

# FORWARD IN CHRIST

September 2003

The Word from the WELS

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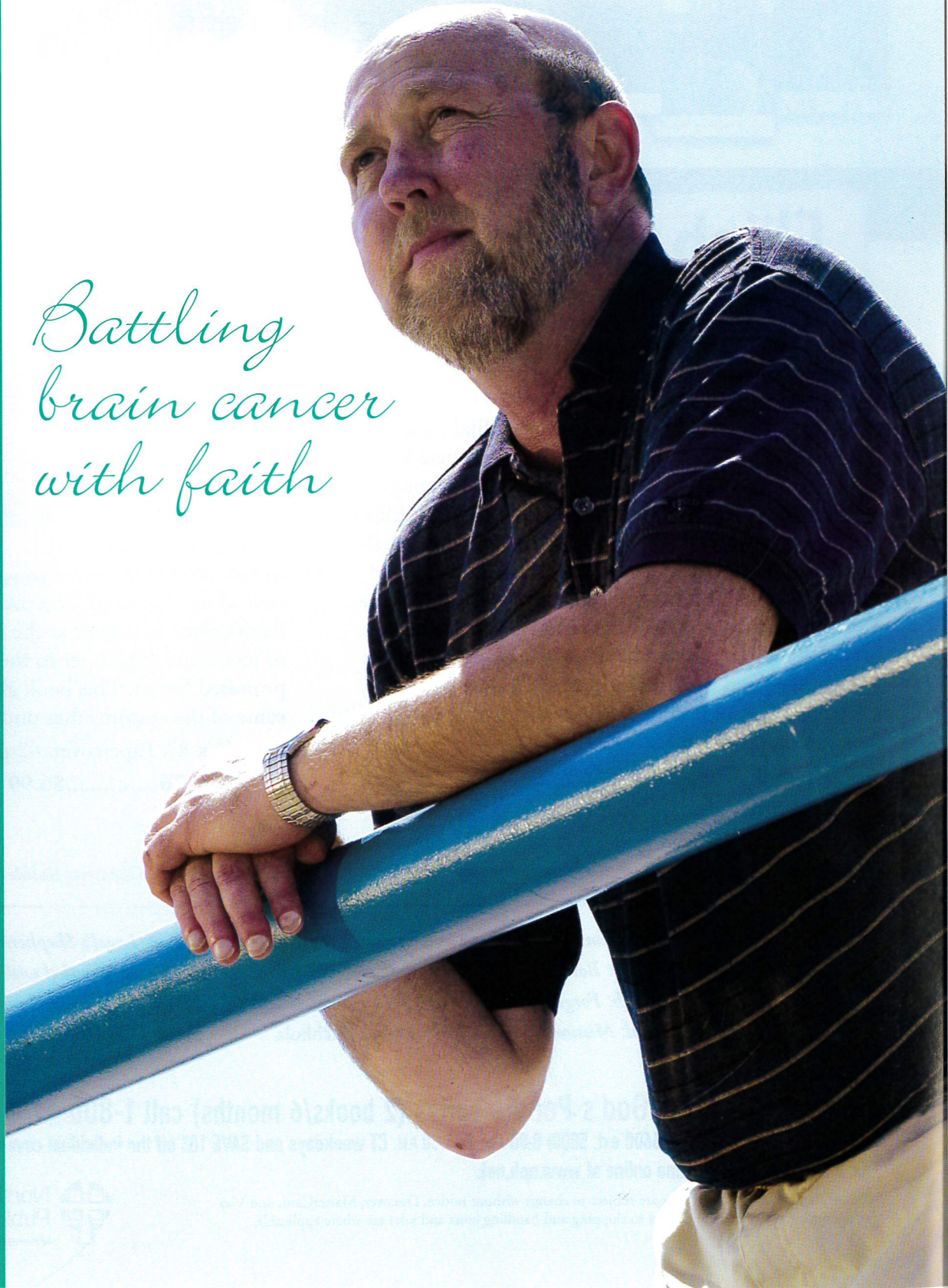


A spiritual  
journey in  
Cameroon

A 10th-century  
mystic in a  
20th-century  
body

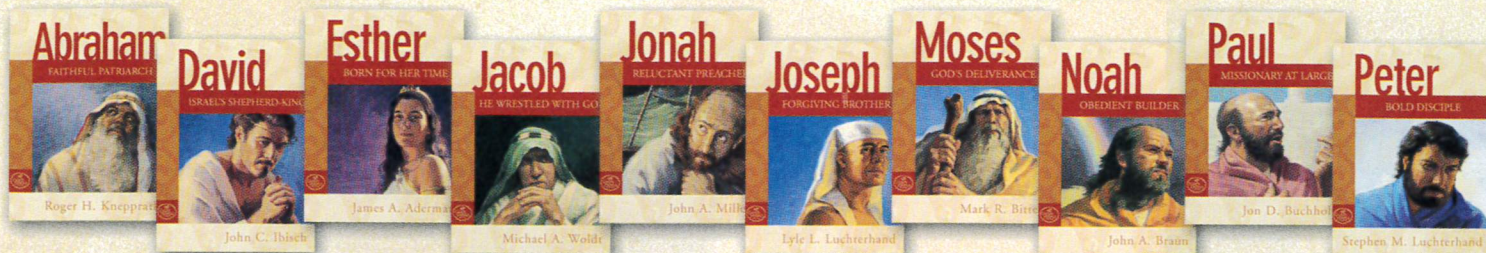
Martin  
Luther's  
family life

*Battling  
brain cancer  
with faith*

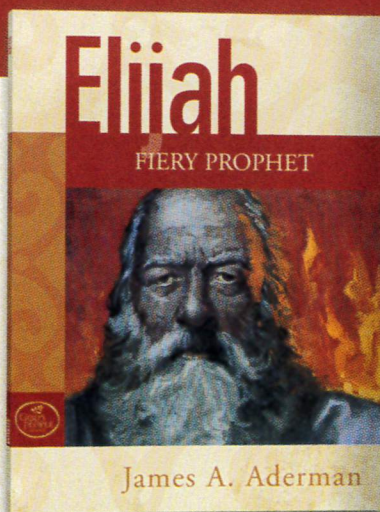


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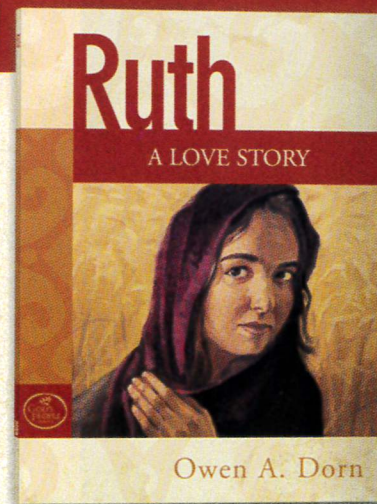
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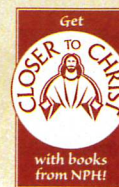
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# Not lucky, but blessed

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4*

Thomas A. Westra

**H**ave you heard about the lost-and-found notice: “Lost dog: three legs; blind in left eye; missing right ear; tail broken; recently hit by a truck; answers to the name ‘Lucky’ ”? Maybe there’s been a time or two in your life when you felt like old “Lucky” yourself.

## We will have troubles

Concerning our life on this earth, the apostle Paul wrote: “We are hard pressed on every side . . . perplexed . . . persecuted . . . struck down” (2 Corinthians 4:8,9). Yet, the Bible calls us “blessed.”

Some people seem to go through life with a Pollyanna attitude. Life is always great for them—or so they would have you believe. The implication sometimes seems to be that if you are a “good Christian,” then life will always be great for you, too. But recall Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44) or at the funeral of Lazarus (John 11:38). He was at times sad and troubled. “A man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53:3) is the way that Isaiah describes him. And didn’t Jesus say that we would also have trouble in this world (John 16:33)?

## We can’t focus on our troubles

Perhaps, however, we carry more sorrow than necessary because we focus on the trouble and not on the strength and the hope that God gives. Paul said, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” We are not crushed,

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in despair, or destroyed, because we have not been abandoned by our heavenly Father. Our God is with us. More than that—he is with us as our brother, the brother who loved us enough to give himself as the ransom price for our sins.

A husband and wife let all kinds of misery come into their marriage when they focus exclusively on a problem instead of focusing on the tremendous blessings God gives them in their marriage and on his presence and promise to help them. In a healthy marriage, a couple not only knows their weaknesses but also their strengths, and they know their real strength is God’s presence and promise.

As a church body, we can focus too much on declining revenues, decreasing elementary school enroll-

ments, lack of numerical growth, etc. I’m not suggesting we bury our heads in the sand and ignore the challenges facing us, but if we are to meet these challenges, then we must focus on our strengths, such as a worker training system that prepares pastors and teachers who are well-equipped with God’s Word and with a Spirit-given desire to nurture God’s people and to reach the lost.

## Heaven outweighs our troubles

Our real strength is this: our God goes with us. He has put into our hands the precious treasure of the good news of his love, and he has promised that the gates of hell themselves cannot stand against his Word. Now that’s effective ministry!

The apostle Paul also wrote: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:16,17). How awesome that glory, which will be ours when we stand with our Savior in his heavenly kingdom! It far outweighs whatever we are suffering now and makes all our problems seem “light and momentary.”

Jesus, lead us on.



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

## FORWARD IN CHRIST

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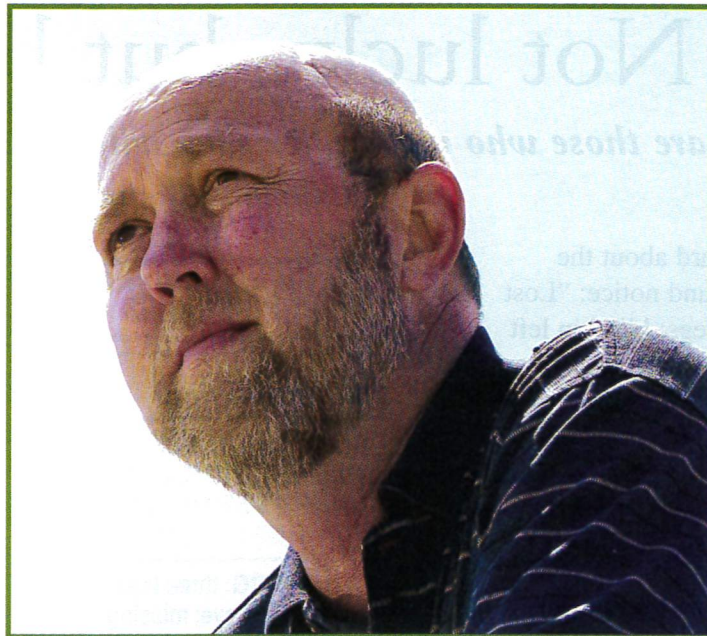
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Kurt Troge feels that every Christian's life, not just those whose lives are touched by cancer, should be an example to the world around us.

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## bits & pieces



God always has a plan for us. We may not always know what it is, but the directions our lives take—whether good or bad—follow his plan. Several articles this month illustrate this truth.

- Our cover story details the miracles in Kurt Troge's life since he discovered just over a year ago that he had brain cancer (p. 8).
- A volunteer to Cameroon had her own reasons for going to Africa. But God also had a plan for her, a plan that led to "A transformation of faith" (p. 10).
- Martin Luther wasn't sure he wanted to get married. But God's plan for Luther included a wife and family. Read more about "Luther: the family man" on p. 21.
- Sometimes it takes a while for us to see God's plan. A story that spans 70 years helps one teenager understand that God is in control. Check out "One step" (p. 20).



A new series starting this month takes us on a walk with St. John through his Gospel. Here you will not only learn more about the disciple whom Jesus loved but also become closer to the Son of God. The first article, "Soaring like an eagle," is on the back page.



For the past four months, you've learned more about how WELS is organized and why it is organized that way. This month discover how we can all walk together toward a common goal as we conclude the series, "WELS at work" (p. 16).

—JKW

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PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

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God's love and grace are on display as Kurt Troge battles brain cancer.

*Martin A. Moldenhauer*

PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

## 10 A transformation of faith

Jesus brought me to Cameroon not only to do his work but also to be transformed.

*Laura A. Bublitz*

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## 12 Live from Lomira

God knows when your 15 minutes of fame are coming. Even more than that, he will give you the words when the time comes.

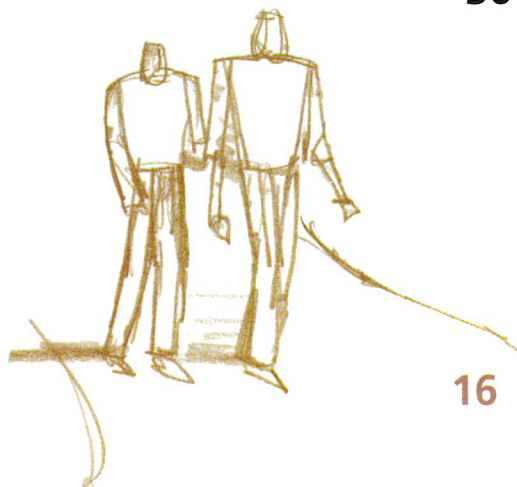
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The human soul won't find peace either in amassing material or shedding it. The soul finds rest only in the material God.

*Wayne A. Laitinen*

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*Peter Hagen*

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Although reluctant to marry, Luther changed his mind when God sent him a wife.

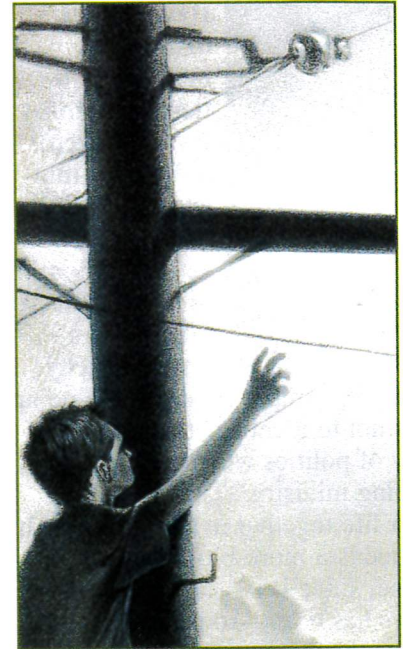
*Richard D. Balge*

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John's Gospel lifts readers to the throne of God and unwraps mysteries not for our understanding but for our worship.

*Theodore J. Hartwig*



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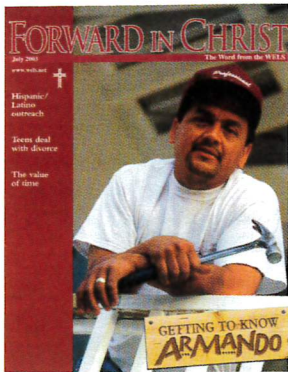
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**Watershed decisions**



**David Clark's distinction between politics and ministry ["Church politics or ministry?"; July] was helpful, yet it was too dismissive in touching on a very touchy**

**subject** by simply saying, "The point . . . is not to identify others who are guilty of politics when they should be doing ministry." This is an area of our life together in Christ's church that needs a more blunt and direct exposé, since it is—and probably always has been—so pervasive and potentially destructive. Called workers and lay members alike are guilty of giving in to this temptation of "seeking personal or partisan gain, scheming, opportunism, etc.," putting ourselves, our desires, our personal agendas ahead of the cause of Christ and the common and individual welfare of our brothers and sisters in our Savior.

