace?

Think about it. When a friend is fretting over her bad decisions from last weekend, don't try to explain it away. She needs to hear that she is forgiven. Whip out the tool, and share it with her. When that little girl is sad because she can't seem to fit in with her friends, she needs to see how baptism makes her fit in with God's group. Use the tool of baptism to give her a new identity. When a friend is ashamed to come back to church because he hasn't been there in a whole year, he needs to hear that the Lord's Supper is there to unite him in forgiveness with those who haven't been there all week.

You may feel like you aren't spiritually smart enough to use these power tools from Jesus. Well, your pastor knows how to use them. Ask him to teach you. I'd guess he'd even host a "How to" course to show more people how to be spiritual handymen.

The tools Jesus created are the most effective tools on this planet for mental and spiritual health. Don't rest until you know how to make them work in your hand!

Donald Patterson is pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Texas.

CONSTANT PEACE

Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Inc., works hard to share peace through Jesus to the institutionalized.

Julie K. Wietzke

“Living in constant fear.” That’s what George*, an inmate at the Racine Correctional Institution, said it was like being a drug lord. That, and having lots of money, jewelry, and fancy cars.

Ken Lenz, a chaplain for Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Inc. (WLIM), built off George’s answer when George asked him what it was like being a Christian.

“Living in constant peace.”

That peace that comes from knowing our Savior died and rose for us is what WLIM strives to show the hurt and lonely people who are institutionalized.

Sharing peace for 100 years

WLIM started just over 100 years ago with one pastor visiting tuberculosis sanitariums, county homes, jails, and penitentiaries. Now seven full-time chaplains, one deaconess, and 12 part-time chaplains are working to share God’s peace with hundreds of people in nursing homes, hospitals, county jails, juvenile detention centers, and state prisons.

More than 80 percent of those visited are not WELS; 50 percent are unchurched.

“They’re at that point of life, at a time of crisis, when they’re doing a lot of soul searching,” says Steven Stern, WLIM chaplain. “It’s a real opportune time to approach people about spiritual issues.”

Every visit counts. Chaplains never know how long people will be at the institutions.

“I think this ministry is probably more about planting the seed,” says Don Borgwardt, WLIM’s executive director. “In most cases, you don’t get to see the harvest. The Lord will on judgment day. All we can do is share our faith and share the Word with them and let the Holy Spirit do the work.”

Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Inc.

Who: Seven full-time chaplains, one deaconess, 12 part-time chaplains, and 300 volunteers

What: A parasynodical ministry sharing God’s law and the saving gospel of Jesus Christ with people who are institutionalized

Where: Those in institutions throughout an area that spans all of Wisconsin, northern Michigan, northeast Illinois, Indiana, and one prison each in Tennessee and Minnesota

When: 1902 to the present

Why: God’s directives in Hebrews 13:3; Matthew 25:31-46; and Luke 6:32-36

How: Through financial support from an association of 188 congregations in the three Wisconsin districts and from schools, organizations/groups, individuals, and foundations

Helping volunteers share their peace

Volunteers are an important part of WLIM’s outreach into institutions. Over 300 serve in various ways.

David Kapanke, a member at Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis., has been volunteering since 1989. He served on the WLIM Board of Directors, ministered to people in hospitals and rehab centers, and now coordinates and conducts Bible studies at the Waukesha County Jail and a minimum-security facility.

“I never thought I would do anything like this,” says Kapanke. “It’s amazing what happens when God gets his hands into the mix.”

Kapanke is one of four laymen working on an initiative to coordinate local lay-led Bible studies in every county jail in Wisconsin. So far congregations in 14 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties have started these ministries.

But some may not feel comfortable sharing their faith with the institutionalized. That’s one reason WLIM recently called Chaplain Steven Stern to be a full-time volunteer coordinator—to give volunteers the tools they need to share the Word.

“Everyone is afraid at first,” says Stern. “We’re scared too. On my first sick call [as a pastor], I was calling on this lady who was going to have a baby. She was quite large. I said, ‘I bet you can’t wait to have

that baby.' And she said, 'I had it.' People are afraid of making a mistake. Well, you can't make a much bigger mistake than that, and I'm still doing hospital ministry. We'll train you. And we won't ask you to do what you're not comfortable doing."

He continues, "The key is to be approachable. They're not looking for someone who's way up there on that perch. If our laypeople are humble, God bless them. That will get them further."

Stern will be working with three part-time lay ministry coordinators to recruit, train, and encourage volunteers as they reach out with a message of peace to those who live in fear, to those whom Jesus commanded us to reach out to in Matthew 25.

"This is Jesus' ministry," says Lenz. "Where would Jesus be today? I can't help but think that he would be visiting the prisons, the hospitals, the inner cities—the places where I think the message of Jesus really needs to be."

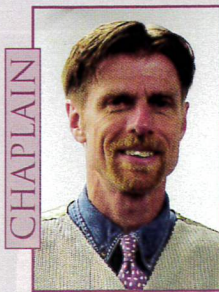
The places where constant peace through our Savior needs to overshadow the constant fear of this sinful world.



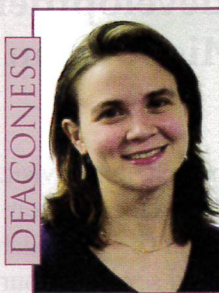
Julie Wietzke is senior communications assistant for Forward in Christ magazine and WELS Communication Services.

For more information about WLIM, check out its Web site, <www.wlim.net>, or call 1-888-214-6490.

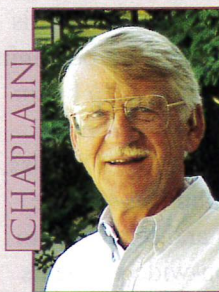
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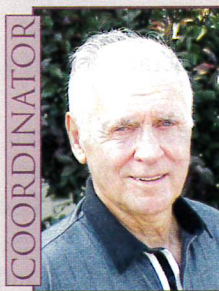
Phil Merten



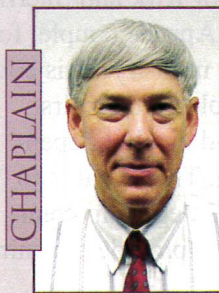
Sarah Owens



Ken Lenz



Franklin Gauger



Steven Stern

In an interview, several WLIM workers shared their attitudes about institutional ministry:

Their favorite parts—

"The way that grace means so much to people. They know that they have nothing to bring to the table as far as earning God's love. I've known guys who say, 'I heard about the love of God before, but I always assumed that applied only to church people. I didn't think God could love a burnt-out hippie like me.'"

—Chaplain Phil Merten, works with those in jail and with those who are chemically dependent or have just been released from institutions

"I know that I've grown so much closer to the Lord in the last 10 years of serving him. Doing this ministry is very humbling, and it helps you realize how much you depend on him in what you do. . . . Seeing him work and seeing his love for all these kids makes his love for me even more magnified."

—Deaconess Sarah Owens, works with juvenile delinquents

"At this time of year [Thanksgiving, Christmas] it's really a down time [in the jails]. There's only one thing that you can give them to bring joy, and that's Jesus Christ. . . . You leave that depressing scene with a good feeling that you really brought something that is more precious than presents under a Christmas tree or a fancy gift or a big meal. You brought them the precious Word of Life."

—Chaplain Ken Lenz, works with those in jails

What brings them back day after day even when the ministry gets difficult—

"Sometimes your legs just go despite your heart and head. And then after you leave your heart and head join. When you go, you say, 'Lord keep pushing me.' Then when you leave, you say, 'Thank you,' and your heart is with it again."

—Deaconess Sarah Owens

"You have a God that's faithful. That compels you to try to be as faithful as you can."

—Franklin Gauger, part-time lay ministry coordinator

"So many times in the hospital I've made 10 calls and just chit-chat, and nothing really happens. Then there's that 11th call, and there's the person waiting for someone to come by. It happens too often to be an accident."

—Chaplain Steven Stern, works with the hospitalized

New vision for Native American Missions

Jeffrey W. Gunn

A new team ministry model and developments in existing ministry make Native American Missions an exciting place to be in the 21st century.

At a recent teacher's conference in WELS' Arizona-California District, those who had no German or Scandinavian blood were asked to raise their hands. In a group of more than 150 WELS teachers, only five raised their hands. This was in an area of the country in which fewer than 30 years from now, if current trends continue, Anglos will be a minority. Gospel outreach in the 21st century is going to be different than it was in the 20th century.

Two of those raised hands were Apache. In the past several years, Native American Missions has developed an approach that is exciting, innovative, and effective.

Indigenous staff developing

Perhaps one of the most exciting elements has been the incorporation of indigenous Apache staff.

Our ministry left the 20th century with a staff of Anglos and little in the form of Native American leadership. A few years into the 21st century, there are five Native American staff members—one student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and four students at Martin Luther College.

Through the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS), we have a solid number continuing to train in our own adult leadership training classes. Apache leaders are trained

to lead worship, preach, teach, visit, and offer spiritual guidance to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Apache teachers now teach in several of our elementary school classrooms.

Christian leaders emerging

Another exciting development is that the Apache leaders are beginning to encourage one another to begin ministries. Two Apache women, originally trained in an ACTS class, recently approached the Apache Lutheran Council and requested to begin a reservation-wide women's ministry and to hold a women's conference. Interestingly, the women were motivated to do this because they were so touched by a recent gathering of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society.

That kind of partnering between more traditional WELS ministries and outreach ministry will be a key element of outreach in the 21st century. Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc. (WLCFS), has sent us staff member Rick Loewen to train and mentor Kirk and Sherri Massey, a young Apache couple, for youth and family ministry. This couple recently completed their first course in drug and alcohol dependency counseling. Their goal is to achieve a master's degree in counseling to be able to provide our min-

istry with much needed Christian counseling services. With the help of WLCFS, we now have this young couple reaching out to the hurting youth in our school at East Fork.

Lutheran schools improving

Our Lutheran schools have proven to be a fantastic tool to reach out into Apache communities. Each one of our three elementary schools has long waiting lists of children who we wish could be hearing the Word of God daily. Throughout the classrooms and hallways of our schools, the spirit of Christ pervades the instruction.

Teaching the gospel remains the chief focus, but, following research done last year, exciting changes were made to improve the school environment and the effectiveness of the education. We continue to research and look for partners to provide a more effective education for Christ's lambs. We located a group of schools that have a track record of doing a phenomenal job of educating young people in inner-city environments. In another exciting potential partnership, we became aware that Wisconsin Lutheran College also has been studying these schools and has started an urban teaching center. At the very least, we will gain by having in our own



(From left) Peridot Lutheran School Board member Norbert Pechuli and principal Martin Plocher are working together to strengthen WELS Native American Missions.