Many times the "political" member or minister may well have blinders on his or her own political machinations in Christ's kingdom, and so that is why a loud call to repentance is in order for all of us on this touchy topic.

*Jonathan Rupprecht*  
 *Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

This letter will not appear until after the synod convention. No matter, because **I want to address a long-term solution to the deficit problem**, and the convention must address the problem on a short-term basis.


The number that is frequently mentioned when talking about the deficit is \$10,000,000. That's a lot of money, when you look at it from the point of view of those in synodical administration who must wrestle with all of our financial woes. But

if you turn around and look at it from the point of view of the person in the pew, there is a lesson to be learned.

WELS has a membership of around 400,000. A simple division—one that many can do in their heads—tells us that the enormous sum of money causing all kinds of alarm, hand wringing, and finger pointing amounts to about \$25 for each of us. Which of us has not spent \$25 foolishly, perhaps on impulse, this year?

Where should fingers be pointed? Right back at ourselves! Malachi, 400 years before Christ, had it right when he said, "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord." A little farther on, the Lord through Malachi asks, "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. . . . Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse . . .".

Don't point fingers at the economy or at the stock market. Point your finger at yourself! Are you bringing the whole tithe? Very few of us are. If we were, the [financial] troubles of this present time would not be with us.

*Richard Engelmann*  
 *Cincinnati, Ohio*

**Thank you for that great law/gospel picture** of shock and awe ["Shock and awe," June].

*William R. Brassow*  
*Saginaw, Michigan*

**Re: "In the cross hairs" [July]. The article [on rapture] interested me and brought back a few memories.**

I have worked with quite a few people who believe in the false rapture. It gave me an opportunity to use Scripture to let them know what else the Bible has to say. However, their concerns always centered around interpreting prophecy—mostly Daniel and Revelation; the tribulation; the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth; whether they would be part of the "rapture;"

whether they would be part of the 1,000-year kingdom of Christ on earth; and what will happen if they aren't "raptured" and have to become "underground" Christians fearing for their lives and more.

I never heard them say anything about faith in Christ and the comfort, peace, and hope that believers in Christ have.

It is important to pray for these people and to witness to them whenever or wherever we meet. Quite often people who appear on Christian TV or radio who believe in the false rapture speak of all these things as something to look forward to. I didn't get that impression from the folks I've met.

*Evelyn Drews*  
*St. Francis, Wisconsin*

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**THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS**  
 OCTOBER 2003

1. 1 Kings 9:1-10:13	15. Jn. 1:35-51
2. 1 Kgs. 10:14-11:43	16. Jn. 2:1-22
3. 1 Kgs. 12:1-32	17. Jn. 2:23-3:21
4. 1 Kgs. 12:33-13:34	18. Jn. 3:22-36
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6. 1 Kgs. 15:1-16:7	20. Jn. 4:27-54
7. 1 Kgs. 16:8-34	21. Jn. 5:1-29
8. 1 Kgs. 17,18	22. Jn. 5:30-47
9. 1 Kgs. 19	23. Jn. 6:1-21
10. 1 Kgs. 20	24. Jn. 6:22-40
11. 1 Kgs. 21	25. Jn. 6:41-71
12. 1 Kgs. 22	26. Jn. 7:1-24
13. John 1:1-18	27. Jn. 7:25-52
14. Jn. 1:19-34	28. Jn. 7:53-8:29
	29. Jn. 8:30-59
	30. Jn. 9
	31. Jn. 10:1-21

# Antidote to Internet smut

Armin J. Panning

The federal government has recently passed significant legislation allowing people to sign up on a “no call” list. The list is intended to keep telemarketers from forcing themselves on people with unwanted products or services.

At the same time formal legislative steps are also being taken to curb yet another problem, the objectionable Internet sites and unsolicited e-mails that have mushroomed of late. Many of them appeal to people’s greed or their fears. These are bad enough, but an even greater threat is the absolutely filthy offerings that are cropping up everywhere. Blatant pornography appealing to the lust of the flesh abounds! Legislation is recognizing this danger and allowing libraries to “filter” what is permitted to enter the public sector via the Internet. These filters can certainly help protect impressionable young minds against the perverted practices and immoral “pleasures” of the world.

It really shouldn’t surprise us that the world actively lures others in. Such activity is precisely what Paul describes when he writes, “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32).

Jesus didn’t filter out the world for his disciples when on Maundy Thursday he prayed to his heavenly Father, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Paul also acknowledges the impossibility of getting away from immoral people when he tells the Corinthians, “In that case you would have to leave this world” (1 Corinthians 5:10).

The danger is compounded in that evil men in the service of Satan have a powerful ally in the Old Adam residing in every one of us. It is still true: “For out of the

heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality. . .” (Matthew 15:19). That’s our heart Christ is speaking of. With good reason Scripture urges: “Flee the evil desires of youth” (2 Timothy 2:22). We can and we should avoid temptations and compromising situations.

But the fact remains—we cannot totally get away from evil or completely filter out problems. Rather, we need to be prepared to withstand Satan’s inevitable attacks. But how? Note Christ’s approach in the upper room. For his disciples, left in the world, he prays, “Father . . . sanctify [keep holy] them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:1,17).

Paul provides a practical commentary on what this “word of truth” means when he instructs the Corinthians in the matter of morals. He tells them, “Flee from sexual immorality. . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). Therein lies the real antidote to the many temptations that daily beset us.

The world argues, “What I do privately is no one else’s business. As long as no one is hurt by what I do, who are you to tell me otherwise?”

Paul says, “You are not your own. You were bought at a price.”

When we remember whose we are, and the price Christ paid to make us his own, then there can be no response other than the one that the apostle assumes for his Corinthians when he urges them, “Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

*Armin Panning, a member at St. Matthew, Port Washington, Wisconsin, is a professor emeritus at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

We cannot completely filter out problems. Rather, we need to be prepared to withstand Satan’s inevitable attacks.

# Miracles

**God's love and grace are on display as Kurt Troge battles brain cancer.**

**Martin A. Moldenhauer**

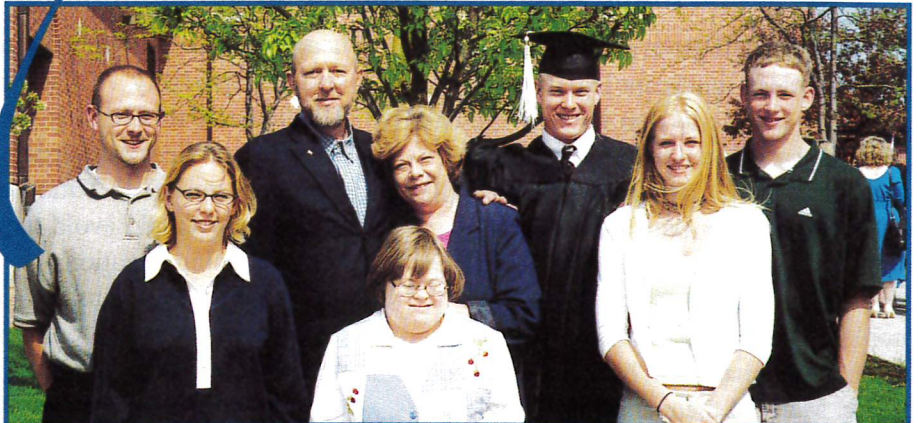
**A**s college roommates at Dr. Martin Luther College, Kurt Troge and I shared the dream of teaching in WELS secondary schools. Since then God used a couple of bearded guys (one tall, one short) to teach, coach, and offer advice to thousands of teens in transition.

Now, I am in Kurt's kitchen in Manitowoc, Wis., on June 10, 2003, talking about the miracles in his life. We both know that his brain cancer ("glioblastome multi-forme") is among the most serious and deadly of all cancers.

However, Kurt is just two weeks away from celebrating a full year of grace after the initial dismal diagnosis. Reflecting on his past year, we agree that his story should be told, a story of grace, God's love, and magnificent miracles.

### **A miracle of acceptance**

When he first heard the diagnosis, Kurt was thunderstruck with disbelief. In seeming good health, he had played the best round of golf in his life just a few days before! Yet, a bit of subsequent unsteadiness and some difficulty in signing his name forced him to the doctor, where a CT scan revealed the tumor on the brain. An immediate operation was scheduled.



Kurt and Debbie Troge and family. Kurt has devoted his life to teaching God's children, most recently as principal at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

The doctors found and removed the tumor, and Kurt was able to walk out of the hospital in three days—a miracle of recovery. Although his right arm was affected by the tumor's removal, Kurt has never complained. He simply shrugs and admits that his golfing days are done—a miracle of contentment and acceptance.

### **A miracle of comfort**

The oncologist, however, gave the Troges a gloomy report about the severity of this insidious cancer, its likely return, and a shortened life expectancy. Both Kurt and his wife, Debbie, headed home depressed that day. However, as they walked into their house, the phone rang. Reggie Riesop, principal of East Fork Lutheran High School in Arizona, was calling to suggest a favorite Psalm that had comforted him in 1997 when he had a brain tumor removed.

Riesop remembers walking into East Fork's chapel and hearing his Apache students singing Psalm 31: "Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the LORD is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior."

"I just about lost it," says Riesop. "Those words were such a comfort at that time of stress." Miraculously, Kurt had repeated that same psalm to himself when going under the knife.

### **A miracle of faith**

Kurt has had a sleep-deprived year. However, he counts it a blessing to see the quiet dawning of each new day. It also gives him more precious time to study Scripture. Each morning Kurt reads the words from Psalm 33:22, "May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you."

Gloomy news hasn't made Kurt a gloomy guy. During my interview, he slyly flips to Psalm 6:4,5, "Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?"

"See?" he quipped. "This is another reason why I am alive yet. I can't praise God from the grave."

Kurt ends each of his e-mail messages with Philippians 2:14-16: "Do everything without complaining or arguing so that . . . you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out



the word of life.” Kurt feels that every Christian’s life, not just those whose lives are touched by cancer, should be an example to the world around us.

### **A miracle of hope**

When Kurt went next for radiation treatment, a substitute radiologist was on duty, and he convinced the Troges to visit a group of University of Wisconsin–Madison cancer doctors with whom he had worked. Swiftly, these new doctors took over the case and began a sequence of 30 effective radiation treatments, using a specially-designed face mask. This effectively fought the tumor’s return during late summer of last year.

Last fall Kurt applied for inclusion in a nationwide, experimental group, fighting his cancer with protein inhibitors. Kurt was accepted into the program in October, one out of only 115 people from around the entire country.

Doses of this experimental drug were continued, and miraculously, the February 2003 MRI revealed no tumors! However, and for reasons that God alone can understand, an MRI on April 10 showed that the cancerous tumor had returned in its original location and in another place besides. Here again was a new crisis in which to trust God, another miracle to hope for and expect.

Back in December, Dr. George LaGrow, a WELS parish assistance consultant, invited Kurt to go to Colorado with him in April to do some consulting. One of the men in the Colorado church was Doug Pfeiffer, a medical physicist working at a hospital in Boulder where a specialized surgeon uses a “cyberknife.” This machine bombards tumors with beams of radiation from a hundred different directions, effectively “zapping” the tumor at the delicate point of confluence.

Pfeiffer happened to hear of Kurt’s new tumors and put him in contact

with the cyberknife surgeon. Within a couple of days, Kurt and Debbie were flying to Colorado. Upon finishing two cyberknife treatments, Kurt could walk better and felt immediately better, still another miracle.

**His wife says, “It’s not all about us. We all have our struggles, but how we deal with them is the important thing.”**

### **A miracle of life**

Since then Kurt has taken higher doses of steroids to prevent brain swelling, infections, and illness. Recently, he suffered a seizure, lasting several minutes and scaring him. “I never wanted to have a seizure,” says Kurt. “But God decided to take me there. Fortunately, I did not lose consciousness, and now I am not so afraid of the experience.”

His wife says, “It’s not all about us. We all have our struggles, but how we deal with them is the important thing. Whatever the answer is, that is the answer. We can accept it.”

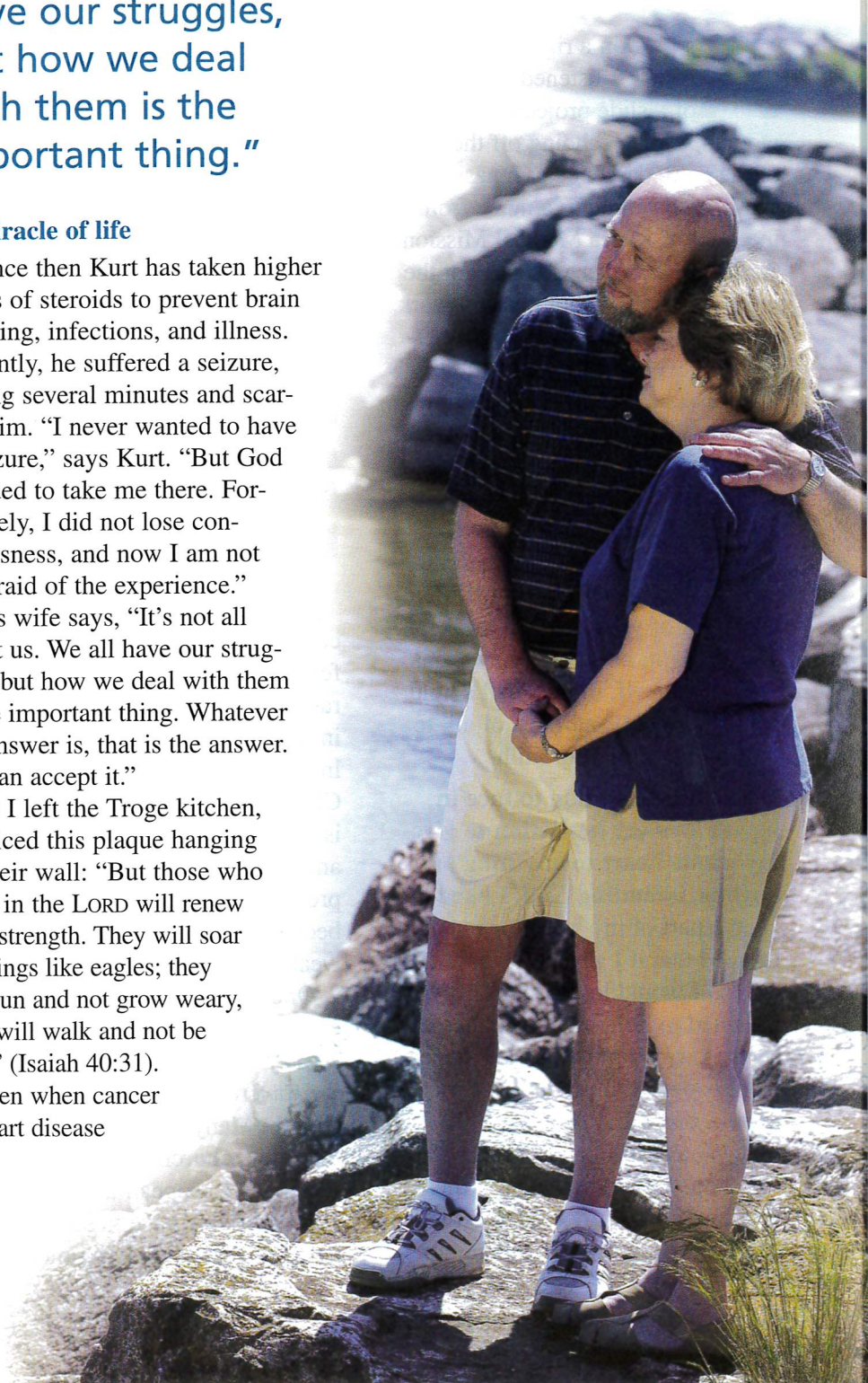
As I left the Troge kitchen, I noticed this plaque hanging on their wall: “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

Even when cancer or heart disease

or heartache afflict us, Kurt’s example shows us that we are not defeated, for our hope is in the Lord. Miraculously, the Lord has saved us, and the miracle of eternal life awaits each believer.



*Dr. Martin Moldenhauer, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.*



# A transformation

**Despite my weaknesses, Jesus brought me to Cameroon not only to do his work but also to be transformed.**

Laura A. Bublitz

**A**s I sat on a rigid wooden bench, I listened to the hum of a slide projector and a woman's voice echoing off the walls of the cold, darkened gymnasium. We were listening to a nurse from the Central Africa Medical Mission. As I soaked up her words, I got the impression that doing mission work must awaken so much joy in a person that every day would be uplifting. I assumed that being in a foreign mission field must strengthen a person's faith by leaps and bounds.

However, I have found from living in Cameroon for the past two years as a lay missionary that my preconceptions were a bit off. Being taken out of your element awakens you all right, but it really awakens you to yourself, to the devil's hold over the world, and most of all, to the condition of your faith.

**The hardest thing to face in myself was my hesitation to give my whole heart to anything or anyone, including God.** I liked to keep a part of my heart for my own. I feared that if I gave my whole heart to God I would lose a part of myself. I wanted to hold on to weaknesses such as wanting to keep a distance from people and running away from certain problems. But these weaknesses have been a crutch for far too long. Lulled to sleep by the droning hum of my tedious American lifestyle, I needed waking up.

I can't help but think that my escape artistry played into coming to Cameroon. Feeling bitter about my whirlwind existence, perhaps I wanted to run from the unpleasant realities surrounding me. After running for so long one would think I would be better at it, but all I did was manage to run to another place loaded with problems all its own.

## Hope is never lost when the Lord is near.

I found a land full of poverty, corruption, and greed. In fact, a few years back Cameroon was ranked as the most corrupt nation in the world. I found myself working with a church, the Lutheran Church of Cameroon (LCC), that is young in years, small in number, and trying to grow in this compromised moral climate. I quickly became well-acquainted with the weaknesses plaguing the church.

One weakness I saw was the all-consuming obsession with money. Money matters were constantly at the forefront of conversations in the church. Many Cameroonians generally view churches as moneymakers, since European and American church bodies have been coming here for years supplying money for

churches, schools, and health care facilities. Therefore WELS, and my husband and I as its representatives, were often seen as some divinely sent Santa Clauses. Both personal and church-related requests were being presented to us daily. We couldn't help but wonder if some people came into our church for the sole purpose of benefiting their pockets.

Another weakness I saw was what I like to call "plank vision." Consistently we were hearing accusations being hurled at one another. So clear was their vision of other people's wrongs, but so poor was their vision of their own shortcomings.

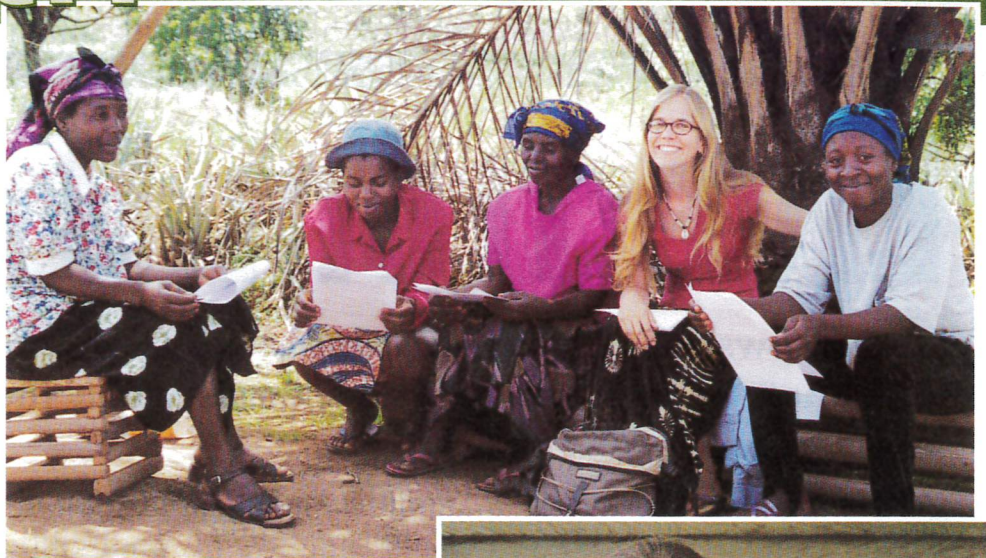
Between all the money disputes, smoke screens, and finger pointing, the spiritual aspect of the church was often shrouded and obscured. This sad reality was discouraging. This was not what I had in mind when we signed on for this adventure. All I could think is, what about the Word in its truth and purity? What about sharing the news of salvation? What about loving one another as Christ loved us? Were these things important to Cameroonians, or was it just all about money and making oneself look good? Seeing these weaknesses and flaws that were so woven into the LCC, I began to think the situation hopeless and our presence here pointless.

# of faith

**Then one Sunday God knocked me upside the head.** I was sitting in church feeling bitter about the members around me. I thought to myself, “How can anything decent come out of these people who cloud over God’s Word?” As I was smugly sitting there, a rousing chorus began. Drums were beating, powerful voices booming, hands clapping, people dancing, and it hit me. The song’s words, “Lord, make me a practical instrument for you. Use me, oh God,” spoke directly to my heart. Seeing them praising God with such earnestness, my eyes filled with tears, and a wave of shame passed through me. I was forgetting my own sinful humanity and, more importantly, about the Holy Spirit’s power.

What was I doing? Did I not just admit to you my own weaknesses? I was doing the very thing that I was so disappointed in them for doing. I was pointing out their wrongs, forgetting God’s Word, and feeling inflated because I was not participating in their sins, all the while harboring my own pet weaknesses. Who am I to say that if put in the same situation and poverty as they that I would be any different?

It all came together for me that Sunday—why I came here, and who I wanted to become. I felt Jesus’ arms wrapping snugly around me, supporting my guilt-worn soul. Despite my weaknesses, Jesus brought me here not only to do his work but also to be transformed. I knew at that moment that God was shouting at me: “Laura, give me your heart completely!



Laura Bublitz leading a women's Bible study in Cameroon.

Only I can help you become the person you long to be.” My spirit, feeling breathless and tired from years of running and fighting with God by trying to hold on to my weaknesses, finally took in a deep, liberating breath. I was ready to let go of my weaknesses. I was ready to be transformed.

Peace overcame me. Hope is never lost when the Lord is near. The comfort overwhelmed me, and all I could do was stand in awe and marvel at the power of my ever faithful friend. If the Lord could get through to me by using experiences and circumstances, could he not also reach the Cameroonians? After all, we are all essentially the same. We have all fallen short of God’s glory, we all need the Holy Spirit to work in our wayward hearts, and we all need the forgiveness of a loving Savior.

Sitting in that sun-baked church on that rickety wooden bench, I had a turning point in my life. I feel I am



Laura Bublitz and Barbara, the daughter of a national pastor in Cameroon.

one step closer to being the person I want to be. I know I will never be a perfect follower of Jesus this side of heaven, but with God’s help, my spiritual journey will always be moving forward, all the while molding my heart after his own.



*Laura Bublitz and her husband, Aaron, were WELS Kingdom Workers’ volunteers in Cameroon from January 2001 to June 2003. They are now members at Our Savior, Grafton, Wisconsin.*

**A**s a licensed emergency medical technician and a first responder for a volunteer fire department, I helped deal with the huge Quad/Graphics fire on July 12, 2002. Each article in this series will focus on a phrase or two that sticks in my mind as I recall what happened.

# Live from Lomira

**God knows when your 15 minutes of fame are coming. Even more than that, he will give you the words when the time comes.**

**William R. Carter**

**S**omeone once said that everyone would experience 15 minutes of fame at some point in his lifetime. Mine began when the commanders at the Quad/Graphics fire needed to appoint someone to talk to the press.

## Sharing news about the fire

Soon after the fire started, the sheriff's deputies informed us that a couple dozen reporters and cameramen were already gathering at the scene. The Milwaukee TV stations had gone to continuous live coverage and wanted a statement from the firefighters. Because our officers knew I had some experience speaking in public, they asked me to serve as "public information officer" for this incident.

By the time we left the scene nine days later, I had given five formal press conferences, written six press statements, and granted requests for dozens of interviews, some of which were broadcasted "live from Lomira." If you were to add up all the times my words appeared in print or my face appeared on camera, I know it

would total quite a bit more than 15 minutes.

Many people have asked me what it was like. I was quite nervous at first. This was a lot different than preparing for a Sunday sermon. I was worried that these reporters wouldn't be as kind an audience as my congregation. I knew that most of Wisconsin would hear it if I said something stupid.

It helped to get advice from some sheriff's deputies who had dealt with the press before. It also helped to remember what Paul said in Philippians 4:13: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." That appears to be exactly what happened, because friends and family who saw my first press conferences told me that I looked much more comfortable and confident than I felt.

It also became easier the more I did it. In fact, as I got to know the reporters better and began to understand how the whole media world operates, the job of "public information officer" became quite enjoyable.

I admit that part of that enjoyment was pure ego rush. Every time I visited the press area or checked the voice mail on my cell phone, more reporters wanted to talk to me. I also was able to sit in on meetings with upper-level executives of a multi-billion dollar company. Even their CEO was asking me for advice. Everywhere I went that week, people would come up to me and thank me for my work and for what the firefighters had been doing. Anybody's ego would enjoy that kind of attention.

I also appreciated the opportunities I had to help people learn about rural firefighting in general and about what our firefighters did at this fire specifically. Many questions from the big-city reporters showed that they had a hard time understanding the spirit of volunteerism that exists in small communities and the level of professionalism and cooperation that exists in small-town fire departments. It was heartwarming to see how they took what I told them and turned it into glowing tributes to what our firefighters accomplished that week.

## A GOSPEL LIGHT SHINES THROUGH THE BLAZE

On July 17, 2002, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* printed a one-on-one interview with Carter conducted and written by Lauria Lynch-German. Titled “Pastor sees spiritual side of fighting blaze,” the article clearly expresses Carter’s faith. Here is an excerpt:

You have said you personally would not do any of your jobs—father, pastor, or EMT—if it wasn’t beneficial. Do you think the other firefighters and EMTs feel the same?

I can speak for what I teach to my congregation, and there are at least a dozen of the guys in our department who are in my congregation. Everything that a Christian does, absolutely everything, is for the glory of God. . . . If my guys have been listening to me when I talk on Sunday—and have been listening to God’s Word—that’s what they’ve learned and why they’re serving. They’ve learned what Jesus Christ did for them when he gave his life for their salvation.

### Sharing news about God’s love

I am especially grateful for the opportunities that I had to witness, and I’m thankful that the Lord gave me the words when those opportunities were there. By the end of the week, I had been featured in two different articles in the Milwaukee paper and one report on a Milwaukee TV station. In each one of those interviews, the reporter asked questions that gave me the chance to do what the apostle Peter encouraged us to do



Billy Carter (right) was assigned to be the public information officer for the Quad/Graphics fire. He conducted five press conferences and many interviews during the nine days after the fire.

when he said, “Always be prepared . . . to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).

A question about how I could respond to emergency calls when I know I might not return gave me a chance to talk about how God’s promise to be with us always would apply to me as well as to those I might leave behind. A question about why I do what I do gave me the chance to talk about how everything a Christian does is done to the glory of God. A question about what I was going to tell my congregation gave me a chance to talk about how difficulties in our lives and the lives of others give us the opportunity to share God’s love with people when they need it the most.

Perhaps the most striking thing about my experiences is how suddenly and unexpectedly my life changed. My agenda for that Friday

had included a golf outing for the Winnebago Lutheran Academy tuition fund and a picnic for our faculty and school board. The following week I was supposed to be on vacation, a quiet week at home to catch up on a few things around the house. Little did I know when I woke up that morning how much those plans would change and what amazing opportunities I would have to give glory to God—publicly—by the end of the week.

But God knew. He knows when your 15 minutes are coming, too. Even more than that, he knows about the other opportunities he’s going to give you to give glory to him. Keep looking for them. And may God give you, too, the words when that time comes.



*Billy Carter is pastor at St. Paul, Brownsville, Wisconsin.*



# No need to be lonely

Put the word “loneliness” on a blank page or a note card. Think about it, and then write the answer to the question: “What does loneliness mean to me?” You may be surprised at what you write down.

## Types of loneliness

Several different types of loneliness exist. First there is “physical isolation.” Examples include when a person is away from home, on a walk by himself on a dark night, or at home without any other family members present. In each of those cases a person is said to be physically lonely.

When persons feel alone in their minds, even though other people are right next to them, it is called psychosocial loneliness. Loneliness of this type seems to be the most common. Many have said it: “Even though I’m in a crowded room, I feel so alone.” Those suffering from psychosocial loneliness do not feel connected with those in the same room, house, or place that they share.

This kind of loneliness has been characterized as a darkness that covers or even smothers a person. Some say that it’s an emptiness that gnaws away inside or a hunger for something that cannot be satisfied.

**The protective, abiding presence of the Lord brings great comfort and strength to people in all times of loneliness.**

Frederick A. Kogler

To be suffering from psychosocial loneliness is a terrible and fearful thing. Most often this feeling comes from having suffered some kind of loss, such as when a person loses a job, a spouse dies, or when dear friends or family members move away. Physical loss or separation from one's "society" may cause the feelings of "aloneness."

Another type of loneliness, "spiritual loneliness," plagues men and women so much that the medical world has described it as epidemic in proportion. Spiritually lonely people feel not only physically isolated from others, but also not connected with anyone or anything, even God.

This kind of loneliness accounts for a large number of suicides and explains why Psalm 23 is so popular. As the psalmist writes, it is there, in the near death experience, the loneliest time of one's life, that great comfort is derived from what is revealed: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). Comforted as sheep are by the presence and companionship of their shepherd, so also the protective, abiding presence of the Lord brings great comfort and strength to people in all times of loneliness.

### **Age not a factor**

Loneliness is no respecter of age. Young people feel the condition as well as the elderly. Perhaps the elderly, who have experienced so many losses in their lives, are more often numbed to the comfort and promise of the Almighty Savior. But the needed and desired comfort is there for everyone to share.

To the elderly, God promises: "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will

sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you" (Isaiah 46:4).

To all of us, God says: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

## **Loneliness is no respecter of age. Young people feel the condition as well as the elderly.**

### **Believers in Jesus are connected**

When the Lord Jesus taught his disciples, he explained to them that even though all of them would leave him alone, he would not be alone or deserted because his heavenly Father would be with him. "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 16:32).