Exciting changes have been made so that children at Peridot Lutheran School in Arizona (above) can enjoy a more effective education.

synod's midst a training program for teachers who will understand our instructional needs.

Facing financial difficulties

Apache leaders met recently to discuss the problem of a lack of financial resources in WELS. In the face of a major cutback on current ministry, our Apache leaders agreed to take the issue back to the believers in our Apache Lutheran congregations. More support, a faith-stretching amount more, was pledged, but with synodical cutbacks, many ministries may cease to operate.

Some, in fact, already have. This past year, due to budget constraints, Native American Missions was forced to withdraw resident missionaries to the Lakota and the Navajo. Thankfully, the Lakota outreach has been adopted by our WELS congregation in Mission, S.D. Navajo outreach continues through the efforts of Home Mission Board Missionary James Fleming, who operates an outreach program for Navajo youth in Farmington, N.M.

Despite the financial difficulties, we in Native American Missions do not plan to shrink away from current ministry opportunities. Parish ministry, gospel outreach, and church planting will continue to be a major focus. Recently, one full-time Apache pastoral assistant, Leonard Fall, and one

part-time assistant, Gary Lupe, were added to our parish ministry staff.

Our pastoral staff meets monthly to study and discuss ministry approaches and to hold one another accountable as a team for an outreach mindset. Our resources might be limited for the present, but our pastors and Apache pastoral assistants are dedicated to preaching and teaching the true gospel message and looking to the Lord for his blessing on that message.

Planning ministry for the future

The Apache leaders and our outreach-oriented staff see that 545 reservations exist in the United States alone. WELS Native American Missions is currently operating on just two of those reservations. In the future, we plan to take a multi-disciplinary team of Native American and Anglo missionaries onto one of those 543 other reservations and share the gospel there.

That team will include people to

- plant churches and carry out parish ministry;
- teach the gospel to young people and operate Christian schools;
- educate adults in the Word and prepare them for leadership and service to the church;
- counsel and nurture those who have problems, addictions, hurts, and confusion in their lives; and
- train new Native American Christians how to become better

stewards of the gifts and talents that the Lord has given them, imparting the practical skills needed to manage their God-given gifts for his glory.

It is our hope and prayer that the real success of this model will be written in the lives of Native Americans, who will hear the gospel and come to know Christ as their Savior.

Reflecting on the gospel's success

It is amazing to see what happens when a young Native American child comes into contact with her Savior through the patient, loving attention of one of our missionaries. Or to see the gospel's power when a troubled adult is given the counseling and care necessary to help him overcome a serious problem he's faced for years. Or to experience the joy when a young Apache couple brings their child to be baptized into the Lord's kingdom. Or to witness the dedication that naturally results when our leaders are trained in the Word of God through our adult leadership training program. In our 110-year history, the stories of the gospel's success abound in Native American Missions. May many more such stories be written in the future. ✨

Jeff Gunn is the director of WELS Native American Missions.

Family ties

Members of WELS and the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church in Japan are working together as part of God's family. Learn more about your brothers and sisters in the LECC.

Nicole R. Balza

In times of adversity, families often are strengthened as they work together to overcome their problems. The same holds true in church families. As WELS struggles to deal with the reality of a nine percent revenue shortfall this fiscal year with a predicted 20 percent shortfall in the next fiscal year, it is important that members come together before God to ask for his help. Our sister church body in Japan, the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC), is also ready to step up and help us in these uncertain times.

Glen Hieb, a WELS missionary in Japan, recently had to deliver the news that because of the WELS revenue shortfall, one missionary to the LECC in Japan would have to be recalled to the United States.

"The Japanese Christians reacted so wonderfully," says Hieb. "First they gave thanks for the blessings they have received through WELS. Then they prayed for the Lord to help. They also asked how they could help. A call was sent out to all the members of the LECC to pray and to give as much as they could to help our WELS brothers and sisters. They wanted you to know that they stand with you.

"All seem ready to do their part with their offerings and their talents. This was especially heartening because

the Japanese have been experiencing a recession, sometimes a depression, in their economy for 10 years now. They receive no interest on their savings at the bank. They already have been giving much and now appear ready to dig even deeper into the principal of their savings, not the interest, to help out. What wonderful Christian brothers and sisters we have here in Japan."

Here is a chance for you to get to know some of your brothers and sisters in Japan who are praying for you and working with you to accomplish God's work. Hieb shares the stories of three LECC members:

"My most recent cause for rejoicing was the news that Kimura San was confirmed in our congregation

at Ashikaga. I found Kimura San and her daughter sleeping in their car on a Sunday morning in our church parking lot.

"Perhaps because of the love she was shown by the Christians in our church, she attended church and Bible class regularly. She was baptized after about six months, but then all of a sudden she was gone.

"To our joy an unexpected phone call revealed that the Holy Spirit had led her to within a 10-minute drive from one of our LECC churches. She is married again. Her whole family is active in church. Recently a new baby was baptized and her husband is also taking confirmation class."

"Ten years ago Mr. Doi started studying the Bible with Missionary Haberkorn. After Haberkorn returned to the United States, Mr. Doi fell away from church.

"For 10 years I sent Mr. Doi an invitation to worship every Christmas and Easter. To my surprise, after about five years, he wrote a reply saying, 'I want to come, but I can't because of my job.'

"Another four years passed. Because of the bad economy in Japan, he lost his job. The Lord used this sad event to the blessing of his church. Last year I sent him an invitation again. He came to the Christmas Eve service. That evening we had two adult baptisms, an infant

Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC)

"Forty five years ago with the help of the members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod we started out as infants. Over the years we feel that like a small child we have grown and matured from elementary school to middle school to high school. We will become full-fledged adults in the near future, I believe."—Takeshi Nidaira, a national pastor in the LECC

Members: 451
Established congregations: 4
Preaching stations: 6
National pastors: 4
Expatriate missionaries: 5*
Expatriate teachers: 1*

*As of Dec. 1, 2002

The man facing the camera is dressed for a local parade as a servant who lived in the Edo period (1600-1868). He came to the LECC church in Mito as a college student. After hearing a gospel presentation, he became interested in Christianity and started studying. He is now confirmed and studies every week on Sunday morning before church. He also brought a friend, who is now studying to be a member.



Each year the LECC hosts three church-wide events—summer Bible camp, Reformation Festival, and Spring Bible Study Day. In August 2002, 120 members attended summer Bible camp in Shiobara. This camp is a time for learning, worship, and fellowship. It is also a non-threatening way for members to introduce newcomers to the LECC. Here attendees join together for Bible study.



The WELS missionaries and national pastors who serve the LECC in Japan. From left: Tadashi Yoshida, Brad Wordell, Takeshi Nidaira, Wakichi Akagami, Josh Stahmann, Glen Hieb, Jim Sherod, Fukuichi Oshino, and Kermit Habben. Members of the LECC eagerly await the day in March when another seminary student will graduate and work with the national pastors and missionaries pictured here.

eighth of an 11-part series

baptism, and a confirmation. It was a wonderful Christmas harvest, but I will always remember that evening more because of what Mr. Doi said to me as he left that evening.

“He said, ‘Pastor, I’m not baptized yet.’

“With the new year, Mr. Doi was in class and was baptized on Easter. Since that Christmas Eve, he has not missed a worship service or a Bible class. Because he is jobless, he uses the extra time to help our treasurer prepare the monthly offering envelopes, to deliver tracts, and to serve as an alternate representative to the LECC delegate conference.”

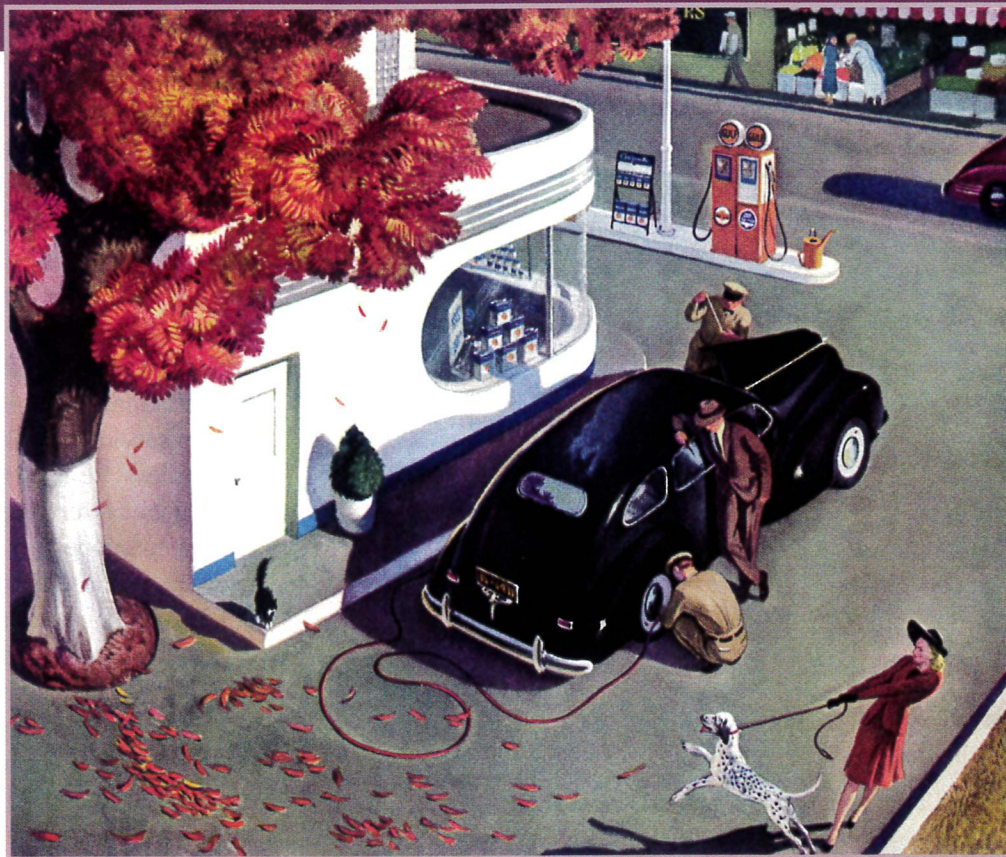
“Mr. Yamaguchi comes to church every Sunday. I get him from the hospital. At one time in the history of our church he was a prospective seminary student. But then he had some problems that caused him to leave the church. Alcoholism was what put him into the hospital.