The loneliness of his death on the cross, ("My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?") moreover, would be replaced by his eternal connectedness with his Father and the Holy Spirit as indicated when he rose triumphant from the grave that first Easter morning.

His disciples, eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection, would be comforted by seeing these wonderful events. They bring comfort to us as well. In John 20:31 we read: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Jesus would never desert these same disciples who would flee and go to their own homes, leaving Jesus in his loneliness. Later, after his resurrection, he reinstated them and commissioned them. He charged them to teach, baptize, and spread the good news throughout the world. He reassured them once again that they would never be alone because he would be their constant companion. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

If we are tempted, mauled, and beaten in our spirit by the old enemy Satan, and he causes us to feel as though we are alone in every possible way, may the Holy Spirit rescue us with the comforting assurance and remembrance of our Savior, Jesus. Jesus comes to us through the gospel. Jesus stays with us as his Word lingers in our hearts and minds.

The next time you feel lonely or you come upon someone else who is lonely, remember the words of the LORD spoken to his children: "For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory" (Deuteronomy 20:4).



*Fred Kogler, a retired pastor, is a member at Emanuel, St. Paul, Minnesota.*

*Some types of loneliness may be symptoms of physical or psychological conditions. If you struggle with loneliness for an extended time, talk to your pastor or another trained professional. Christian Family Counseling, a ministry of Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, can assist you in locating a Christian therapist in your area. Contact them toll-free at 877/855-0936 or visit <[www.wlcfs.org](http://www.wlcfs.org)>.*



# Walking together

Every one of us—from the newest member to the synod president—needs to exercise our faith.

Julie K. Wietzke

**W**alking is a healthy, low-impact way to strengthen your body and help prevent certain diseases. It's also fun to do, especially if you have a walking buddy for encouragement, support, and friendship.

But "walking" doesn't have to be just a physical exercise. It can also be a spiritual training. The word "synod" actually means "walking together." As members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod we all need to walk together toward our common mission of making disciples throughout the world, using the gospel in Word and sacrament to win the lost for Christ, and nurturing fellow believers for lives of Christian service.

## **We all need to go in the same direction**

Sometimes the hardest thing about walking is determining where you want to go. If you have a walking buddy, it's important to agree where you want to end up. If you don't, you'll be walking in different directions.

The same is true of our work together as a synod. We need to have a common goal or direction. Otherwise areas of ministry, districts, congregations, even individuals will be working at cross purposes.

The synod in convention is the legislative body that determines the direction we should head in pursuit

of our mission. Representatives—pastors, teachers, and laymen—from each of the 12 districts meet every other year to vote on important issues that set the course for upcoming ministry. Every congregation has a say because they take turns providing these representatives.

Another way we walk together toward common goals is by working on joint ministries. Instead of having each congregation train its own called workers, we have a strong ministerial education system that trains students from high school all the way through the seminary. Instead of each congregation sending out members as missionaries, extensive home and world mission programs send ministers out to spread the gospel throughout the United States and the world. Instead of each congregation developing stewardship programs, hymnals, evangelism tracts, and school curriculums, we have talented workers putting together materials that will serve the entire synod. Though we all are responsible for these things, we delegate that authority for consistency, accuracy, and economy of resources.

"The synod isn't some structure on Mayfair Road in Milwaukee," says Bruce Becker, Board for Parish Services administrator. "The synod is a gathering of individuals. But the synod organization is there to assist the individual in carrying out the

work that God has given that individual to do."

## **We may walk to the beat of a different drum**

But what work has God given us to do? How can we help carry out our mission?

Some things we all can do:

- Grow in the Word and sacraments. Attend Bible class and church regularly. Read your Bible. Have daily devotions at home. All these things will help you grow stronger, and therefore help the synod grow stronger as well. "To address the strength of the synod is to stress the personal, individual, spiritual growth of the people in our congregations," says Randy Hunter, Bible study coordinator for the Commission on Adult Discipleship. Part of a church's job is to help you grow personally and spiritually so you see where you fit in. Says Hunter, "As a result of the Word that you hear and the sacraments that you receive, you will see God's greater purpose for your life."
- Pray hard. Pray continually. Pray both for your congregation's work and for the work of the synod at large. Set up a prayer chain at your congregation. Use the monthly prayer calendar from the Ministry of Planned Giving, found at <[www.wels.net/mpg/](http://www.wels.net/mpg/)>.
- Be informed. Read your church newsletter and bulletin. Talk to



your pastor about what is going on at your church and in the synod. Read the synod's Mission Objectives Vision statement\* so you know the goals we are all working toward. Find out who your WELS congregational representative is and talk to him about what we do together as a synod. Watch the *WELS Connection* video and read your synod publications (*Forward in Christ* magazine, *Mission Connection*, *Lutheran Leader*) so you can be connected to other churches as we all walk together with the Lord.

Doing all these things may point you in a direction for greater involvement, depending on your personality and gifts.

- Get involved in setting direction in ministry. Start in your local congregation by attending voters' meetings. Join one of your church's committees. Help lead your congregation toward the synod's common goals. Once you have done that, you may even want to get involved at the district or synodical level.
- Encourage young people for the public ministry. Talk to your children or to young people in your congregation about serving their Lord as a pastor, teacher, or staff minister. Support and encourage these students with your words, money, or a nice care package.
- Give of your time and talents. Sing in the choir. Visit shut-ins. Clean the church. Teach Sunday school. Help with a mailing. Your pastor will have a list of ways you can use your talents to further God's kingdom.

Volunteer for WELS Kingdom Workers, an organization that facilitates volunteer efforts in mission fields. Or get involved in the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society. Hundreds of opportunities

are waiting for you inside and outside your church's doors.

- Offer financial support. Give generously to your ministry at home, but also share your gifts with ministry at large. Our joint efforts of missions, ministerial education, parish services, and administration would not be possible without this support.

While we may be involved in different ways, we're all walking toward the same place. The same is true for each congregation as it plans its local ministry in accord with our mission at large.

### **We all need the exercise**

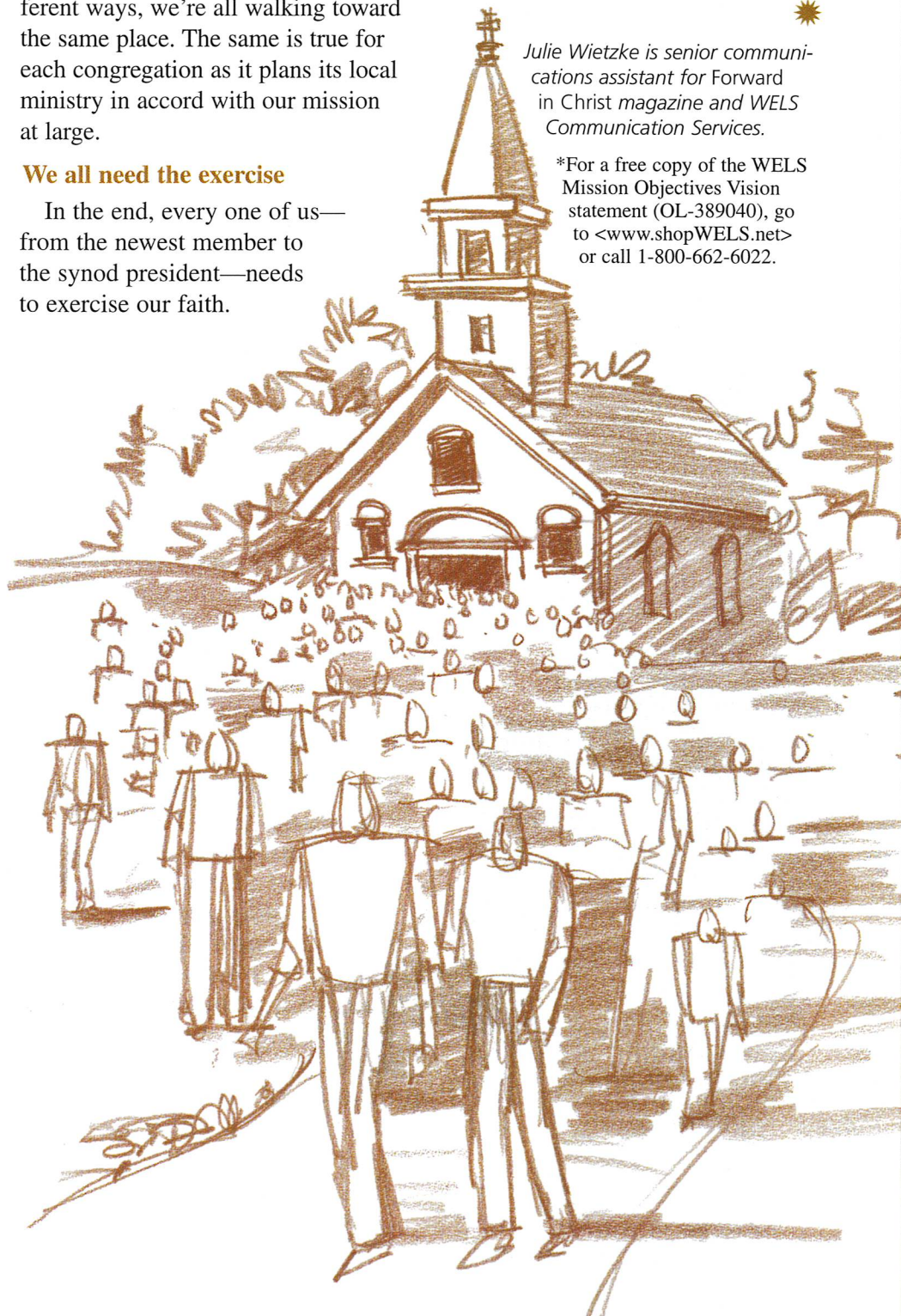
In the end, every one of us—from the newest member to the synod president—needs to exercise our faith.

"The opportunities to share Jesus with a growing number of people in our country and worldwide are there and continue to grow," says Becker. "To take advantage of these opportunities is going to require the efforts and commitment of every member of WELS."

So do you feel like taking a walk? I'll go with you!

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

\*For a free copy of the WELS Mission Objectives Vision statement (OL-389040), go to [www.shopWELS.net](http://www.shopWELS.net) or call 1-800-662-6022.





# THE MAN

The human soul won't find peace in amassing

Wayne A. Laitinen

**T**here was no sign of the sun on that frostbitten Sunday morning. As I made my way in the dark up the back sidewalk of the church, I fumbled for my keys in the pocket of my overcoat. Even before I got to the door, the adrenalin rush had begun. I was plotting the quickest route to all those thermostats, light switches, and locks so I could mount the pulpit and run through my sermon a few more times. Then the usual Sunday crowd would arrive.

### Getting rid of "mass"

I was so engrossed in these thoughts that I hadn't noticed the silhouette of a young man with a backpack trying to open the very door I was approaching. Startled, I stepped back into the dark. He heard my steps and turned to explain that he had been hitchhiking all night, walked five miles from the highway, and needed a place to roll out his sleeping bag and get some sleep.

He ended up on the floor behind my desk in the sacristy. I'm not sure how much sleep he got. There were speakers in the sacristy. He commented on the sermon at the dinner table that noon. He also told me that he had been a student at an Ivy League university.

Except for his appearance he seemed like a guy who had the intelligence and family fortune to qualify for Yale or Harvard. He went on to explain that he had just walked away from school and family to go to Texas. "What's in Texas?" I asked.

"I'm going there to climb a pole and touch a high power line."

Silence.

I offered a wan smile, wondering if this was some kind of manipulative joke. Then he continued, "I want to get rid of mass."

"Mass?"

"Yes," he said with a level gaze, "You know: matter."

More silence.

"Oh," I said, as I tried to detach myself from such silliness, "Well, if you're trying to get rid of matter, that'll work."

But he wasn't kidding. He really had this thing about the material body being evil. There I was in the 1980s, sitting across from a 10th-century mystic who was punishing his flesh so his soul could be free! I went on to tell him that if he succeeded, he had a lot more to lose than body mass. Then I gave him

# MATERIAL GOD

material or shedding it. The soul finds rest only in the material God.

the best law and gospel presentation I could muster.

## Finding peace in God

What drives people to such extremes? A life of unbridled desire? Undenied privilege? Unlimited possibilities? Our excesses drive us to the painful realization that the god of material things is really not a god at all, but a demon. Perhaps that is why sects and cults thrive during times of affluence. By denying the food, drink, and bodily pleasures that once ruled their lives, they hope to find spiritual peace. Jonestown and Heaven's Gate are the logical conclusion.

## God likes matter . . . recreated in his image to serve him here and hereafter.

However, the human soul won't find peace either in amassing material or shedding it. The soul finds rest only in the material God.

Yes, God likes matter. After all, he created a material world, ". . . and it was very good." Into that perfect world he placed a man and woman: two flesh-and-blood creatures—each made in his holy image. Even when our first parents rendered their bodies unfit for paradise by their rebellion, God in his grace chose to redeem their "mass" and resurrect it to life everlasting!

But to do this God literally became a material God. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man . . . born in time from the nature of his mother, fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh" (The Athanasian Creed, *Christian Worship*, p. 132, 133). "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

This is the mystery of our salvation: that not merely the man, Jesus, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin, but the God-man. Not merely the man, Jesus, was born of the virgin Mary, but the entire God-man. Nor did the "man part" of Jesus die on the cross (it is foolish even to talk as if the two could be separated), but the entire God-man died in our place. Nothing less would have satisfied God's justice. Likewise, the whole Christ arose from the dead. The whole Christ ascended into heaven. Even now, God our brother (the material God, if you will) prays for us at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, Jesus is not the Redeemer only of our soul. He is the Redeemer of the whole person: soul and body.

This is the glory of Christmas and Epiphany. God came not to destroy our material flesh (as ridiculed with sin and death as it is now), but to sanctify it forever. St. Paul says that through conver-

sion of our souls we are able to offer to God our bodies as living sacrifices. Yes, God likes matter . . . recreated in his image to serve him here and hereafter.

I just wish I had thought of all those things before my mystic friend walked out the door and turned his face toward Texas.



*Wayne Laitinen is pastor at St. John, New Ulm, Minnesota.*

## "Matter" matters to God

The way we care for our bodies is a wordless creed. We confess to the world *who* we are and *whose* we are.

Yet, fleshly abuse and twisted theology are common bedpartners. Already in AD 370, 16-year-old Augustine spent a summer indulging in the sins of youth. That autumn he left home for the excitement of college life. Later in his life he recalled with tears those years of sexual immorality. Was it only coincidence that, at the same time, he was strangely drawn to a cult that considered the material body to be evil?

Before he discovered Christ's full redemption, a misguided Martin Luther punished his body to free his soul.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

# WHATEVER

## One step

A story that spans 70 years shows that **God has a plan** for each of us.

Peter Hagen

**M**enasha, Wis., may seem like an odd setting for a sudden revelation—I'll be the first to admit that. However, this event takes place over a span of both miles and years. I'll start at the beginning.

**It was the Depression, the middle of the 1930s.** A young man in his late teens or early 20s stood on a bridge in the middle of winter. He was contemplating suicide. His parents were both dead; he had no education, no job. He was living in a hotel with an aunt and two younger siblings. Life appeared hopeless. However, the world was blessed when that young man turned away from the rushing waters below.