“After many years Mr. Yamaguchi came to repentance and began to rebuild his life with the Lord’s help. Because his family has abandoned him, he really has no way of ever leaving the mental hospital he is in. There he has a roof over his head and three warm meals a day, as well as good medical care. But he has something else there, too—a ministry.

“Mr. Yamaguchi conducts classes for all who are interested in the hospital. On more than one occasion I have received phone calls from people who have learned of Christ through his work, who wanted to study with me, too, and be baptized.”

Kimura San, Mr. Doi, and Mr. Yamaguchi are examples of how devoted our brothers and sisters in Japan are to God’s work. As members of both WELS and the LECC face economic challenges, it is a blessing to know that we are working together to build and strengthen God’s family.

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



Reflecting our Savior, our churches need to be filled with full-service people—not self-service people.

Full-service churches

John L. Eich

Remember when gas stations were known as “service stations”? You pulled into a service station, and someone served you by pumping your gas into the tank, cleaning your windshield, and checking the oil (and filling it if you needed some). It was service with a smile.

Then we developed “self-service stations” for convenience. You pull

in, pump your own gas, clean your own windshield, and check your own oil. It’s cheaper and more convenient for the gas station. That’s true. When you serve yourself, it’s always cheaper and more convenient for the person providing the service.

But it shouldn’t be the way of the Christian church. It wasn’t the way of the cross. The cross was not cheaper. It certainly wasn’t

convenient . . . it was full-service all the way. It took the total, complete, and personal service of Jesus Christ to redeem us.

Inclined to serve self

But, what do our churches look like? Full-service? Or a building filled with self-service people? The Holy Spirit tells us: “Each of you should look not only to

God has called each of us to be full-service Christians and churches, and he has equipped us for service.

your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). In other words, look out for the other guy.

But that’s not a popular idea today, is it? Today the pervading sentiment, fostered by the sinful flesh, is to ignore the other guy and ask, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” As with Cain, God doesn’t even give that question any respect by answering it. The answer is, of course, “Absolutely!”

Slow to get involved

You know how frustrating it is when you pull up to a service station, and the wind is blowing, and the rain or snow is falling. You’re trying to keep your nice clothes from getting soaked, to hold your umbrella, to keep the kids happy, to pump the gas, and to get the dog out for a walk, all while the station attendant watches from the warm surroundings of the store. Then, when you go in to pay, he acts as if you are inconveniencing him.

Now, carry that picture over into your church. Are there people attending who are caught in the storms of life, who are juggling a variety of problems, but all they see are faces around them watching, but not helping? Do we treat their needs like inconveniences? It’s easy to do. We get involved with our own lives and forget that other people have lives too. We get involved with the people we know and forget that other people aren’t known. We get involved in our own hurts and neglect the hurts of others.

Convinced of inadequacy

As Christians, we want it to be different. As Christians we should

know how to love. We follow a God of love. He has told us to reach out to everyone with the love of Jesus. It doesn’t matter whether they are in the church or outside of the church. Love is a mark of genuine Christianity. It is the evidence that we are authentic followers of Jesus. It not only is the basis for fulfilling and caring relationships within the church but also the basis for effective outreach to those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. People respond to genuine love. Genuine love is seen most clearly as we serve others.

Unfortunately, one of the sad consequences of living in our fast-paced society is that we are losing the ability to develop meaningful and lasting relationships with others. We live far too often on the superficial level. As a result we are finding ourselves more empty and less loved than ever before.

Or maybe we are just afraid to help. Sometimes we feel as inadequate to serve others as we would feel stepping into an operating room to take over a brain surgery. Our fear of failure keeps us from even trying. Yet God has called each of us to be full-service Christians and churches (Ephesians 2:10), and he has equipped us for service (Ephesians 4:11,12).

Equipped to serve

God is love. He sent his Son to earth to live and die because he

loved us. As the message of God’s love grips Christians, the Holy Spirit fills us and turns cared-for Christians into caring Christians.

Christ is our example of how to really serve: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16).

We can demonstrate our love by how we speak about and to one another. Scripture exhorts us to speak words seasoned with grace. We can also show our love through our actions. Sometimes the smallest actions are enough.

But whether great or small, we can’t show love in a passive way. We must be active. Love is something we do. An act of kindness here, a good deed there—love in action—that is what we want. What is it that you can do to show your love to someone else? Begin to do it. It will have a powerful impact.

As we serve others, we make God’s presence practical or real for others. As one little boy said, as he was being comforted by a nurse in the emergency room, “You must be how God feels with skin on.” We put “skin” on God when we care for and serve others in the name of our Savior. We care because Jesus cares. People are important to God, so people are important to us. We are charged with the task of sharing his love. Let’s start by sharing that love with the people around us.

Then our churches will be full-service—good service—service-with-a-smile churches.

John Eich is pastor at Good Shepherd, Alma/St. Louis, Michigan.

WHATEVER

Watch your step!

Just as Blondin's balancing pole helped keep him on his walk toward his goal, **Jesus** promises that he **will** be with us to **keep us** "on the rope."

Michael Roberts

During the 1850s a world-famous tightrope walker named "The Great Blondin" became famous for walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope.

Without the aid of his guide pole, which he used for balance, Blondin would have had a difficult time completing this task. It was also important that he didn't panic, but kept his concentration so that every step he took was directly in the middle of that rope. One false step, one little slip, would mean almost certain death.

Just as Blondin's balancing pole helped keep him on his walk toward his goal, Jesus promises that he will be with us to keep us "on the rope."

The end of that rope for Blondin is like heaven for us Christians, and the rope itself is like our earthly life in Jesus. Just as many forces, such as wind and gravity, acted on Blondin, trying to knock him off the rope and preventing him from reaching his final goal, many forces act on us too. Satan makes troubled times come into our lives to try to make us take a false step so that we stumble in the pursuit of our final goal.

In times like these, I am reminded of the song "Sometimes By Step." Rich Mullins wrote in verse two of that song: "and on this road to righteousness, sometimes the climb can be so steep, I may falter in my steps, but never beyond your reach." God will always be there with his staff to keep us on the way.

As Christian teenagers, we will be faced with many new temptations that will seek to turn our eyes from Jesus. Some of us are in college now, and some of us will be out on our own soon, without our parents waking us up every Sunday morning to go to church. Being away from home is one of the biggest stumbling blocks

put in the way of our faith. Will we be strong enough to stay in the Lord? On our own power, no. But we have an all-knowing, all-loving God who is our guide. He will help us to stay on the road to heaven.

Another line to "Sometimes By Step" goes like this: "I will seek you in the morning, and I will learn to walk in your ways, and step by step you'll lead me, and I will follow you all of my days." Many of us have grown up in a Christian home, learning to walk in God's ways. Now that we may not have that daily reminder of God's love in Christ, we need to put our faith in God and trust him to lead us home to be with him.

We must realize now that not everyone around us will be a Christian. Some "friends" will even try to keep us from going to church and staying in God's Word. Maybe in times of weakness, we might sometimes be one of those people. We must not take our faith for granted. Just like a muscle, if our faith is not exercised daily it will begin to weaken, and we may even lose it.

This fact reminds me of the advice Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 10:12: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." May God bless you as you continue in your walk of faith.

Michael Roberts, a member at St. John, Lannon, Wisconsin, is a freshman at Marquette University, Milwaukee.



act

Getting to know God's story

Randy K. Hunter

Three figures crowd into the earliest pictures of God's dealings with people: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three are the patriarchs, and millions of Jews, Muslims, and Christians have honored these men for the way God revealed himself to them and through them.

How significant was Abraham? Two thousand years after his death, a pregnant virgin in Nazareth sang about him: "[The Lord] has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham

and his descendants" (Luke 1:54).

Abraham's son was Isaac, and his grandson was Jacob. These three generations were so important that the Bible often calls the Lord "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Their stories fit inside 38 chapters, Genesis 12-50, but we fit into their story, too. The apostle Paul includes all believers in the patriarchal family photo when he calls Abraham "the father of us all."

- A covenant is an agreement. Some of God's covenants are one-sided, such as his promise to send an offspring of the woman to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Some of his covenants are two-sided, such as his agreement with Abraham's descendants 500 years after his death: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5). Read the covenant in Genesis 12:1-3. Make a two-column chart. In one column write the things Abraham was supposed to do and in the other write what God would do for Abraham. Identify the covenant Paul describes in Galatians 3:6-9 as one-way or two-way.
- "[Abraham] believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). God determined to rescue people who lived before Jesus in the same way he rescues people today: through faith. List the things that might have made it difficult for Abraham to believe and obey the Lord. For each item you list, identify how it might challenge us today.
- When God called Abraham, he used a voice. Discuss the ways you determine whether God is "calling" you to some activity.
- When Abraham doled out the goods at the end of his life, the most important thing he had to offer wasn't a thing. It was the blessing. Create a plan to demonstrate to your heirs that your Christian faith is the greatest legacy you will leave them.
- In those days, the oldest son would receive a double portion of inheritance and the blessing from his father. But not always. Abraham's oldest son, Ishmael, was not the child of his wife, but of his wife's maid. So Isaac, his second son, received the blessing. Isaac's oldest son, Esau, lost the blessing when Esau's younger brother, Jacob, tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing. The trickery and deceit used to get the blessing doesn't diminish God's plan. It demonstrates how God will bless whom God will bless. God did not choose them because they were perfect. He just chose them. Illustrate how God operates the same way today.
- In Genesis 27:18 Jacob's father asked him, "What is your name?" In 32:27, God, in the form of an angel, asked Jacob the same question. Compare his answers and evaluate the change in Jacob.

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

Find this article and possible answers on-line. Go to <www.wels.net/sab/frm-nl.html> and click on "current issue." Then click on "Getting to know God's story." Answers will be available after Feb. 5.

Creation & promise

Patriarchs

Freedom from captivity

Wandering

Promised Land

Kings

Major prophets 1

Major prophets 2

Minor prophets

Returning home

Wisdom books

Preparation for the coming Messiah



Answers to your WELS budget questions

WELS Vice President Wayne Mueller answers your questions about the current revenue shortfall.

Question: I have heard that over 100 people will be cut because of the synod's revenue shortfall. Who decides who will be cut? What is the timetable for the cuts?

Answer: In a worst-case scenario, fewer than 100 people will lose their positions. Synod-elected boards make decisions on specific cuts within their area of ministry. The Synodical Council will make final decisions about all cuts at the end of February. Each area of ministry decides when its cuts will begin. Some cuts have already taken place within synod administration. In Ministerial Education and World Missions some cuts began in January, but most of them will occur in early summer. In Home Missions there will be few, if any, cuts. In Parish Services all cuts will take place June 30.

Question: What kind of support will there be for those whose jobs are cut?

Answer: The new downsized budget includes more than a quarter million dollars to help people make transitions. Our synod's Human Resources will offer counsel in many cases. Many positions in our schools are protected by a severance agreement. In addition, district presidents will make arrangements for continued support for those who do not immediately receive new placement.

Question: The synod in convention voted a significant increase in compensation for called workers. How will that increase be affected by the budget cuts?

Answer: The final word on that awaits the decision of the Synodical Council and the synod in convention, which meets from July 28-Aug. 1. The plan now is to grant the full proposed increase in one-third increments over

three years. This plan will save the budget millions of dollars, yet upholds the spirit of the synod resolution.

Question: When I read the article entitled "Diagnosing a need for spiritual growth" in the Sept. 2002 issue of *Forward in Christ*, I was concerned. It worries me that we seem to have an abundance of administrators at a time when synod schools and congregations are being forced to make huge cuts. It is ironic that we are paying a man to be in charge of spiritual growth for the synod while at the same time making huge, damaging cuts to our teacher and pastor training school in New Ulm, Minn.

Our pastors are thoroughly trained to promote spiritual growth among their members. We should be relying on them to encourage spiritual growth.

Answer: The Synodical Council is charged with oversight of the whole WELS ministry program. It has determined that spiritual growth is its number one priority and has called the Spiritual Growth Project Director.

The Synodical Council made its decision on the basis of cause and effect. Instead of treating only the symptoms of various ministry weaknesses, it wanted to address the underlying virus. The symp-

Check out future issues of *Forward in Christ* magazine for more questions and answers and for more information on the revenue shortfall. Find out the latest on the WELS revenue shortfall at www.wels.net (jump word "budget"). If you have a question about the budget, e-mail budget@wels.net. Answers will be posted on the Web site.



Wayne Mueller

toms include weak mission offerings; a 17,000 decrease in souls over the last decade; and a plateauing of Bible class attendance. The Spiritual Growth Project will treat the underlying spiritual virus that causes these weaknesses. It will encourage the faith of our synod leaders on all levels.

Those forced to make cuts in the quantity of the WELS budget are taking special care to preserve the quality of all WELS ministries, including Ministerial Education. Even with current funding stringencies, we fully expect our schools to be able to train all the various ministers the church needs for the foreseeable future and to train them well.

In a study done for the synod convention a few years ago, it was demonstrated that WELS, among the four largest Lutheran church bodies, had the fewest administrators per communicant member. Cost for all administration requires a smaller portion of your mission dollar than it does in other churches. WELS' full-time administrators are fewer in number than the faculty of our smallest ministerial school.

If you have further concerns about this, speak to your district lay representative who votes for you on the Synodical Council. You can get his name, address, phone number, and e-mail address from your pastor.

Sweet celebration

On Aug. 25, Star of Bethlehem, Santa Maria, Calif., observed its 25th anniversary. James Moore, who is actively involved at Star of Bethlehem, was asked to design and make a cake for the celebration (pictured right). Moore describes his creation:

The base of the cake was made up of five cakes made to look like stones (the foundation of the church), with each stone having one of the five solas: *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone); *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone); *Sola Fide* (by faith alone); *Sola*

Christo (by Christ alone); and *Soli Deo Gloria* (to God alone be the glory). Above the five cakes was a replica of the stained glass window at the back of Star of Bethlehem. The next layer of the cake had the theme “25 years of God’s amazing grace” printed around it. On the top of that cake were the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet (*alpha* and *omega*), referring to Jesus’ eternal nature. The top layer of cake was in the



shape of a Bible opened to Ephesians 2:8-10.

The Bible was hand-lettered with three verses that summarize the heart and soul of Lutheran theology.

Lights! Cameras! Produce!

Not just anyone can be a movie star. But what about a producer? Steve Zambo, WELS media communications director, hopes to turn many WELS members into video producers with the new video *Lights! Cameras! Produce!*.

Many congregations and organizations are searching for ways to use visual media to communicate. But they aren’t just looking to shoot church services from a new angle. This venue could be used to present

Bible studies or do outreach. Videos could help new members learn about the church so they feel more comfortable coming. They could keep congregation members up-to-date on news within the church. The possible uses for videos within schools and other organizations are as endless as the creative minds that make them.

Hiring professionals to produce videos can be expensive, so *Lights! Cameras! Produce!* teaches the basic

skills and helpful tricks it takes to do it on your own. It will guide you all the way from the planning stages to editing the final product.

Lights! Cameras! Produce! (#388860) will be available Feb. 15. Visit <www.shopwels.net> or call Northwestern Publishing House at 1-800-662-6022.

Laura Warmuth

The sleeping giant

The alumni of WELS high schools can be a valuable asset in promoting Christian secondary education. Too often, though, schools limit themselves to only contacting alumni for annual fundraisers, which is why the Association of Area Lutheran High Schools held the first WELS Alumni Seminar on Oct. 20-22, 2002, in Trego, Wis.

Representatives from 18 WELS area Lutheran high schools, two WELS preparatory schools, Martin Luther College, Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), and Wisconsin Lutheran College shared ideas on new and innovative ways to involve alumni in promoting Christian education.

Dave Payne, communications director at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., says, “A lot of good, hands-on information was presented. I came back with five to 10 new ideas that will become part of the alumni program here at FVL. For example, we are now working on coordinating an on-line alumni directory. Being able to see who was doing what was really valuable.”

Program director Jerry Kieselhorst adds, “It is time to awaken the sleeping giant of Lutheran school alumni so that they can be a valuable asset



Attendees of the first WELS Alumni Seminar gathered together for workshops and discussion sessions aimed at finding new opportunities to involve Lutheran school alumni in promoting Christian education.

in promoting Christian education.” To build on the progress made at this seminar, a second seminar is planned for Oct. 24-26.

Perusing WELS publications

Need some good reading material? Why not check out WELS publications. There's something for everyone. This series will introduce you to the various publications so you can discover which ones will benefit you.

Lutheran Parent

A tiny cry calls for you.

A new voice says, "Ma."

Your young child begins to wonder "Why?"

Soon enough your stubborn teen grows silent.

When you consider the evils invading homes today—divorce, abuse, spiritual backsliding, and poor communication—raising a happy family isn't an easy task. And it certainly isn't something to get into without God's guidance.

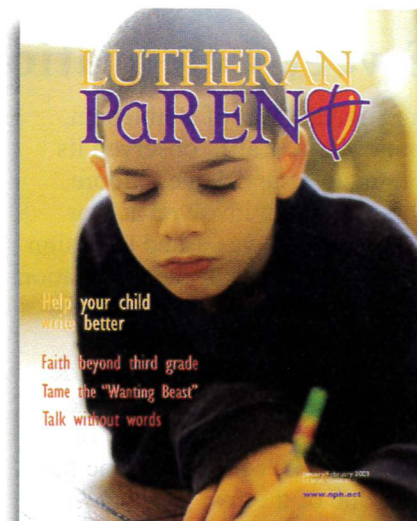
Lutheran Parent, a Christ-centered parenting magazine, caters to young families who are beginning to form their spiritual habits within the home, but also addresses the challenges of raising children up to adulthood with "subject matter that is fearless in tack-

ling tough topics," according to editor Kenn Kremer. Articles discuss school violence, Internet dangers, and gender orientation, as well as discipline and family communication.

Lutheran Parent evolved from a monthly devotional magazine called *Wellspring*, first published in September 1993. Two years later, *Lutheran Parent* was born as two magazines bound together. The *Wellspring* devotional was attached inside the new feature magazine. In September 2002 the two were combined into a single publication offering guidance and support to Christian parents and a full array of devotional readings and activities for the whole family.

"There are many parenting magazines on the market, each spinning its own philosophy," Kremer says. "Many people aren't aware of the subtle messages—religious or otherwise—that filter into their approach to parenting."

With 6,200 subscribers, *Lutheran Parent* is fulfilling its mission to provide Bible-based guidance, encour-



agement, and resources for Christian families. Karen Brumm, mother of two, shares, "It's so much better than all the other 'parenting' magazines out there because it always keeps Christ in the answers to our questions!"

Want to subscribe? Go to <www.nph.net> and search for Lutheran Parent under periodicals. Or call Subscription Services, 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee, 414/615-5785.

Laura Warmuth

Caring for called workers

"I have a heart for called workers," says Karen Harmon. She and two other layworkers, Paul Baker and Ray Brown, make up a Care Committee for Called Workers (CCCW) at St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif. They are people who value the gifted, self-sacrificing workers for Christ, but recognize that these called workers are also just "human beings with the same needs, desires, difficulties, and limitations" as the rest of us.

Care Committees for Called Workers exist to support and encourage called workers in their ministries and to enhance the quality of living for their families. St. Mark has had a CCCW for many years, but during a reorganization in January 2001, they sought ways to be more supportive and aware of their called workers' needs.

To let the workers know that the CCCW was committed to them, St. Mark's CCCW held a luncheon at Harmon's home. Then they met with each worker individually to identify any concerns that needed attention, whether spiritual, physical, professional, or financial. This helped them set up a program that best meets their workers' needs.

A CCCW may welcome a new worker and help him find a good dentist in the area. It may seek adequate salaries for workers and observe anniversaries and retirements. It might provide meals while a child is critically ill or, like St. Mark, collect frequent flier miles so that workers can visit family or attend conferences.

WELS Commission on Special Ministries puts out a handbook

to serve as a guide for developing a CCCW, but every congregation has a unique mix of workers with different needs. As Harmon shares, it is important to have both men and women on the committee "to bring balanced insights and sensitivity to the needs and concerns of male and female staff."

Only 40 to 50 percent of WELS congregations have a CCCW. Although it doesn't take a committee to pray for called workers or thank them for all the ways in which they have touched our lives, these committees can ensure that called workers' needs are being met.

Order a Care Committee for Called Workers Handbook (#388251) at <www.shopwels.net> or call 1-800-662-6022.

Laura Warmuth

Committee on Relief continues ministry of compassion

It was a landmark year for the WELS Committee on Relief. Primarily because of 9/11, donations reached an all-time high of \$1,024,892. In addition, Committee on Relief Chairman Philip Schupmann reports:

- We worked together with two sister synods to deliver funds. The \$10,000 that was given to Germany for flooding was delivered via the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. The \$73,500 that was given to Latvia was delivered via the Confessional Lutheran Church.