**Time warp to summer 2001.** My mom sent my brother, Kurt, and me to Grandpa and Grandma's house in Menasha—the gutters needed cleaning. While we were there, Grandpa had to go to the grocery store. I said goodbye, since Kurt and I would probably be gone by the time he got back.

Life went on as normal for a few days. I lifted weights for football, practiced marching music for the Lutheran Vanguard of Wisconsin, and sat around home.

**Mere days before leaving with Vanguard for the East Coast, Dad told me that Grandpa had fallen.** He was bringing some groceries home, lost his balance on the steps, and hit his head on the sidewalk.

I didn't know what to do. Kurt and I were leaving in just three days, and my grandpa was in a coma. The doctors had decided to monitor the pressure in his head, help him breathe with a ventilator, and let the brain heal itself. I thought, "Well, the doctors know what they're doing. I can't do anything." But there is no feeling like that feeling of helplessness.

Kurt and I left a few days later. We just prayed and trusted that everything would turn out.

The first stop was Sun Prairie, Wis. Let me say this: marching in a parade takes concentration. When one's

concentration falters, the music and marching fall apart, which is what happened to me in Sun Prairie. I couldn't march or play well.

The next stop was Niagara Falls. What I remember most was a chaperone telling me that Grandpa hadn't woken up when the doctors had turned off the machines to see if the body that was my grandpa would breathe.

The rest of the trip was much of the same—exciting and fun. But one thought always lingered: when would Grandpa wake up?

**That brings me to one dreadful night in Pittsfield, Mass., when a chaperone took me to a telephone.** My heart sank as I heard that Grandpa had been taken off the machines, but still hadn't woken up. He had died.

I ended up at Bethel, Menasha, for the funeral. I heard the pastor preach about Grandpa and how God has a plan for us all. One part especially stuck out. That was 1 Samuel 20:3: "Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death." There had been a step between that young man and the waters below; there was a step between that sidewalk and heaven.

It was then that I realized that God actually has a plan for me. I didn't believe like a student in school—nodding and ignoring the implications. I felt, all the way down to my toes, that the God who created the cosmos, sent the flood, and kept my Grandpa on that bridge, actually had a plan for me. Imagine that!

Peter Hagen, a member at St. Matthew, Appleton, Wisconsin, graduated from Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, in May 2003.





# Luther: the family man

**Although reluctant to marry, Luther changed his mind when God sent him a wife.**

Richard D. Balge

**M**artin Luther and Catherine von Bora were legally married in Wittenberg on June 13, 1525, in the Black Cloister where Luther was living. Two weeks later, a short service at the City Church served as the public announcement that they were husband and wife.

## Preparing to wed

Six years had passed since John Staupitz released Martin from his monastic vows and the pope had excommunicated him. Some of Luther's followers and colleagues wanted him to marry, as an example and as encouragement to former monks and nuns who were not certain that they could in good conscience marry. While still a bachelor, he wrote a treatise on monastic vows and another on the estate of marriage. As an outlaw and because he was subject to chronic ill health, he himself had been reluctant to marry.

When he did finally marry, at age 41, his motives were several. He wanted to put his convictions regarding the married estate into action. He wanted to set an example for other former monastics. He wanted to spite the pope. He wanted to please his father. The overriding circumstance that prompted his marriage, however, was that God sent him a wife.

Luther's writings had convinced a number of sisters in the Cistercian convent near Grimma that their vows were not binding. In April 1523 they

fled. Soon after, a food purveyor's wagon arrived in Wittenberg. Twelve fugitive nuns emerged from barrels on the wagon. In those days there was almost no place for an unmarried woman to find an honorable occupation. Eight of the nuns soon married, and three returned to their parental homes.

One nun remained single for almost two years. One young man's parents rejected her as a bride for their son, and she herself rejected another match. She did suggest to a friend that she would be willing to marry Dr. Nicholas Amsdorf—or Luther himself.

Catherine von Bora (1499-1552) was the daughter of a minor noble of Bohemian descent. After her mother's death she was placed in a convent. She took her final vows at age 16.

## Married life

The first Lutheran parsonage was the Black Cloister in Wittenberg. The Augustinian community had disbanded, and Elector John of Saxony granted the Luthers the right to live there. What had been the residence of 40 monks provided plenty of space for the growing Luther family (six children), the members of the extended family (including Catherine's Aunt Lena and nine children of Martin's two deceased sisters), the many guests (including foreign students, colleagues, fugitives, and government officials), and a few servants.

The convent had provided Catherine with a better education than most girls in those days received. As Luther's wife she continued to learn. She was the competent manager of a large household. She had charge of the family's finances, augmented the family income from a small farm and a fishpond, and brewed beer for the table. Contrary to the general custom of the time, Luther bequeathed his entire estate to her care. He knew he could trust her business sense.

The Luthers had three sons and three daughters. Elisabeth died at eight months and Magdalene at 13 years. Luther saw to it that his children received spiritual training, but he also wanted them to be educated for useful service in the world. University students served as tutors for the boys. Hans became a lawyer, Martin studied theology but never entered the public ministry, and Paul was a physician. Luther's daughter, Catherine, married a Prussian nobleman. Luther's only living descendants are from her.

*Richard Balge, a member of Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin, is a professor emeritus at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

To learn more about Luther, watch for the Sept. 26 premiere of the motion picture, *Luther*. For more information or to view the trailer, visit <[www.lutherthemovie.com](http://www.lutherthemovie.com)>.

## Adjusting to God's curveballs

Drafted by the Toronto Blue Jays after his high school graduation, Mark Sievert seemed to be living every American boy's dream. Yet, the dream quickly faded when he was injured his first year. Surgeries followed, but the pain never went away, and the curveball that caught the scouts' attention suffered with it. Although he played in the minor leagues for nine years, Sievert never fully recovered from his early injury. Even an 84-day stint in the majors ended in disappointment when he had to spend the entire time on the disabled list.

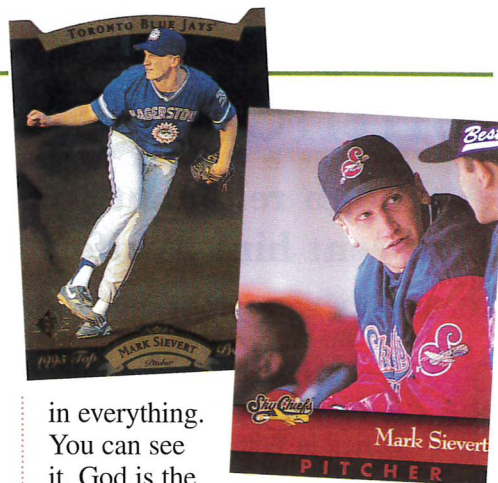
So many ups and downs in such a short amount of time. Yet, Sievert says, "It made me closer to God. I prayed 10 times more than I ever had before."

Recognizing that his professional baseball career was ending, Sievert moved on to a new adventure—teaching. From early childhood, he'd known

he wanted to be a WELS teacher. He attended Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., but was temporarily sidetracked by the lure of professional baseball. Even when playing ball, though, Sievert loved working with kids.

In 2000, Sievert began his new adventure by enrolling at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. While there, he served as pitching coach for the school's baseball team. This past May, Sievert graduated with his education degree. Within weeks, he accepted a call to teach fifth and sixth grade at Hope Christian School—an independent WELS school in an impoverished area of Milwaukee. Now his dream of ministering his faith could also come true.

"God's Word has been missing in the city for quite a while now," explains Sievert. "Staff members at Hope all have the right mindset. God is included



in everything. You can see it. God is the focus all the way—from discipline to curriculum. When I observed some classrooms here last year, I could see that these kids thrive on God's Word. It's their favorite subject. I can't wait to teach it to them, too."

Has Sievert given up on baseball, though? Not quite. "You can always use an athletic background in teaching," he insists.

At the very least, he'll be popular on the playground.

## Communicating Christ today

Armed with popcorn and your Bible, you're ready for a night of adventure in front of the big screen—even though you are sitting on a metal chair in a church basement rather than lounging on the comfy couch in your living room. As the familiar opening music swells, you settle back to watch another episode of *Communicating Christ Today*.

This video series, which reviews the Bible, church history, and doctrine, has recently been updated for the 21st century. The original series, *Communicating Christ*, has been a help to many congregations and was translated into 10 languages, including two forms of sign language, so that WELS world missionaries can also use it.

The series' strength comes from the simple approach it takes to ex-



*Communicating Christ Today* host Richard Warnecke finds himself in all kinds of unique settings—including the desert. Each setting helps Warnecke review the Bible, church history, or doctrine.

plaining the Christian faith. It is the perfect tool for familiarizing church prospects with Christianity, and it can also effectively be used as a review for veteran Christians. Designed to be taught by lay leaders,

the video series comes with a workbook and teacher's guide.

*Communicating Christ Today*, produced by WELS Kingdom Workers, preserved the message of the original video series but added in some action. Host Richard Warnecke, administrator of WELS Kingdom Workers' Faith in Action program, finds himself in a variety of settings, including a haunted house, a lifeboat, and a movie theatre, that help him communicate the series' message.

"It's scripturally sound—and fun!" says Warnecke.

The new series includes 31 episodes on five videotapes, but individual tapes can be purchased. The workbook and teacher's guide are provided on a CD-ROM. Closed captioning is available. To order, call Northwestern Publishing House, 1-800-662-6022 or visit <www.nph.net>.

## Rise up and call him blessed

This year, Clergy Appreciation Day is on Oct. 12. Many congregations use the month of October to honor their pastor and tell him how much he is loved and appreciated.

Our pastors do so much more than lead a church service on Sunday mornings. They visit the sick, dying, and shut-in. They do administrative work and put together the bulletins and newsletters. They answer endless phone calls and counsel troubled families. They marry, bury, and baptize. They confirm and instruct youth and adults. They attend endless meetings. They work long hours preparing their sermons. We are blessed to have our dear shepherds leading us. They deserve our honor and appreciation.

Last year I was blessed to honor my pastor and encourage other congregation members at Mt. Olive, Shakopee, Minn., to do the same. To do this, I searched the Web for articles, poems, and ideas that show how much we love and appreciate our pastor and his family and e-mailed them to congre-

gation members twice a week for the month of October. When Sunday, Oct. 13, came, I was pleased that some did give gifts and cards to remember him. He was pleased as well (and slightly embarrassed).

Show your pastor(s) your appreciation this October with a card, gift, or word of thanks. Honor him all year long by praying for him and coming to church and Bible class regularly. Remember his birthday and anniversary with a gift or a card. Be active in the church—whether that's cleaning the church or serving on a board or committee. Tell your pastor how much you appreciate all that he does for you and the congregation. He will love you for it!

In honor of all our WELS pastors, I want to say that we do notice and deeply appreciate all you do for us. Thank you!

By the way, this article is my gift to my pastor this year. Happy Clergy Appreciation Day, Pastor Schwertfeger!

*Jennifer Kluender*



## A special shepherd

Pastor Peter Unnasch is not the kind of man you think of when you think "pastor." He is not afraid to get silly and let loose with the kids of Shepherd of Peace, Norfolk, Neb.

This week was vacation Bible school (VBS) at our church, and Pastor did the music time. During the closing devotion yesterday, Pastor taught the children the fun Christian song, "I just wanna be a sheep, baa baa baa baa." This is always a big hit with the kids, as Pastor teaches them actions and looks slightly goofy jumping around at six-and-a-half feet tall. My daughter, Sydnie, is two and a half and just along for the fun and to "help" Mom and the other ladies. She also enjoys this song.

After VBS, Sydnie and I went straight to my work at a WELS child-care center. While Sydnie was finish-

ing her lunch with two three-year-olds at the day-care, she asked the other two children if they knew Pastor Unnasch. They replied that they didn't. Sydnie asked, "Do you have your own pastor?" One replied yes and the other no. Sydnie said, "My pastor is so nice. He sings the 'Baa Baa' song with me!"

This is a neat story for two reasons: 1) You are never too young to witness for Christ, and 2) many people have the idea that pastors are somber, fire-and-brimstone kind of men. One of the eighth-graders of our congregation commented to me, "I always thought of pastors as these serious guys, and then there's Pastor playing 'Follow



Peter Unnasch, pastor at Shepherd of Peace, Norfolk, Neb., leads vacation Bible school students in singing, "I just wanna be a sheep, baa baa baa baa."

the Leader' and making silly faces with all the kids." Pastor Unnasch is just one example of how pastors can affect all the sheep in the flock by breaking out of the mold!

*Jodi Pohlman*

## Obituaries

### Gertrud A. Palmtag 1929-2003

Gertrud Palmtag was born Sept. 16, 1929. She died May 23, 2003.

A 1969 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served Jordan, West Allis, Wis., and St. Philip and St. John (68th St.), both in Milwaukee.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Richard. She is survived by two sons, four daughters, 16 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

### A. Kurt Grams 1915-2003

A. Kurt Grams was born June 17, 1915. He died June 7, 2003, in Muskego, Wis.

He served at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; two sons; two daughters; five grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

## WELS news briefs

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

### Board for World Missions

414/256-3233



On May 18, 2003, a milestone was passed in the young Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Siberia, Russia. Three national pastors—Igor Logvinov, Mikhail Starikov, and Andrei Khomutski—received calls and became the first Russian pastors to serve this WELS-established church body of about 600 souls. These men have been training for over eight years. Here congregation president Ivgenniy Provotorov (right) of St. Luke's, Iskitim, Russia, signs the call certificate as Starikov (left) and Missionary Michael Ewart (center) watch. Starikov will be serving St. Luke's.

**Friendly counselors to India Mark Krueger and John Hildebrant are returning to India** after departing in February to seek visas that would give them more permanent status in India.

The Lutheran Mission of Salvation in India is no longer a part of the WELS mission in India. Although many members remained with the WELS mission, subsidy was discontinued to two pastors, five seminary students, 13 orphan homes, and about 80 gospel workers in December because of unresolved differences over mission policies and practices.

WELS now serves over 5,000 souls in 90 congregations and preaching stations in India. Forty-five men are

enrolled in the theological training program—15 in the seminary and 30 in the preseminary. Another 75 men, most of whom serve congregations, attend monthly seminars where they are taught God's Word. WELS people continue to support 175 orphans in eight orphan homes. In addition, gifts from WELS help to give a Christian education to 165 children in two Christian day schools.

The leaders of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM), the national WELS church organization in India, have faithfully assumed large leadership roles. God used the temporary absence of resident WELS counselors to help the church mature and unify.

### Conference of Presidents

Twelve more Martin Luther College teacher graduates were assigned on July 15.

**Jacob R. Briney** to Emanuel First, Lansing, Mich.

**Luther P. Curia** to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.

**Mandy S. Erdmann** to St. Mark, Mankato, Minn.

**Robyn E. Glaesemann** to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.

**Sarah J. Janke** to St. John, Dowagiac, Mich.

**Nancy M. Johnson** to Christ the Lord, Houston, Texas

**Rebekah A. Koch** to Bethel, Menasha, Wis.

**Erin C. Krell** to Faith, Antioch, Ill.

**Nathan C. Krug** to St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin, Mich.

**Adrian R. Smith** to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.

**Matthew E. Wurster** to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

**Deborah D. Zimmermann** to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.

### Board for Home Missions

414/256-3284

In their May meeting the Board for Home Missions granted **establishing phase with existing manpower and**

**no subsidy to Pleasant Prairie, Wis.** They granted **developing phase to Victory, Lexington, Ky.**

### Commission on Special Ministries

414/256-3240

**The 13th correspondence Bible course booklet is available for WELS prison ministry.** The new booklet, "So I'm Forgiven: Now What?" is based on the book of James. More than 1,000 inmates have already ordered it.