- Perhaps because of the tough economic climate in the United States, personal requests from families with medical and personal needs dramatically increased. However, the committee still primarily deals with disaster aid.

Committee on Relief grants given Sept. 2001-Sept. 2002

DOMESTIC:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| \$405,000 | Attack on America Relief distributed through Sure Foundation, New York City |
| 105,000 | Attack on America Relief distributed through WELS Kingdom Workers |
| 92,000 | Attack on America (other grants) |
| 2,500 | Project Share |
| 142,192 | Aid to families with medical and personal needs |
| 10,000 | Arizona forest fires relief |
| 5,000 | Colorado forest fires relief |
| 10,000 | Ladysmith, Wis., tornado relief |
| 2,700 | Ladysmith, Wis., tornado related |
| 4,500 | Inner-city missionary fund |
| <u>22,000</u> | Inner-city relief |
| \$800,892 | |

FOREIGN:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| \$ 45,000 | CARE International Relief |
| 8,000 | Latvia Revolving Relief Fund |
| 65,000 | Latvia (medical equipment) |
| 10,000 | Germany flooding |
| 10,000 | Hunger in Afghanistan |
| 10,000 | Goma Volcano (Congo Effort) |
| 15,000 | Nigeria water wells |
| 30,000 | Apache family ministry |
| 10,500 | Native American general relief |
| 13,500 | World missionary grants |
| <u>6,500</u> | General world relief |
| \$224,000 | |

Total grants distributed: \$1,024,892

For more information on the Committee on Relief, contact Philip Schupmann, 1910 Richard St, Aurora, IL 60506; <philipschupmann@msn.com>.

Obituaries

Wilbert E. Schulz 1911-2002

Wilbert Schulz was born June 3, 1911, in Merrill, Wis. He died Nov. 29, 2002, in Beaver Dam, Wis.

A 1935 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Leavenworth, Wash.; St. John, Mansfield, Wash.; Withrow Lutheran, Withrow, Wash.; Trinity, Merrill, Wis.; St. Paul, Wonewoc, Wis.; Christ, Denmark, Wis.; St. John, Renville, Minn.; Ascension, Moorhead, Minn.; and St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his sister, brother, and infant great-grandchild. He is survived by his wife, Agnes; three sons; two sisters; a brother; 12 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren.

Frederic H. Nitz 1922-2002

Frederic Nitz was born May 12, 1922, in Watertown, Wis. He died Nov. 25, 2002, in Watertown.

A 1948 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served as teacher at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis., and East Fork Lutheran School, Whiteriver, Ariz. He served as pastor at Church of the Open Bible, Whiteriver, Ariz.; Gethsemane, Cibicue, Ariz.; Trinity, Hendricks, Minn.; St. John, Arco, Minn.; Christ, Cochrane, Wis.; Martin Luther, Buffalo City, Wis.; Zion, Cream, Wis.; St. John, New Ulm, Minn.; and Our Savior, Sun City, Ariz.

He was preceded in death by an infant son. He is survived by his wife, Grace; two daughters; two sons; two sisters; three brothers; and nine grandchildren.

WELS news briefs

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

Commission for Communication on Financial Support

414/256-3214

A new and convenient way for members to support WELS ministry is available—Internet giving.

Go to <www.wels.net/mpg>. Click on “Give a Gift,” and you will be taken to a site that describes opportunities and provides instructions. Giving with a credit card is offered as one on-line option.

Communication Services Commission

414/256-3230

Want to learn how technology can help your church or school’s ministry?

Come to WELS Tech 2003 at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., from June 22-25.

The conference will include topics on Web site design, teaching with technology, computer networking, and video production. Check out <www.wels.net/welstech> for more information and a full list of sessions being offered.

Board for Ministerial Education

414/256-3236

Enrollments for our four ministerial education schools are in.

The four ministerial education schools include Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. (high schools that prepare students for full-time church work); Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. (college that trains teachers and prepares men for the seminary); and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon (seminary that trains pastors).

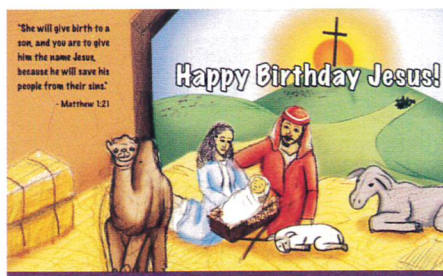
| | 2002-03 | 2001-02 | 2000-01 |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| WLS | 182 | 165 | 150 |
| MLC | 1,054 | 1,044 | 1,017 |
| LPS | 345 | 355 | 381 |
| MLS | 525 | 561 | 575 |
| Total | 2,106 | 2,125 | 2,123 |

The Multi-ethnic Preseminary Program, a distance-learning program that prepares second-career minority men for entrance into Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, has been moved to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

It formerly was located at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. The program will be renamed the Pastoral Studies Institute.

Commission on Youth Discipleship

414/256-3224



This year’s winner of the Commission on Youth Discipleship and the Commission on Evangelism outreach Christmas card contest was Mary Wardell, a seventh-grade student at Memorial Lutheran School, Williamston, Mich. The theme was “Happy Birthday, Jesus!” Limited orders for the cards and a fairly significant expense to produce them have led the commissions to discontinue the contest in the future. The Commission on Evangelism is planning to develop new outreach cards for Christmas and Easter that will complement each other and be more affordable.

Tel/Tech Task Force II

262/650-1592

Efforts in distance learning are moving forward under the leadership of Tel/Tech’s synod-wide Distance Learning Committee. Dr. James Grunwald of Martin Luther College is serving half time as coordinator of distance learning. Projects being considered include

- distance learning for native pastors in world mission fields. Coursework under consideration includes general teaching methodology and use of on-line teaching.

- early placement coursework at Martin Luther College, enabling qualified area Lutheran high school students to take certain courses on-line for college credit.
- congregational on-line Bible study, which will emphasize interactive techniques through placement on a congregation’s Web site. Subjects include Revelation, Acts, and Galatians.
- an on-line course for musicians on organ registration.

The task force is offering matching support to groups and organizations wanting to develop Web coursework. Contact the task force for more information.

Commission on Adult Discipleship

414/256-3278

Because of current budget difficulties, the commission has decided to put the calling of the position of Adult Discipleship administrator temporarily on hold. This position has been vacant for a year. The commission was reluctant to stop calling and has made it a high priority to resume calling. Delaying the call will allow the commission time to determine what other programs have to be cut.

Board for Home Missions

414/256-3284

At the Board for Home Missions meeting in September 2002: **Money and manpower for the “establishing phase”** was granted to southwest Waukesha, Wis.; Fredrick, Md.; and Sarpy County, Neb. Calls to Fredrick, Md., and Sarpy County, Neb., have been put on hold because of the current budget situation. East metro St. Louis, Mo., was granted money to further research an opportunity. Existing “establishing efforts” were continued in 16 locations.

The “development phase” was granted to Crown of Life, Corona, Calif.; Victory, Jacksonville, Fla.; Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev.; Hope, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.; Beautiful Savior, Las Vegas, Nev.;

and Apostles, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Mission subsidy was granted for Faith, Kokomo, Ind., and adjusted in Richmond, Va.; Winston-Salem, N.C.; Little Rock, Ark.; Garland, Tex.; and McFarland, Wis.

Funding was discontinued in Portland, Maine, and the work there was designated as a preaching station.

The authorization to work with the Church Extension Fund (CEF) to purchase land or existing facilities was granted to Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.; Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; Tallahassee, Fla.; Kokomo, Ind.; and Oconomowoc, Wis.

Authorization to work with the CEF to plan or build facilities was granted to Corona, Calif.; Las Vegas (Water of Life), Nev.; Maineville, Ohio; Cambridge, Minn.; Mobile, Ala.; and Sharpsburg, Ga.

Board for World Missions
414/256-3233



Twelve men graduated from the seminary for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) in May 2002. Eight graduates are from Zambia; four are from Malawi. These men are now serving a one-year vicarship and will be eligible for calls into the LCCA in 2003. Standing (l to r): Missionary Philip Birner (teacher), Edward Bangwe, Philip Chikwatu, Fainos Tarisayi, Dr. E. R. Wendland (teacher), Principal Salimo Hachibamba (teacher), Lambulami Mzalule, Simon Mweete, Brewster Munthali. Kneeling (l to r): Sylvester Mwanza, Lackson Nkunje, Cappy Shamwanga, David Baloyi, Lucius Renard.

District news

Nebraska

Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, held an open house on Nov. 24, 2002, to showcase its expanded building. The addition, which was also dedicated on Nov. 24, more than tripled the size of the school and includes a spacious gymnasium, a science classroom and lab, a music classroom, and a library/computer center.

Messiah, Wichita, Kan., opened a child care center in 2002. The church, which averages 44 people for midweek Advent services, had 177 people attend on Dec. 11, 2002, when a special Advent service was held for families of the child care center. This is the highest worship attendance ever in Messiah's history.

Western Wisconsin

The graduating class of 1987 from **Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie du Chien, Wis.,** held its 15th class reunion from June 21-23, 2002.

Arizona

Approximately 70 students and adults from **Arizona Lutheran Academy (ALA), Phoenix,** and **Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.,** surveyed the area around ALA on Oct. 26, 2002. The information that was gathered is being analyzed in light of a potential WELS mission being planned for this booming area.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Kenneth Pasch; DM—Wayne Rouse; NE—Michael Helwig; WW—Martin Baur.

Nebraska



Rocky Mountain Christian Camp was held the week of July 13-20, 2002. This camp has been an annual tradition in the Nebraska District for over 30 years. For about the last 20 years, the camp has been at a site near Leadville, Colo. Here the 130 campers enjoy a refreshing rinse with the hose. The camp is run for those heading into grades six through nine.

Dakota-Montana

On Nov. 17, 2002, members of Redeemer, Hettinger, N.D., held a retirement dinner for organist Ragna Earsley. Earsley was a WELS organist for 49 years.



Dakota-Montana

Members of Immanuel, Ward, S.D., held a service to commemorate 100 years in their current church building on July 21, 2002. The service was conducted in both German and English and had the feeling of a service from 100 years ago. Some members even dressed in period clothing. Pictured here are Dylan Kuehl and Edna Steuck, Immanuel's youngest and oldest members.



23 Lutherans in the 108th Congress—Twenty-three Lutherans—12 Democrats and 11 Republicans—are in the 108th Congress of the United States.

Catholics (149 members) make up the largest group in Congress, followed by Baptists (70) and Methodists (61). In addition, there will be 49 Presbyterians, 44 Episcopalians, 38 Jews, 24 nondenominational Protestants, 15 Mormons, and 11 nondenominational Christians.

Other religious groups include eight members of the United Church of Christ; five Christian Scientists; four members of the Assemblies of God; four members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); three members from the African Methodist Episcopal Church; three Universalist-Unitarians; three Eastern Orthodox Christians; two members of the Christian Reformed Church; two Seventh-day Adventists; and one each for the Quakers, Church of Christ, Congregational-Baptist, Community of Christ, Evangelical Methodist, and Evangelical.

Seven members reported no religious identification.

Bush administration to cover unborn children in health program—

In a major victory for pro-life advocates, the Bush administration said that it will consider unborn children as persons eligible for health insurance

coverage under the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The administration said it is making the change to enable more low-income pregnant women to obtain prenatal care. Under the new rule, states could extend health insurance to unborn children from the moment of conception by enrolling them in the CHIP program.

The debate will now shift to states, which must decide whether to add unborn children to their programs.

[LifeWire, Oct. 3, 2002]

Lutheran nonprofit tops list of largest nonprofit groups—

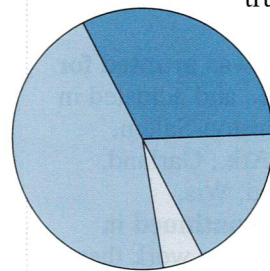
Lutheran Services in America topped the list of the United States' largest nonprofit groups, according to a survey by the *NonProfit Times*.

Lutheran Services in America is an alliance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and their nearly 300 social ministry organizations.

The National Council of YMCAs and the American Red Cross followed in second and third places, respectively.

Other faith-based groups in the top 10 were Catholic Charities USA in fourth place, United Jewish Communities in fifth place, Goodwill Industries International in sixth place, and the Salvation Army in seventh place.

Poll: America's trust in church/religion at low point—



American's trust in institutional religion is at its lowest point in 30 years, according to a Gallup poll.

Only 45 percent of Americans have a "great deal or quite a lot" of confidence in the church or organized religion. Thirty-two percent of people had "some" confidence, 18 percent had "very little," and three percent had none. Last year 60 percent had a "great deal or quite a lot" of confidence in the church/religion.

Confidence in the church/religion was sixth for the 16 institutions listed in the poll. The military came in first, followed by the police, the presidency, the U.S. Supreme Court, and banks. Falling behind the church, in order, were the medical system, public schools, television news, newspapers, Congress, the criminal justice system, organized labor, big business, Wall Street, and HMOs.

The poll of 1,020 adults has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

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.

A gift for the soul

Looking for a low-cost gift for a relative, friend, or neighbor? Feed their souls as well as their minds with *Forward in Christ* magazine. This gift is good for every month of the year:



January—Start the year out right. Give someone a gift that keeps giving year-round.



February—Give the one you love the gift that shows what real love is.

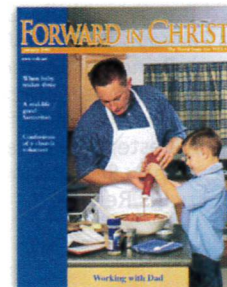


March—Need a unique birthday gift? Wrap up a gift subscription to *Forward in Christ* magazine.



April—Trying to fill Easter baskets? Give spiritual nourishment from *Forward in Christ*. Each issue brings the message of the risen Savior.

Call Northwestern Publishing House or order on-line today. 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee, 414/615-5785. Go to <www.nph.net> and search for *Forward in Christ* under periodicals. Charge it—Discover, MasterCard, or Visa—or bill it.





CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Borgwardt, John M.**, to exploratory, Waukesha, Wis.
- Johnson, Randall S.**, to Our Savior, Perry, Mich.
- Neumann, David M.**, to Our Savior, Monte Vista, Colo.
- Wagenknecht, Steven W.**, to Amazing Grace, Boise, Idaho
- Walters, Mark R.**, to St. John, Maribel, Wis.
- Zwieg, Larry G.**, to retirement

Teacher

- Brohn, James R.**, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.
- Frey, Elaine R.**, to Peace Of Our Savior, New Carlisle, Ohio
- Lemke, Shirley A.**, to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.
- Pasbrig, Katherine J.**, to St. John, Milwaukee

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 57th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 28-Aug. 1 at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Details will be announced later.

ANNIVERSARIES

- La Crosse, Wis.**—Mount Calvary (75). Feb. 15. Service, 6 PM. Feb. 16. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. German dinner to follow. Pastor Ed Ungemach, 608/784-5324.
- Phoenix, Ariz.**—Arizona Lutheran Retirement Center. Mar. 2. Open house, 3 to 4 PM. Remembrances, 4 to 4:15 PM. Food served, 4:30 to 5:30 PM. Tours until 6 PM. 602/995-2541.
- Phoenix, Ariz.**—Arizona Lutheran Academy (25). Mar. 23. Service, 4 PM. Meal to follow. 602/268-8686.
- Fairmont, Minn.**—Shepherd of the Lakes (25). Sept. 28. Service, 3 PM. Luncheon to follow. 507/238-1269.

COMING EVENTS

- Mission and Ministry Seminar**—Feb. 4-6, 7:30 AM to 12:30 PM. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Caleb Schoeneck, 920/564-6049.
- Alzheimer presentation**—hosted by Fox Valley OWLS. Feb. 15. 1:30 PM. Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis. Herbert Grams, <hmgrams@aol.com>.
- Martin Luther College Choir tour**—
 - Feb. 22, St. Paul, Bloomer, Wis., 7 PM.
 - Feb. 23, St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis., 10:30 AM; Riverview, Appleton, Wis., 7 PM.
 - Feb. 24, Manitowoc LHS, Manitowoc, Wis., 9:45 AM; St. John, Lomira, Wis., 7 PM.
 - Feb. 25, Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee, 8:30 AM; First, Lake Geneva, Wis., 7 PM.
 - Feb. 26, Grace, St. Joseph, Mich., 7 PM.
 - Feb. 27, Huron Valley LHS, Westland, Mich., 1 PM; St. Paul, Livonia, Mich., 7 PM.
 - Feb. 28, First, Racine, Wis., 7 PM.
 - Mar. 1, Grace, Milwaukee, 6 PM.
 - Mar. 2, Siloah, Milwaukee, 10:30 AM.
- Retreats**—
 - Pathways to Christ Retreat—Mar. 21-23. Hawthorne Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. Dorothy Laabs, 920/235-6495.
 - Today's Christian Women's Retreat—Mar. 21-23. Sheraton Lansing Hotel, Lansing, Mich. For more information, visit <www.tcw.org> or e-mail <info@tcw.org>.
 - Christian Woman Today Spring Retreat—Mar.

28-30. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262/784-0412.

- Spiritual Renewal Weekend for Women**—Apr. 4-6. Radisson Plaza Hotel, Rochester, Minn. Bev, 507/931-3945.
- Lutheran Pioneer National Convention**—Apr. 26, St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis. Opening service, 8:30 AM. Closing service, 5 PM. Banquet, 6:30 PM. To register, call 888/214-8225.
- WELS Tech 2003**—Technology conference for pastors, teachers, and laypeople. June 22-25. Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis. <www.wels.net/welstech>. 414/256-3210.
- Lutheran Women's Missionary Society 40th Annual National Convention**—June 26-29, Madison, Wis. Hosted by Capitol & Rock River Circuits. 414/321-6212.
- Good Shepherd Bible Camp**—Thousand Oaks, Calif. July 13-19. Charles Found, 805/492-8943.

NEEDED

- Christian couples**—to serve at the Lutheran Mobile Clinic in Malawi. A three-year commitment. Female member should be a registered nurse and male member to serve as administrative coordinator. Kathie Wendland, 920/682-5694.
- Registered nurses**—for medical mission work in Zambia. Kathie Wendland, 920/682-5694.
- Newsletter editor**—WELS Commission on Special Ministries is seeking a volunteer editor for their SHARE (Special Help and Resource Exchange) newsletter. The quarterly newsletter provides information to parents, teachers, pastors, and other WELS members who are involved in spiritual training of individuals with cognitive disabilities. Bruce Cuppan, 920/922-8672.
- Picture rolls or flip chart**—with large, colorful Bible story pictures. To be used for Jesus Cares ministry. Betz Dobberstein, 605/342-8052.

SERVICE TIMES

- Louisville, Ky.**—Hope. Sunday worship, 8:15 & 11 AM. Sunday school and Bible class, 9:30 AM. Steven Lange, 502/423-1211.
- Rhineland, Wis.**—Zion. Saturday worship, 7 PM. Sunday worship, 8 & 10:30 AM. David Sternberg, 715/365-9357.
- O'Fallon, Ill.**—Christ Our Savior is an outreach arm of Martin Luther, St. Louis, Mo. Bible study, fellowship, and a short devotional service on Tuesday evenings, 7-8:30 PM. John Chapas, 618/632-1160.

NAMES WANTED

- The Villages, Fla. (Lady Lake, Lake, Sumter, and Marion County area)**—Herb Schaefer, 352/753-7515.
- St. Louis Metro East/Scott Air Force Base, Ill.**—John Chapas, 618/632-1160.
- Europe**—Civilian and military people. Services held in London area; four locations in Germany; and Zurich, Switzerland. Need names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Contact Michael Schroeder, <welschaplain@t-online.de>.