**A new WELS prison ministry video is also available. This 10-minute video provides an overview of WELS prison ministry.** To order a copy, call your district Special Ministries coordinator. You may also contact the WELS Prison Ministry Distribution Center, P.O. Box 452, New Ulm MN 56073; 507/354-3130.



Thomas Kraus traveled to Germany with his wife, Lois, in June to begin a one-year tour of duty as the second WELS civilian chaplain in Europe. Pastor Kraus will work with Chaplain Michael Schroeder to provide spiritual services and support to WELS military personnel and civilians as well as work on building up a charter congregation of English-speaking people in Wicker, Germany.

### Commission on Worship

414/256-3265

**Christian Worship: New Service Settings** was released in January.

The 73-page pew edition provides new musical settings for three services: Common Service, Morning Praise, and Prayer at the Close of Day. Nine new psalm settings are included. For more information, click on the link at <[www.wels.net/worship](http://www.wels.net/worship)>.



## Back to school for worship

It's September. Time to go back to school.

But we're not talking about learning reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. We're talking about examining lyrics, liturgy, and Lutheran worship.

Two-day School of Worship Enrichment seminars bring together worship planners from several different WELS congregations to analyze existing worship practices and to plan future strategies.

The seminars will help you "blend theory, theology, reflection, and new experiences in worship," says Bryan Gerlach, Commission on Worship administrator.

Extensive surveys before the seminar allow congregation members and worship planners to examine where they're at and determine where they want to go.

"It's a good catalyst for congregations to sit down and talk to each other about worship rather than let it go as it has been," says Pastor Mark Bitter, chairman of the Commission on Worship.

During the seminar, participants will listen to presentations on the purpose and forms of worship, hear demonstrations of new music and old music done in new ways, and participate in worship featuring the historic Lutheran liturgy with new styles and songs. School of Worship Enrichment presenters even serve as worship leaders for a special Sunday service at the host congregation.

"We hope to help our people understand the rich treasure we have as Lutherans with our theology and how we live that out as we proclaim the gospel in worship," says Bitter.

Experienced worship planners then consult with individual congregations and help them set goals and develop plans for their worship. These breakout groups are customized by congregation according to the already completed surveys.

So far the Commission on Worship has conducted four different School of Worship Enrichment seminars, with almost 40 congregations participating. The commission is subsidizing the costs for congregations to attend through a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

*Want to go back to school for worship? Talk to your district worship coordinator. Just go to <[www.wels.net/worship](http://www.wels.net/worship)> and click on Commission on Worship to find your district representative. Or call 414/256-3226.*

**Worship Music: A Resource for Lutheran Keyboard Musicians provides WELS musicians with fairly easy Lutheran service music** for organ, piano, or electronic keyboard, including compositions based on new hymns from *Christian Worship*. If you subscribe to this service, you will receive 15 to 20 pieces twice a year. For more information, click on the link at <[www.wels.net/worship](http://www.wels.net/worship)>.

**Commission on Youth Discipleship**  
414/256-3224

**The Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) appointed a Task Force on Parenting Ministry.** The task force has been given eight months to submit a report and recommendations on ways in which the CYD can meet its seven specific goals regarding parenting ministry. You may obtain a copy of these goals and the task force's "job description" from <[cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net)>.

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

**The School of Outreach focuses on a complete program of congregational outreach,** with the

intention that congregations develop strategic plans for their evangelism programs. Congregations should send their pastor(s) and leaders (men and women) to the event. Teams of five to 12 are effective for making short- and long-range plans for outreach to the unchurched in their area. Go to <[www.wels.net/evangelism](http://www.wels.net/evangelism)> for information on upcoming dates and locations. Or contact your district evangelism coordinator or the WELS Evangelism office.

**Tel/Tech Task Force II**  
414/650-1592

For many years, WELS has had a partnership with New Horizons Computer Learning Centers. Found in over 160 U.S. locations, New Horizons offered discount rates to WELS teachers for software applications and technical training classes. **Now the Tel/Tech Task Force II has authorized matching funds up to 50 percent on any New Horizons' training**—to a maximum of \$175 per person per day. The task force has made \$25,000 available on a first-come, first-served basis through

June 30, 2004. The offer applies to all WELS pastors, teachers, and support staff. See <[www.newhorizons.com](http://www.newhorizons.com)> for a complete listing of course outlines and schedules. For more information or to register, contact Kevin Conley at 414/607-5600 or <[kevin.conley@newhorizons.com](mailto:kevin.conley@newhorizons.com)>.

**Communication Services Commission**  
414/256-3230

**Two WELS media productions received a 2003 Telly Award.**

*Lights! Cameras! Produce!*, a two-hour video workshop that helps congregations, schools, and organizations learn how to use television to effectively communicate, was honored as one of the best videos in the "How To" category. The video is available at <[www.shopWELS.net](http://www.shopWELS.net)> or by calling 1-800-662-6022.

The pilot episode of *Fifth Pew from the Front* received a Telly in the "Television and Cable Programs" category. The Commission on Adult Discipleship will be using this half-hour Christ-centered program as a Bible study tool.

## District news —

### Southeastern Wisconsin

Toyota Motors Corporation and the National Science Teacher's Association honored **Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.**, as a 2003 grant award winner. Tom Mellon, Kettle's science chair and grant writer, accepted the award at a ceremony in Philadelphia. The grant money will support the wind machine/aeration portion and the solar component of the school's wetland wastewater treatment system. Toyota listed all award recipients in a half-page ad in *USA Today* on March 28.

**Risen Savior, Milwaukee**, held a record-breaking vacation Bible school from June 16-20. Over 250 children registered, and an average of 100 attended each day. Risen Savior attributes this highest attendance ever to holding the VBS off-site in a local condominium's common area.

### Minnesota

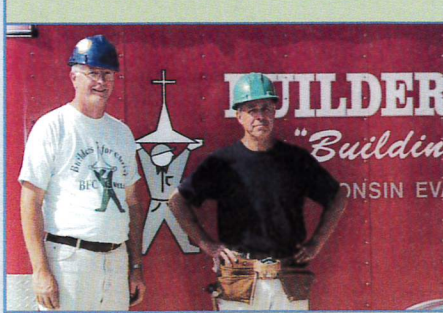
Tornadoes swept through Springfield, Mo., on May 4, destroying many homes around **Zion, Springfield**. However, the tornadoes did not damage the church or any members' homes. Four families from Zion watched as a tornado hit the streets a block away, bounced over their homes, and then destroyed several on the next street.

### Pacific Northwest/Arizona



Aaron Miller (left) is an eighth-grader at Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M. Tommy Werth (right) is a sixth-grader at Grace, Kenai, Alaska. On Jan. 21, both won state championships in the First Annual Reader's Digest Word Power Challenge. In March, they represented their states at the national championships held in Virginia.

### Western Wisconsin



John Wempner (left), from Leesburg, Fla., and Carl Bergeson (right), from Sitka, Alaska, traveled from opposite ends of the country to work on a Builders For Christ project at Bethel, Galesville, Wis.

### California

On July 13, members of **Christ the Vine, Temecula, Calif.**, attended the dedication of their church building. Church attendance at this mission congregation averages about 170 each Sunday.

The **Mountain View Circuit** of Southern California hosted a satellite credit course at California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, from June 9-13. Fifteen pastors attended the course taught by Prof. Forrest Bivens on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

### Happy Anniversary!

**D-M—Mount Zion, Missoula, Mont.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary on July 27.

On July 27, **Redeemer, Hettinger, N.D.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary.

On Nov. 10, 2002, members of St. John, Dempster, and Mt. Calvary, Estelline, S.D., honored their pastor, **Gail Johnson**, for serving their congregations for 25 years.

**MI—Members of Christ, Saginaw, Mich.**, have celebrated the congregation's 100th anniversary throughout 2003. The major celebration took place on July 27.

**PNW—**On July 6, members of Grace, Seattle, Wash., celebrated **Thomas Gumm's** 20th anniversary in the pastoral ministry.

**WW—**On July 20, members of St. Peter, Schofield, Wis., celebrated **Walter Davidson's** 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministry.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Kenneth Pasch; CA—Hermann John; D-M—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; PNW—David Birsching; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Martin Baur.

## In the news —

On May 18, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* featured an article about **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon**. Titled "Living, breathing Lutheran history keeps seminarians grounded in tradition," the article details the school's history, campus, curriculum, and approach to learning.



Quotes from seminary students and Seminary President David Valleskey are peppered throughout the article.

"This really is a fine place to study," said senior Michael Seifert.

Valleskey noted, "Pastors need to keep up with changes in society without losing sight of their history or diluting doctrine and faith."

The *Air Force Print News Today* featured an article on June 20 about **three girls from Salem, Colorado Springs, Colo.** Marissa Uhlhorn, 10, Alicia Drum, 9, and Janae Kirschke, 10, collected a donation for U.S. troops and gave the money and a letter to the Air Force's Chief Master Sgt. Vance Clark. Clark said, "When they gave it to me and I read [the letter], it was truly one of the most touching moments of my life. To see the true innocence in their giving when they expected nothing in return was a moving experience."

### DEFINING RELIGION

**Apocrypha:** books written before Christ was born that were excluded from the Hebrew canon. The Roman Catholic Church has accepted them as books of the Bible, but Lutherans and Protestants have not. The term is also sometimes used for certain books excluded from the New Testament canon.

## A Nebraskan rose

Rose and Ed Schmiedeke were looking forward to a big, cross-country trip after Ed's retirement. But God took Ed to heaven before their earthly dream was realized, leaving Rose with a heavy heart and an empty house.

Philip Zarling, Rose's pastor at the time, could see that she was struggling with her grief. He suggested that she take in a called worker—a way to keep busy and have some activity around the house. Rose reluctantly agreed.

Her church, St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb., had recently started a vicar program, and in August, she would house an unmarried seminary student. Besides being depressed, she was apprehensive.

God helped Rose and "her vicar" through that year. Surely both of them had their struggles—one getting used to being a widow and the other learning the challenges of the ministry. But that wasn't the end of the story. God used Rose to house 11 more vicars!

Over the years, Rose grew into a sort of den mother for all the called workers of the WELS churches and schools in the area. She encouraged the single teachers to come over for weekly pizza/video parties while they corrected papers; hosted a yearly Christmas party for the church and school staff; and put together many bridal showers and other get-togethers.

Rose also served as a mother/grandmother figure to come to with problems. With her easy laugh and a bowl of popcorn, things looked a little brighter.

Rose's life took a different path than the one she expected. God took her grieving heart and opened it up like the flower she was named for. Thank you, Rose, for the love and support you have given over the years to so many workers for the Lord. That love has blossomed in our lives as we serve the Lord in our callings all over the world.

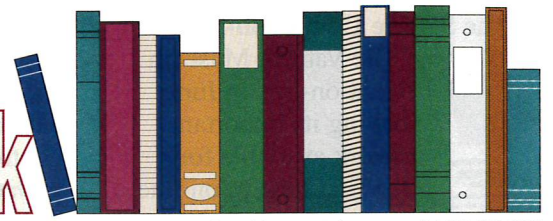
*Jennifer Werre*



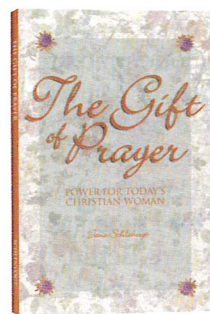
Rose Schmiedeke and one of "her" vicars, Stephen Raddatz.

## Booknook

A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit <www.nph.net> or call 1-800-662-6022.



### Using God's gift of prayer



\$11.99

When looking for a good book, my favorites include two kinds of information. I love books full of ideas that I know but have forgotten or neglected. I also love books that are full of new concepts or teachings that build on that information. Jane Schlenvogt's book, *The Gift of Prayer*, is one of those books.

Each of the 12 short chapters begins with a verse from Scripture that sets the theme. Each chapter closes with a short prayer that focuses on the lessons taught. Throughout the book, Schlenvogt reminds her readers of the blessings and joy that a rich prayer life brings. She is careful to point out that the power comes from our God, not from our prayers.

Schlenvogt's style gives you the feeling of sitting across the table with a dear Christian friend, sharing anecdotes, encouragement, and teaching from God's Word. She shares stories from her own life that show an author who faces the same struggles as most women. She addresses issues such as finding the time to pray, finding the words to pray, and finding the confidence to trust God's answers to prayer. Each struggle is answered with a word from Scripture, coupled with a plethora of practical ideas. Her suggestions range from prayer journals to how to systematically pray for others. By the end of the book readers will find themselves eager to get to work, eager to use the gift of prayer given to us by our loving, heavenly Father.

*Cindi Holman*

*St. Mark, Citrus Heights, California*

### Cute as a button



\$5.99 each

As I read Northwestern Publishing House's new set of children's books to my six-year-old sister, Gabby, I couldn't help but fall in love with the adorable main character, Buttons the bear. As the stories follow Buttons' adventures, children learn basic biblical truths.

Gabby enjoyed the stories, but I think she enjoyed even more the special twist of looking for the actual buttons that are hidden throughout the books' pages (think *Where's Waldo?*). Her drawing below shows

her attempt to recreate illustrator Tammie Lyon's rendering of Buttons.

Author Lynn Groth successfully wrote a series of books that teaches important Christian lessons in a fun format that both kids and adults can appreciate. Northwestern Publishing House has packaged it well by offering a discounted rate of \$18.99 if you buy all four books. All that's missing is the Buttons plush toy.

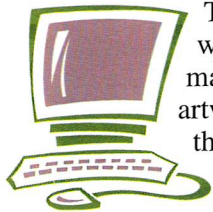
*Nicole Balza*

*St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin*



Buttons drawing by Gabby Moline, Zion, Crete, Illinois.

**See the Sistine Chapel on-line—**



The Vatican Museum went on-line in June, making its important artwork available for the first time to on-line users. By going to <[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)>

and clicking on Vatican Museums, on-line users will be able to have a virtual visit to the Sistine Chapel and five other sections of the museum. Visitors can also access commentary, history, and pertinent biblical quotations relating to selected artwork.

**Canadian federal government looking to change definition of marriage—**

The federal government of Canada has drafted a bill to change the definition of marriage in Canada to include same-sex marriages. The new definition of marriage in the draft bill is “Marriage, for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.” The bill also states that religious officials can refuse to conduct ceremonies that don’t fit into their religious beliefs.

The bill was drafted after the Ontario Court of Appeal’s ruling to legalize same-sex marriages in Ontario in June. The British Columbia Court of Appeal followed suit in July.

The bill will first go to the Supreme Court of Canada to determine its constitutionality and then be put to a vote in the House of Commons, possibly this fall.

If the legislation passes, Canada will become the third country in the world to allow same-sex marriages, after Belgium and the Netherlands.

**U.S. Supreme Court overturns sodomy law—**

In a 6-3 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a 1986 Texas law in June that criminalized homosexual activity.

“The petitioners are entitled

to respect for their private lives,” Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for the court’s majority. “The state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.”

Read more about this decision in our “Editor’s pen” column (p. 34).

**Luther motion picture set to open Sept. 26—**

*Luther*, a motion picture about the life and times of Martin Luther, will be released on Sept. 26 on more than 300 screens in 55 major markets in the United States.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and Neue Filmproduktion, Berlin, Germany, co-produced this movie, which stars Joseph Fiennes (*Shakespeare in Love*) as Luther and two-time Academy award winner Peter Ustinov (*Spartacus*) as Elector Friedrich.

**People with active faith more likely to be satisfied with life—**

A recent Barna poll shows that people with active faiths—those who attend church, read the Bible, and pray during a typical week—are more likely than other adults to strongly agree that they are very happy with their life (73 percent compared to 64 percent).

Seventy-three percent of those with active faiths feel connected to other people, compared to 63 percent of those less active in their faith. Those with active faiths also claim their faith is constantly growing deeper (83 percent compared to 38 percent), and are more likely to describe themselves as being in excellent physical condition (42 percent compared to 34 percent).

Of all people surveyed, 66 percent affirmed that they are very happy with their life. Seventy percent say their religious faith is constantly growing deeper, even though 66 percent believe that religion is losing its influence in our society.

Data is based on a nationwide telephone survey of 1,010 adults during the last week of January and the first week of February 2003. Sampling error is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

[From “Views on quality of life are most influenced by money and faith,” Barna Research Group, Ltd., Ventura, Calif. <[www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)>; April 24, 2003.]

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.

**Take advantage of 2003 pricing while it lasts!**

Recently realize that your *Forward in Christ* magazine subscription runs out soon? Looking for a low-cost gift for a relative, friend, neighbor, or co-worker? Feed souls as well as minds with *Forward in Christ* magazine. Order now to take advantage of 2003 pricing—\$12/year—only \$1/issue. Beginning Jan. 1, 2004, a one-year subscription will cost \$14/year—still a great value for a magazine that is jam-packed with stories of faith, WELS news, interactive Bible studies, and answers to life’s questions.

Call Northwestern Publishing House or order on-line today: 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee, 414/615-5785. <[www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net)>. Charge it—Discover, MasterCard, or Visa—or bill it.



## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Ahlsweide, Eugene F.**, to retirement  
**Bartling, Mark F.**, to retirement  
**Clemons, Samuel M.**, to Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz.  
**Voss, Mark S.**, to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.  
**Werth, William W.**, to Abiding Faith, Smyrna, Tenn.  
**Westendorf, Thomas B.**, to Saved By Grace (ELS), Medford, Ore.

### Teachers

**Bain, Rachel C.**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.  
**Bakken, Kelly**, to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee  
**Beatrice, Monica R.**, to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.  
**Bryant, Amy B.**, to St. Paul, Cannon Falls, Minn.  
**Dobberpuhl, Heath D.**, to Zion, Hartland, Wis.  
**Goede, Michael**, to Kettle Moraine LHS, Jackson, Wis.  
**Gregovich, Joshua D.**, to King of Grace, Golden Valley, Minn.  
**Koeller, Doris A.**, to Salem (107th), Milwaukee  
**LaViolette, Jill**, to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.  
**Monroe, Tamara K.**, to St. John, Baraboo, Wis.  
**Moore, Candace B.**, to Westside Christian, Middleton, Wis.  
**Nolan, Krystal K.**, to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.  
**Pavelchik, Mandy L.**, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.  
**Picchiottino, Juliana**, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.  
**Roska, Janeen**, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee  
**Russell, Karen M.**, to Immanuel, Waukegan, Ill.  
**Scharrer, Jody L.**, to St. John, Hemlock, Mich.  
**Schiller, Renee C.**, to Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis.  
**Schmeling, Amy B.**, to St. Paul, Cannon Falls, Minn.  
**Schultz, Annette F.**, to Trinity, Osceola, Wis.  
**Sievert, Mark**, to Hope Christian School, Milwaukee  
**Springstroh, Kim A.**, to Atonement, Milwaukee  
**Tilbury, Laura E.**, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.  
**Vogel, Anna K.**, to Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
**Warning, Katherine L.**, to Hope, Tsuchiura City, Japan

The synod administration building will be closed Sept. 1. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

David Valleskey, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., will retire at the close of the 2003-04 school year. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary invites voting members of the synod to nominate theologically-trained candidates for the office of seminary president. Nominees must be listed in the current WELS Yearbook under "Pastors-Active." Send names with pertinent information by Sept. 25 to Pastor James Mattek, Trinity Lutheran Church, 604 S 5 St, Watertown WI 53094-4611; <trinitypastor@charter.net>. Also send information about yourself, your home congregation, and how you know the candidate. The list of nominees will be published in December.

## COLLOQUY NOTICE

Clark Brown, Petoskey, Mich., formerly a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in WELS' pastoral ministry. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to

Pastor John C. Seifert, President, Michigan District—WELS, 907 Mattes Dr, Midland MI 48642-3708.

## ANNIVERSARIES

**La Crosse, Wis.**—Mount Calvary (75). Sept. 6. Service, 6 PM. Sept. 7. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. Ed Ungemach, 608/784-5324.  
**Pigeon, Mich.**—St. John (125). Sept. 7. Services, 8:30 & 10:30 AM. Organ concert service, 3 PM. Potluck meal, 5 PM.  
**Saginaw, Mich.**—Christ (100). Sept. 7. Service, 9:30 AM. Potluck dinner to follow. 989/781-0980.  
**Bemidji, Minn.**—St. Mark (30). Sept. 14. Program recounting history, 9 AM. Service, 10:15 AM. Pig roast picnic, 11:30 AM. Lon Kuether, 218/444-6334.  
**New Ulm, Minn.**—Minnesota Valley LHS (25). 507/354-6855.  
 • Sept. 19—volleyball games followed by social hour.  
 • Sept. 20—founders' brunch, all-school tailgate party, football game, banquet, and dance.  
 • Sept. 21—festival service, 2 PM. Pie and ice cream social to follow.  
 Smaller celebrations will be held during the year at concerts, the Association banquet, and graduation.  
**Hadar, Neb.**—Immanuel (120). Sept. 21. Service, 2 PM. Refreshments to follow. Karl Schultz, 402/371-6939.  
**Fairmont, Minn.**—Shepherd of the Lakes (25). Sept. 28. Service, 3 PM. Luncheon to follow. Joy Johnson, 507/238-1269.  
**Gladwin, Mich.**—St. John (100). Oct. 5. Service, 3 PM. Food and fellowship to follow.  
**Brillion, Wis.**—Trinity Concordia Choir (100). Oct. 16. Service, 6:30 PM. Oct. 19. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. Dinner following last service. RSVP, Sherry Derks, 920/864-7060.

## COMING EVENTS

**Church closing**—Sept. 7. Service, 2 PM. St. John, Rauville, S.D. Keith Petersen, 605/886-3134.  
**Sunday school workshops**—Sept. 13, 9-11:45 AM. \$30/congregation. Jerry Kastens, 920/261-3511.  
 • St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis. Classroom management skills.  
 • St. John, Sparta, Wis. Teaching memory work, singing, and missions in a Sunday school.  
 • Northland LHS, Mosinee, Wis. Assisting families and outreach through Sunday school.  
 • Trinity, Watertown, Wis. Preparing and teaching a great Sunday school lesson.  
**Dedication**—New Hope, Melbourne, Fla. Sept. 14. Service, 4 PM. Supper to follow. 321/768-1500.  
**Dedication**—Bethel, Galesville, Wis. Sept. 21. Service, 2 PM. Reception and tours to follow. Debra Hofland, 715/662-2209.  
**Annual life banquet & silent auction**—Waukesha chapter of WELS Lutherans for Life. Sept. 28, 3 PM. Dinner, 4 PM. Country Inn Hotel. Bonnie Frederick, 262/547-6954.  
**Open house**—WELS Lutherans for Life, Metro-Milwaukee branch. Sept. 28. 10:30 AM-1 PM. 8501 W Lincoln Ave, West Allis, Wis. 414/727-8176.  
**WELS/ELS singles retreat**—Oct. 3-5. Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. 262/534-7852 or <share@wels.net>.  
**Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Auxiliary meeting**—Oct. 4, 8 AM to 1:30 PM. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Registration, including lunch, \$10. Jan Lampe, 414/771-4622.

**WOW Retreat**—hosted by Chicago District of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society. Oct. 4-5. Wyndham-Drake Hotel, Oak Brook, Ill. Thea Buege, 708/672-6806.

**Martin Luther College Ladies' Auxiliary**—Oct. 8. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Registration, 9 AM. Meeting, 10 AM. Diane Brutlag, 507/354-8221.

**Christian Growth Seminar**—Oct. 11. Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. Linda Williams, 888/378-2182.

**Run for the prize 5K run/walk**—sponsored by Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio. Oct. 18. Dave Braun, 419/365-5770.

**Christian Woman Today retreat**—Mar. 19-21, 2004. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262/784-0412.

## AVAILABLE

**Periodicals**—two copies of Anderson Catechism workbook series two and one copy each of the *Lutheran Educator* from 1969-1983. Free for the cost of shipping. Ronald Winter, 715/675-3751.

**Furniture**—Two 7' sections of chair rail and one 4' section with cushions, one pair brass candlesticks, and three wall-mounted literature racks. Free for the cost of shipping or pick up from Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wis. Ann Wolfgram, 920/469-0087.

**Furniture**—pulpit, lectern, baptismal font, altar, pews, faceted glass lights. Free for the cost of shipping or pick up from St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. 715/421-3634.

**Furniture**—altar, pulpit, lectern. Free for the cost of shipping or pick up from St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis. 920/565-3780.

## NEEDED

**Curriculum ideas**—for Christian toddler class (ages 0-4). Johannah Rutschow, 440/826-0464.  
**Children's hymnals**—Mary Myllyla, 906/786-0363.

## SERVICE TIMES

**Maineville, Ohio**—Abiding Word, 8470 Landen Dr. Saturday service, 5:30 PM. Sunday service, 9:30 AM. 513/677-9357.

**The Villages, Fla.**—The Open Bible, Spruce Creek Professional Center, Hwy. 27/441 (across from Wal-Mart), Suite 502. Sunday service, 8:45 AM. Herb Schaefer, 352/753-7515.

**Austin, Texas**—Risen Savior, 2811 Aftonshire Way. Service, 9:30 AM. Roger Zehms, 512/280-8282.

## NAMES WANTED

**Carson City/Mineen/Gardnerville/Dayton/Stagecoach, Nev.**—Michael Langbecker, 775/841-4987.

**The Villages, Fla.**—The Open Bible (The Village Lutherans). Herb Schaefer, 352/753-7515.

**Grand Junction, Colo.**—St. Paul is looking for students who attend Mesa State College for a WELS campus ministry program. Jim Berger, 970/874-7009 or David Haberkorn, 970/523-5433.

**Great Falls, Mont.**—Paul Schuler, 406/707-1053.

To place an announcement, call

414/256-3210; FAX, 414/256-3862;

<BulletinBoard@sab.wels.net>. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

# LIFE IN THE SONLIGHT: what might others think?

**“The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. . . . Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.”**

Jon D. Buchholz

**W**hat do people think of you? Nobody wants a bad reputation. We want to be liked and respected. None of us wants to be known as an obnoxious jerk, a filthy slob, or a lazy bum.

For Christians our reputation takes on increased importance when we recognize that we represent Jesus. The way people perceive you shapes the impression they have of Christians in general. You may be the only window to Jesus that people ever look through. I may be the only Bible that an unbeliever reads.

## Freedom can be abused

The Corinthians celebrated their Christian freedom. They understood that they were free from Jewish dietary laws, from Jewish purification and ceremonial laws, and from Jewish festival and Sabbath laws. They could eat what they wanted and worship when they wanted, and they knew it wouldn't harm them spiritually.

Unfortunately, not everyone had a positive impression of the Corinthians' freedom. When believers at Corinth went to the market and purchased meat that had been used in pagan temple rituals—meat that had been sacrificed to idols—it caused some of the conservative Christians with a Jewish background to become offended.

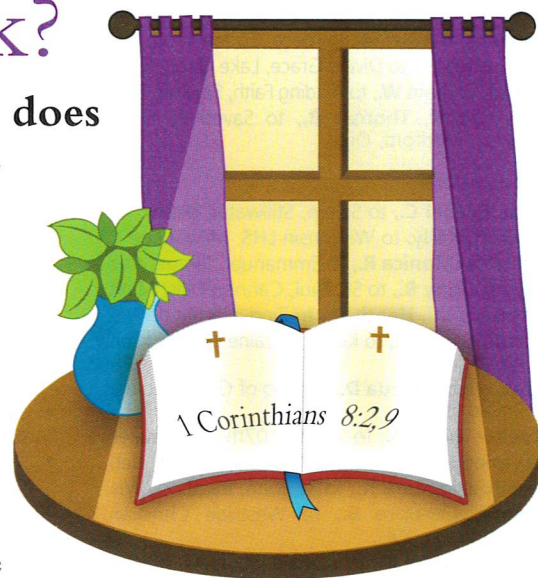
“So, who cares what others think?” the bold Corinthians asked. “They should get over it and find freedom themselves.”

But when souls are at stake, we have to care what others think. It's not worth asserting our knowledge and freedom if it causes a blood-bought soul to fall away from Jesus. Eternity is in the balance. There's too much at stake to ride roughshod over our fellow Christians' sensitivities. Even if we're right, and they just don't understand, it's important to be sensitive to the feelings and consciences of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Let your freedom lead others to Jesus

You are free in Jesus! Free to love, free to serve, free to encourage, free to put others first. Instead of pushing the envelope to see how far you can go, why not use your freedom to lead others to Jesus?

Christian freedom is about more than just eating and drinking. We choose what we wear, the style and image we project. We want to dress modestly and appropriately for the setting we're in. Instead of making a personal statement with outlandish behavior, bold body piercing, and garish style, we'll ask whether our dress and image are edifying to others.



We have choices about the style and form of our worship. In some settings, traditional is comfortable—and it's the only way to go. In other settings, contemporary is appropriate, and traditional forms raise unnecessary obstacles. It all depends upon whom we're with and whom we want to reach.

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” As we Christians mature in our faith, we realize our walk with Jesus isn't about “what I like” or “my way of doing things.” It's about meeting people where they're at, dealing gently with the preferences and perceptions of others, and becoming all things to all people, so that through all possible means we might reach out with the precious message of our Savior.

That's life in the Sonlight!

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

# Getting to know God's story

Randy K. Hunter

**D**rive Highway 1 in California, and you stay in California for hours. Drive Highway 1 on the East Coast, and you barely stay in any state for one hour. State boundary signs fly by like picket fences—or so it seems in comparison to California. Both highways offer beautiful views. Both are legitimate. But the East Coast highway cuts through smaller states.

Read the Old Testament, and you can stay in some books for hours. Read the

dozen books at the end of the Old Testament called “The Minor Prophets,” and names, places, and books fly by like state signs on Highway 1 . . . East Coast, that is. We call these books “minor” for only one reason: they’re smaller. We’ll sample six of the minor prophets here. As you move through these (and the other six on your own), listen for God’s warnings and watch for his promises of mercy.

Enjoy the drive.