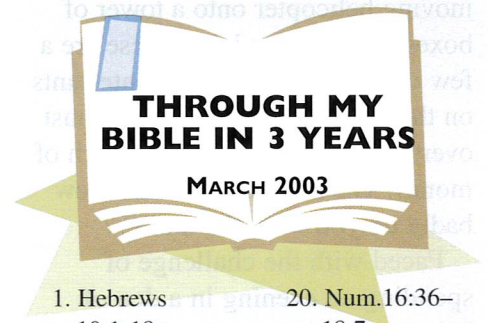
POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Teach English in a foreign country—Has the Lord ever laid on your heart a desire to share Jesus with people of a foreign country? If so, this may be the opportunity you are looking for. We have English language teaching posi-

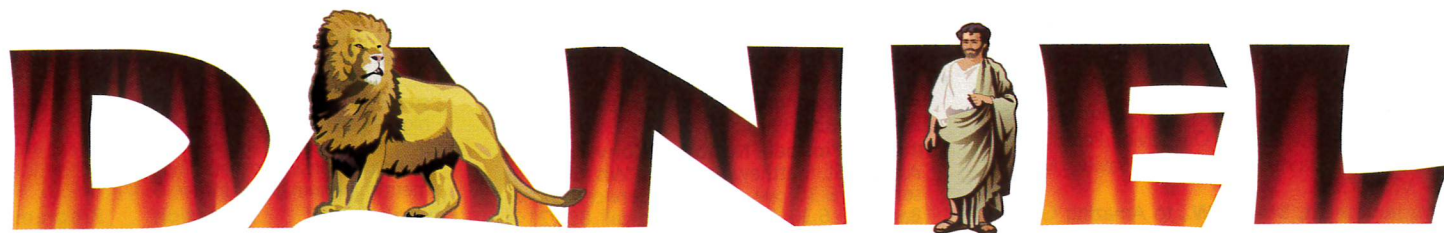
tions open beginning Sept. 1. Travel, housing, health insurance, and a subsistence salary are paid for qualified applicants. Teachers instruct students in spoken English at grade school, high school, and college levels. College graduates in education are preferred, but we are willing to consider others. Ten-month commitment minimum. Joel Lintner, 651/770-6532.

Environmental Education Program Director—for Camp Phillip, Inc., Wautoma, Wis. Must be eligible for a call into the WELS public ministry and be spiritually mature. College degree preferred, although other education and experience will be considered. Must enjoy working outdoors with campers of all ages; possess good communication skills; and present camp programs with enthusiasm, a sense of humor, patience, and self-control. Contact Tom Towner, chairman of the personnel committee, by Feb. 20, 912 W Parkway Blvd, Appleton WI 54914 or <cpxec@yahoo.com>.

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



- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Hebrews 10:1-18 | 20. Num. 16:36-18:7 |
| 2. Heb. 10:19-39 | 21. Num. 18:8-19:22 |
| 3. Heb. 11:1-22 | 22. Num. 20 |
| 4. Heb. 11:23-40 | 23. Num. 21 |
| 5. Heb. 12:1-17 | 24. Num. 22 |
| 6. Heb. 12:18-29 | 25. Num. 23, 24 |
| 7. Heb. 13:1-8 | 26. Num. 25, 26 |
| 8. Heb. 13:9-25 | 27. Num. 27, 36 |
| 9. Numbers 1, 2 | 28. Num. 28, 29 |
| 10. Num. 3, 4 | 29. Num. 30 |
| 11. Num. 5:1-6:21 | 30. Num. 31 |
| 12. Num. 6:22-7:89 | 31. Num. 32 |
| 13. Num. 8:1-9:14 | |
| 14. Num. 9:15-10:36 | |
| 15. Num. 11, 12 | |
| 16. Num. 13:1-14:10a | |
| 17. Num. 14:10-45 | |
| 18. Num. 15 | |
| 19. Num 16:1-35 | |



A witness of salvation

Daniel's "Fear of God Factor" inspires all Christians to put their full trust in the God who saves us from landing in Satan's den.

Philip L. Kieselhorst

Tarantulas crawling all over your face and down the back of your neck. Dining on as many night crawlers as you can eat in five minutes. Jumping from a moving helicopter onto a tower of boxes floating in a lake. These are a few of the challenges the contestants on the TV show "Fear Factor" must overcome in order to win a bunch of money. The main question is: How badly do you want the money?

Faced with the challenge of spending an evening in a den of lions, the main question for Daniel was: How badly do you want to worship God? Daniel's "Fear of God Factor" inspires all Christians to put their full trust in the God who saves.

The challenge

Daniel's work was so exceptional that "the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom" (Daniel 6:3). When some became jealous of him, the only thing they could find to use against him was his uncompromising allegiance to his God. When King Darius signed a decree that sentenced to death anyone who prayed to anyone other than the king, the challenge was set.

The fear factor behind this challenge was off the charts. Everyone

knows what a group of powerful lions will do to helpless prey. It would seem that in this situation, fear of being ripped to shreds by sharp claws and teeth would be the only factor on a person's mind.

Fear of God, love for God, and trust in God are the most influential factors motivating a believer's heart.

But Daniel showed that more powerful factors were involved. "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room . . . Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Daniel 6:10). Fear of God, love for God, and trust in God are the most influential factors motivating a believer's heart.

Unless one understands what God has done to inspire such devotion and admiration from his followers, a person will fail every challenge.

Salvation

Daniel knew why God had his full allegiance. Now everyone would know. "When [Darius] came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished

voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'

Daniel answered, 'O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight' " (Daniel 6:20-22).

In response to this discovery, the king wrote to all throughout the land: "[The God of Daniel] rescues and he saves. . . . He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions" (Daniel 6:27).

Although God has performed a multitude of miracles that inspire our admiration and devotion, one miracle inspires us more than all others: God saved us from hell. Far worse than being thrown into a den of lions would be landing in Satan's den where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. God sent his Son to shut the mouth of Satan and free us from hell.

The fear factor for following Jesus is off the charts. Fear disappears because Jesus rescued us from hell. Now it's time for everyone to know how God has won our full allegiance.



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

Love isn't always easy!

Valentine's Day paints a warm and friendly face on love. True love between marriage partners, parents and children, grandchildren, and friends is an attractive thing, a precious valentine from God. Like every good gift from God, it's to be appreciated and sustained.

But love isn't always easy! Our parents could tell us that, especially our mothers. Who, except a mother, can truly appreciate the hard labor of giving birth? Who, except a parent, can fully comprehend the internal struggle of wanting to say yes but having to say no to someone you love? And, of course, in the greatest display of love ever, Jesus experienced that love isn't always easy.

Besides often being difficult, love often involves sacrifice and hard choices. It feels the pain of those who are affected by the choices we make.

Right now, as a synod, we've had to make some hard budget choices. It seems plainly evident we can't do everything we've done before as a synod, at least not now.

A lot of reasons could be given. Much of it results from the current economic conditions in our country. For example, a large foundation, which has very generously supported the work of our synod for a decade, has found it necessary to cut back its still generous gift to WELS for the Lord's work by nearly \$3 million for next year.

The potential cuts, for all of us, are painful. It's entirely possible that world missionaries will be recalled. Professors at our worker training schools may need to receive calls to serve elsewhere in the Lord's kingdom. Synod administration and programs will be cut back or eliminated. The full increased compensation for synod-supported called workers approved by the last synod convention needs to be delayed.

None of these cuts are painless. They all affect people, people we know and care about. It's another example that love isn't always easy.

Our Savior's love certainly wasn't easy! The pain was far more intense than the nails piercing his hands and feet. The greater agonies were the thoughtless actions of his friends and the deliberate rejection by his enemies. The greatest agony was carrying the burden of our sin.

And yet he bore it all, for us. And the results, for us, are spectacular: sin's sentence suspended, death defeated, a heavenly home!

Love gives birth to love—first Jesus', then ours. This is the time to model Jesus' love for us. As a synod, congregations, individuals, too, let's look at our priorities. What are we doing and what more could we do to serve our Savior?

Christian stewardship involves our whole life: time, talents, treasure. It's all God's, his generous gifts entrusted to our thoughtful, loving management.

Love isn't always easy; it may involve sacrifice. Yet can we truly speak of sacrifice if we are giving up something that isn't ours? We are merely giving back to our God what is rightfully his. When we do, it's encouraging for us to see how God always supports us in what we do for him. And it's always encouraging for others to see how our self-sacrificing love, just like his, unselfishly keeps reaching out to others.

The too-rosy Valentine's Day picture of love is seldom fully realized. The truth is that love isn't always so easy. And yet, through God's gift of love to us in his Son, our love, even when it isn't easy, paints a much more enduring picture. Even when love isn't easy, God's eternal love for us makes it easier for us to love others, always reflecting God's unselfish love.



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

Love gives birth to love—first Jesus', then ours. This is the time to model his love for us.

IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: BEING BORN AGAIN

Question: Many surveys speak about born-again Christians. What does it mean to be born again? How should I answer if someone asks if I'm born again?

Answer: Understood biblically, being "born again" is a powerful picture of the miracle of faith the Holy Spirit works in us. Because of original sin, we were not "alive" spiritually when we were physically born. Scripture tells us that we were "dead in [our] transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). But the Spirit gave us a second birth. In our baptism we were "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). That's why Paul calls Baptism "the washing of rebirth" (Titus 3:5).

Being born again is the same as being brought to faith. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Just as we weren't responsible for our physical birth, so we weren't responsible for our spiritual birth. Through the gospel's power in the means of grace the Spirit gave birth to us as children of God.

However, that's not what many mean when they speak of being "born again." The evangelical author and pollster George Barna asks this question to help determine whether someone is born again: "Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?" (*Real Teens*, p. 122). Notice how being born again subtly shifts from an activity of God to an activity of man? I must point to a time when I committed my life to Jesus and feel that this commitment is still important to me today. If I can't say that, I may not be "born again."

Do you see the danger here? Distorting "born again" from a picture of God's merciful working into a term stressing human commitment places me on the slippery ground of the sinful heart. The hardest thing for a believer

to believe is that he believes. Because we still possess a sinful nature, we wrestle with doubts and temptations. Satan exploits those moments to try to convince us that our faith is a sham. If being born again means that I must be sure I've made a commitment that is still important to me today, then many days I'll conclude that I'm not born again—that I have fallen from faith.

Maybe I never really was a Christian!

Certainly God gives us days we feel joyful in our salvation. But Jesus, not our joy, saves us. Certainly we want to feel forgiven, but it is not feeling forgiven that pardons us before God. It's his declaration of "not guilty" through our crucified and risen Savior.

When I'm in doubt, Scripture doesn't send me to measure my level of commitment to Christ.

Scripture sends me to marvel at the level of Christ's commitment to me. My confidence before God is not built on the quality or quantity of my faith, but on the quality and quantity of Jesus' love for me.

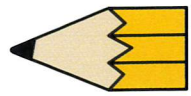
What happens when I take my eyes off myself and focus on Jesus? The Spirit who gave me a second birth through the gospel strengthens my faith through that same gospel.

How should you answer if asked: "Are you born again?" Are they asking whether you made a commitment to Christ that still makes a difference in your life? Then answer, "No!" Are they asking if you've been brought from death to life through the Spirit's power in the gospel? Then answer emphatically, "Yes!"

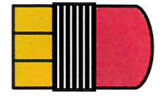
Richard Gurgel is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

Have a question you want answered? Send it to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; <fic@sab.wels.net>. Look on-line at <www.wels.net/sab/qa.html> for more questions and answers.

Being "born again" is a powerful picture of the miracle of faith the Holy Spirit works in us.



POTLUCK POLL RESULTS



In October 2002 we asked you to tell us your favorite person in the Bible (besides Jesus) whose faith holds special meaning for you. Here are some of your replies:

THE CANAANITE WOMAN. “I admire this woman because of her persistent faith, which even Jesus acknowledged [when he] stated she was ‘a woman of great faith’ (Matthew 15:21-28).”

Luciana Donaldson, Nepean, Ontario, Canada

PAUL. “From the time of his conversion his faith never wavered. Whether he stood before King Agrippa or the common man, he was never ashamed to proclaim the gospel.”

Vivian Kemp, Milwaukee, Wis.

RUTH. “The woman of steadfast loyalty, persevering obedience, and gentle love most clearly exhibits the character and faith I strive for.”

Patricia Clark, Belle Plaine, Minn.

ABRAHAM. “The verse that I love the most [when Abraham was tested to sacrifice Isaac] is when Abraham, speaking to his servants, says, ‘We [he and his son] will worship and then we will come back to you.’”

Robert Adrian, Milwaukee, Wis.

MARTHA. “In John 11:20-27, she is an example for us, since Jesus teaches her and she has the opportunity to confess: ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’”

Ruth Sellnow, Watertown, Wis.

HANNAH. “[She] exemplifies the power of a praying mother. From before conception on, I am sure that Hannah faithfully prayed for Samuel throughout her life. In hopes that we might follow her lead, we named our son Samuel too!”

Christian Doebler

JOHN. “His wonderful Gospel paints such a beautiful picture of our Holy Triune—yet one living—God of Israel and his love for us.”

Earl Reichert, New London, Wis.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS. “[He] came to Christ with nothing in his hands but nails and asked to be remembered in Christ’s kingdom.”

Dave Dahlke, Port Orchard, Wash.

ABRAHAM. “At God’s request, he left all that was familiar to him . . . to go to a place that was totally unfamiliar to him. Yet he followed God’s leading.”

Howard Maertz, La Crescent, Minn.

JOSIAH. “Wouldn’t it be a blessing if the fervent zeal and righteous enthusiasm of this young person would characterize more young people today?”

Russ Weir

JOSEPH. “His faith is an example. Joseph’s love for his brothers, demonstrated by his weeping for joy and his forgiveness, is a result of his faith. His love for God is evident in his love for others.”

Duane Timm, Pompano Beach, Fla.

PAUL. “Because he spread the Word, it was carried up to northern Europe and eventually to my parents and me. Also, even though he was in prison, he never gave up. His faith was so strong!”

Lill Mundt, Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

MOSES. “He didn’t want to be a leader, he doubted his abilities, and his temper was a recurring weakness. Yet, he accomplished the impossible through faith!”

Paul Hough, Bradenton, Fla.

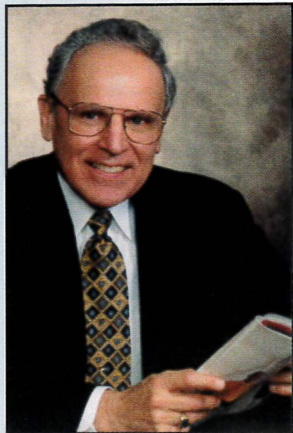
Picture this



Colton (two) and Skyler (four) Mauch collect hymnbooks at the end of the service at St. Paul, Las Animas, Colo. Let none say that they cannot serve the Lord.

Submitted by Hilda Kretzmann

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



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

Every church can be well served to ask whether it needs to change and to face the challenges that come with the changes that are happening around it.

Church and change

“Change!” The very word scares me. Often, I have felt, people want to change things just for the sake of change. I reason that such change is rarely, if ever, for the better.

Besides, why should I change when I'm perfectly happy with things the way they are?

In my church those feelings intensify. There I find something constant in a world that changes daily in spite of my feelings. There I meet to listen to my God and Savior, who never changes, and to bring him praise with others who share my faith.

Still, change happens, outside and inside of the church. It's not all good, but some of it is—not only good, but necessary. In fact, even when we don't think we change, we do. For example, our church body has been changing by more than 1,000 fewer members each year for the past decade. Yesterday's thriving neighborhood church has become today's struggling inner-city church. In the 1990s, the church enjoyed prosperity; now it struggles with some serious adversity. Forty years ago, we were still primarily a regional church. Now we serve throughout the United States.

So, I have learned that change is inevitable. The real question: How does change affect my church? Put another way: Does my church need to change to help its ministry? An example is that the inner-city congregation intensifies efforts, maybe tries new programs, to reach its newest neighbors with the gospel.

So, does your church need to change? Ultimately, you and your congregation must answer that question. If you answer “yes,” only you can decide how. But, all of us must insist that any change must serve the good news of Jesus Christ, of him crucified and risen. The Word of God must not be changed nor relegated to a “by the way” status in the process.

Every church can be well served to ask whether it needs to change and to face the challenges that come with the changes that are happening around it. Ask the question in the spirit of getting more people to listen to God's Word more often. Consider the following challenges:

1. Are we relevant to today's people? Don't misunderstand the question. The gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant to all people in all times. The question asks what we are doing to show them how relevant it is. Can we find better ways to get people to listen, so that they might find out?

2. How are we responding to the gospel imperative, “Go”? Are we doing as much to reach the lost as we do to comfort the found (ourselves)?

3. Are we providing opportunities to get more people—men, women, youth—involved in our church's mission and ministry?

4. Has the Lord given us new tools and new opportunities to communicate his Word that we should use? Is there a cable ministry, a prison ministry, a youth ministry—open to us? Has a new ethnic community sprung up nearby?

5. How do we show that we care with a Christlike love for the souls God puts us in contact with? Do we visit people who visit us? Do we offer help to the needy in the community?

Space doesn't allow us to explore the challenges more thoroughly here or to talk more about some of the risks that come with change. However, we can hardly avoid the subject. For now let it be said that the changing world around us creates increasing opportunities to serve God in ministry. Pray that he who changes not will show us the way and be with us as we go.

Gary P. Baumler

Lights! Cameras! Produce!



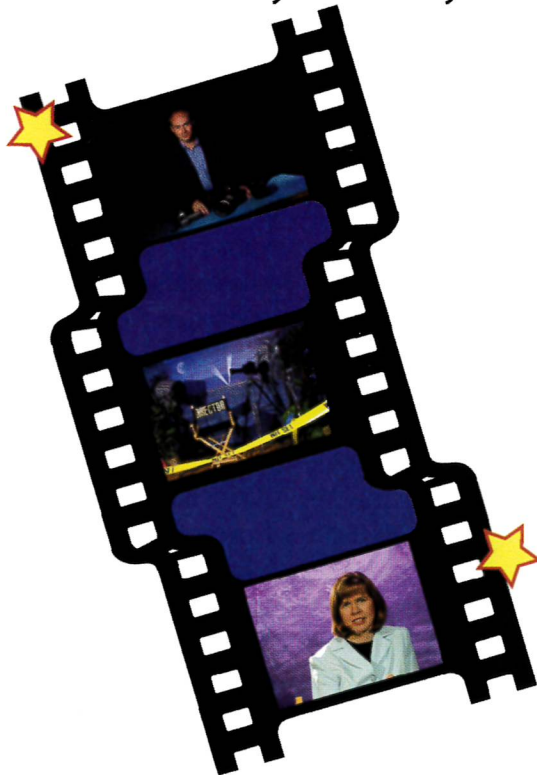
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Product number 388860 (Available after February 15, 2003)

A slippery slope

The world invites us to step off the solid rock of safety, to test the slopes, so to speak. The devil knows that once you start down the slippery slope, it becomes harder to regain a solid footing.

Jon D. Buchholz

The view is breathtaking, but the footing is precarious.

I'm standing on a narrow ridge of rock in Mt. Rainier National Park. Six hundred feet directly below me lie the placid waters of Lake Eunice.

Across the lake rises Mt. Rainier in all its majestic beauty. At 14,410 feet, the summit of Rainier is nearly 9,000 feet higher than where I'm standing.

At my feet, the ridge drops away sharply. The steep incline is covered with loose rock for perhaps 40 feet before it falls off to a sheer cliff down to the lake. It's taken me a half-hour of huffing and puffing to climb the steep trail from the lake up to this ridge. All I would have to do is lose my balance and slip, and the trip down would be a lot faster than the climb up!

As I contemplate the surroundings, the term "slippery slope" comes to mind. The scenery is beautiful, but where I'm standing could be deadly. One misstep and I'm a goner.

I can picture what it would be like to slip. I'd try to grab onto something solid, but I can't see anything that

looks as if it would hold fast. I can picture myself sliding down the loose dirt and gravel, raising a cloud of dust, dragging loose rocks with me, faster and faster until . . . nothing but thin air as I go over the edge of the precipice. I wonder how big a splash I'd make when I'd hit the water.

*Take your stand on Christ!
The view is breathtaking,
and the footing is rock solid!*

Walking in the way of the Lord is like picking your way along a narrow ridge of solid rock. On either side lies a slippery slope that falls off to perdition. Once you start to slide, it's not easy to get back onto a solid footing. It's an easy, quick way down. And it's not the slide or the fall that kills you. It's the hard landing at the bottom.

The world invites us to wander from the path, to step off the solid rock of safety, to test the slopes, so to speak. The devil knows that once you start down the slippery slope, you pick up momentum, and it becomes harder—perhaps even impossible—to regain a solid footing.

I don't know when the trip down the slippery slope started. It was probably

before me. But I know that my generation picked up speed, and we haven't slowed down since. The cloud of dust is just a little bigger, and the avalanche is a little stronger, as we hurtle downhill a little faster . . . until finally?

Finally, we hit the end: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction" (Galatians 6:7,8).

Christians living in a world sliding toward inevitable destruction have only one hope. That's the lifeline that attaches us to Christ. Jesus repeatedly pulls us back from the precipice of destruction. His forgiveness bandages up the scrapes and the bruises from our slippery misadventures. His love plants our feet securely on the rock of his grace. He holds us by the hand and even carries us as we traverse the narrow and difficult path that leads to eternal life. He fixes our eyes on our goal of eternity with him forever.

Take your stand on Christ! The view is breathtaking, and the footing is rock solid!

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