- **Hosea.** In the first three chapters of Hosea, we meet Hosea and his wife, Gomer. But this isn’t the story of a dysfunctional home. It’s the account of a dysfunctional people—Israel. Compare Hosea’s family life, especially as it’s shown in 1:2 and 3:1, with God’s people.
- **Hosea.** Find at least three expressions of the Lord’s grace, compassion, and forgiveness for his people in the book of Hosea.
- **Joel.** Joel’s name means “Jehovah is God.” That was his message, too. Read what Joel wrote about “the day of the Lord” in the following three sections: Joel 2:1-3, 11-13, 28-32. For each section, describe the Lord’s judgment or mercy in your own words.
- **Amos.** The prophet Amos was called to point out the sins of the northern tribes of Israel. Page through the nine chapters, and list as many specific sins as you can find. After making your list, react to the Lord’s message in the last five verses of the book.
- **Amos.** Do some doodling. Sketch out the pictures in Amos 7:1-9 and prepare to explain the meaning of each.
- **Jonah.** The Lord sent Jonah 500 miles east, but Jonah got on a ship heading 2,000 miles west. He would go that far away to avoid telling the 600,000 people of Nineveh about the Lord. List what you feel are the top five reasons Christians (we?) don’t tell others about Jesus.
- **Jonah.** From within the belly of the fish, Jonah thought of “worthless idols” that people cling to. List five “worthless idols” that we cling to today.
- **Jonah.** From within the belly of the fish, Jonah thought of people who “forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” List five examples of “grace that could be theirs” that people forfeit today.
- **Micah.** A young Michael Jackson sang, “It’s easy as A-B-C.” Many things in life (and in the Bible) aren’t that simple, but Micah presents a simple three-step plan to live before God. Simple . . . but not easy. Design a “family shield” to symbolize and help you remember Micah 6:8.
- **Habakkuk.** Habakkuk is unique for more than just his name; he was one of a few people to see God. Not unlike Christians today, Habakkuk had a complaint: “How long, O Lord?” The Lord answered him. Summarize Habakkuk’s complaint (1:2-4) and the Lord’s answer (2:2-4).

*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](http://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 Sept. 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

# IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

## TOPIC: E-MAIL CHAIN LETTERS

**Question:** I received this e-mail: "I don't think I know 10 people who admit they love Jesus. Do you love him? This is a simple test: If you love Jesus, send this to at least 10 people, including the person who sent it to you!" A poem then hinted that Jesus wouldn't have time for me if I didn't take time to pass this on. What should I do with such e-mails?

**Answer:** I've received identical e-mails. Certainly, being ashamed of Jesus is a real temptation. Jesus warns us with his first disciples: "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him" (Mark 8:38). Does my irritation with such e-mails arise from a guilty conscience?

Am I embarrassed to profess that I love him who first loved me? Then such an e-mail may be a blessing. Not that it must lead my fingers to the keyboard, but because it sends my knees to the floorboards to confess my timidity.

But I'm uneasy with such e-mails for several reasons. Although well-meaning, they essentially are shaming me into speaking of my love for Jesus—"If you don't send this e-mail, you don't love Jesus!" Daily calls to repentance help crucify my proud old Adam, but only the gospel empowers genuine fruits of faith. The true key is not how much I love Jesus (always imperfectly until heaven), but how much Jesus loves me. I can't shame others into genuine fruits of faith. The only thing that empowers me to live my faith joyfully is to contemplate in Word and sacraments "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18). Sadly, as this e-mail seeks to move me to action, Christ's love for me isn't mentioned.

That reveals another problem. If the purpose is sharing Christ, merely proclaiming "I love Jesus!" won't bring anyone to faith. If outreach is the goal, there's something

better to do than telling 10 people in my address book that I love Jesus. It would be much better to pray for opportunities to share that Jesus is the answer to the sin that otherwise would destroy us. These e-mails are little more than the spiritual equivalent of a high school cheer echoing across the gymnasium of the world: "We love

Jesus, yes we do, we love Jesus, how 'bout you?" To my non-Christian friends, wouldn't that appear as proud boasting?

Speaking of boasting, it's arrogant to say, "I don't think I know 10 people who love Jesus." I know hundreds, who, despite their sinful weaknesses, love Jesus. What is more, every Sunday I confess by faith—not by human judgment—that countless others love him who

first loved us. That's the beauty

of the invisible holy Christian Church we confess every time we confess the Creed.

So what do you do the next time an e-mail chain letter tries to shame you into sharing your faith? Before hitting "delete," thank God for the well-meaning reminder that we aren't to hide our light under a basket. Then thank God that your salvation isn't dependent on the perfection of your love for Jesus but the perfection of his love for you. Next, pray that God would give you opportunities to share the gospel with those who need to hear not of your love for Jesus, but his love for them. Then, in good conscience, consign that e-mail to the cyber trash can—or hit "reply all" and tell whose love really matters! ✨

*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.*

The true key is not how much I love Jesus (always imperfectly until heaven), but how much Jesus loves me.



# BACK TO SCHOOL



With fall at hand, most churches are thinking about starting up another year of Sunday school. Here are a few ideas for you as you start your planning:

- Have a Christian Big Buddy program. Match adult volunteers with a Sunday school student. Each buddy team receives a notebook, in which the big buddy could anonymously send his “little buddy” notes of encouragement, share favorite Bible passages, or just engage in small talk. The little buddy could then write back. At the end of the year, have a pizza party and reveal to the children who their big buddies are.

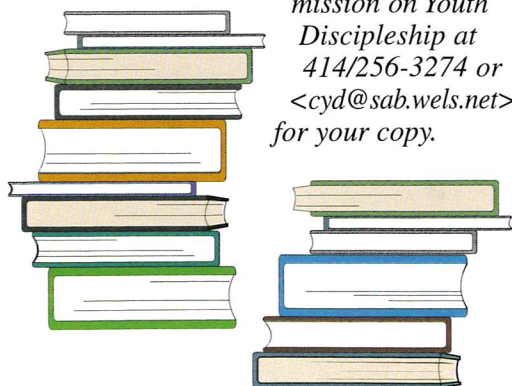
—Lori Plenge  
Mt. Olive, Monroe, Mich.

- Develop a Sunday school newsletter. Share what’s going on in your Sunday school classrooms. This will help keep parents and congregation members informed and involved.

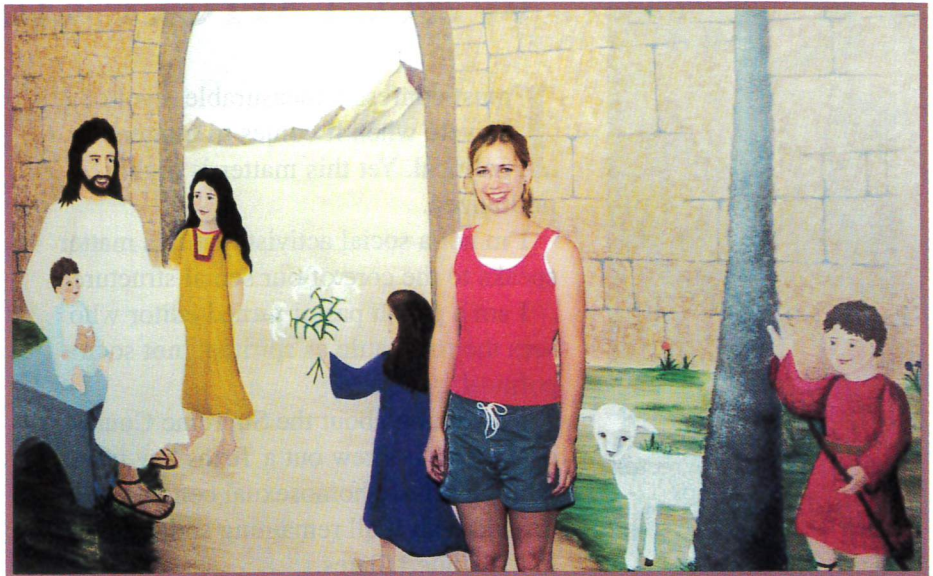
—Susan Buechel  
Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.

- Break up the Sunday school hour by playing Bible trivia and memory games.

The 2003 National Sunday School Conference sponsored an idea swap that had dozens of other ideas for artwork, games, and projects for Sunday school. Contact the Commission on Youth Discipleship at 414/256-3274 or <cyd@sab.wels.net> for your copy.



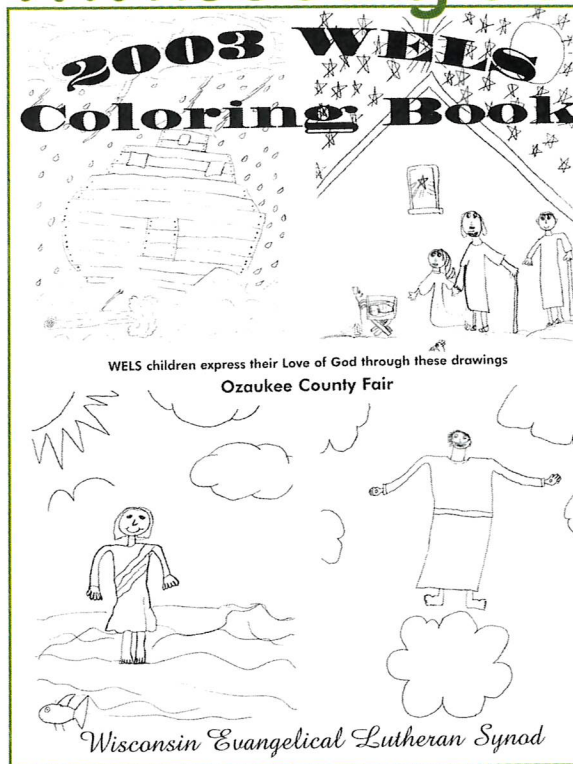
## Picture this



Dawn Kull stands by a mural she painted in the multi-purpose room at Ascension, Escondido, Calif.

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.

## Witnessing at the fair

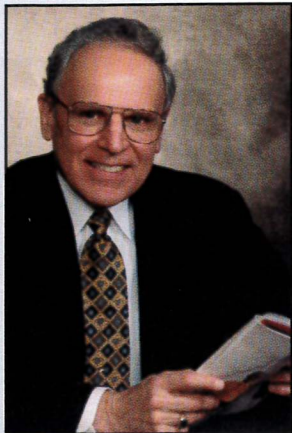


Members of churches in Ozaukee County, Wis., have come up with a unique way to involve their young people as well as to reach out to kids and families. They put together a coloring book showing Jesus’ love that is handed out at the Ozaukee County Fair.

Children from three of the eight Ozaukee County WELS churches submitted drawings for the coloring book. Over 80 volunteers over a five-day period handed out the coloring books and other WELS materials to fairgoers.

WELS volunteers have been handing out

homemade coloring books at the Ozaukee County Fair for the past 11 years. However, this year is the first time that they had a contest to gather artwork for the book.



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

Can we  
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to spread  
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## Watershed decisions

I must confess a measurable level of naiveté when it comes to matters political. Yet this matter is highly politicized.

I'm not a social activist, yet this matter speaks to the core of our social structure.

I am a parish pastor turned editor who sees the real battle as spiritual, not socio-political.

I'm talking about the Supreme Court decision that threw out a Texas law prohibiting private homosexual conduct and trashed with it all remaining sodomy laws in the United States.

Were you surprised by this turn of events? I know I was saddened, disturbed, even angered by it—but not surprised.

Should we be surprised that the law of the land doesn't uphold the laws of God? The abortion debacle in this country should, by itself, disabuse us of the notion that morality matters when the Supreme Court rules.

Should we be surprised when the legal interpretation merely mirrors the moral morass our society has become? What is a sodomy law (rarely enforced) in one state while legislators in another state are considering legalizing same-sex "marriages"?

Should we be surprised when attempts to legislate morality don't work—especially in a permissive society?

No, not surprised! But can we be called to action? In keeping with my opening disclaimers, I don't mean political action, and not even social action. I mean, can we act more vigorously and openly like the Christians we are and the church we unite with to spread the gospel? Will we be lights to shine hope in our world, and

will we be salt for the earth? Can we double, even triple and more, our efforts to tell the whole counsel of God to everyone we can reach?

We can't do it without the law—not the law of the land, but God's law. Let there be no mistake that homosexual conduct runs contrary to God's will and, when practiced without repentance, is open rebellion against God. Let the Jonah-like cry be heard that such rebellion leads to destruction, eternal destruction. Let the law be clearly and forcefully told. Let those who act with impunity know the consequences of such action.

Even so, that's not enough. Even if in fear many turned from their sinful ways, we would have won only a Pyrrhic victory. Our goal is not just to stop sinful activity, not even mainly that. Our goal is to change hearts with the still quiet sound of the gospel, hearts that in thankfulness will strive to avoid sin. Our goal is to lift burdened souls with the sweet sound of forgiveness made sure by the life and death of God's own Son. Our goal is to have God's Spirit work through the Word to win souls for Christ.

Many see the Supreme Court's decision as a watershed for gays and predict major immoral changes to come and the hastening of America's moral demise. How true that will be depends at least in part on what we do in our critical juncture as a Church. God has given us the wherewithal to make it a watershed time in our history. That's what our society needs more of.

*Gary P. Baumler*

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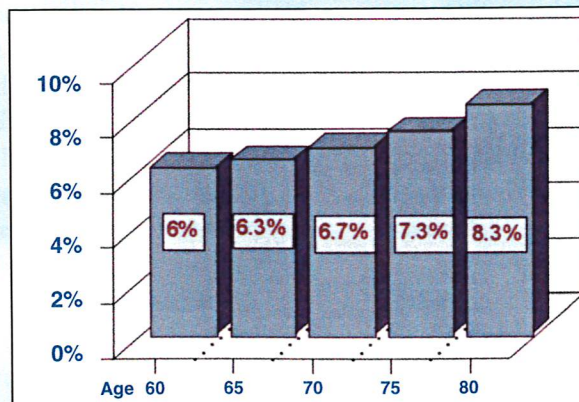
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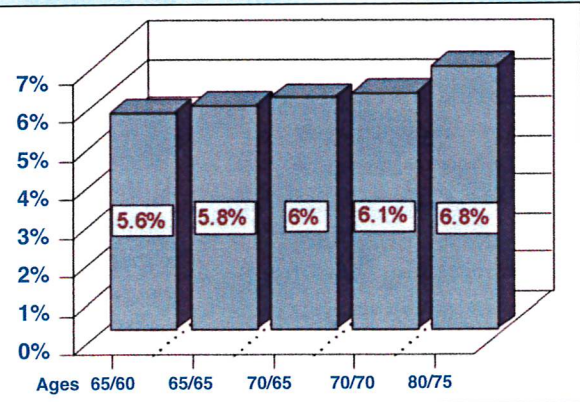
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# Soaring like an eagle

John's Gospel lifts readers to the throne of God and unwraps mysteries not for our understanding but for our worship.

Theodore J. Hartwig

**F**rom veiled hints within the book and according to ancient tradition, the fourth Gospel was written by someone described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. By common consent that man was John.

**Though he seemed to be acquainted with the other three Gospels, John was moved to add yet more to the record,** so that his readers might be lifted to another level of understanding the person and work of Jesus. That intention he declared near the end of his work. The words he wrote aimed to woo and win hearers to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, a human being of flesh and blood, was the Scripture-promised Christ and Son of God, and that by so believing they may have life in his name.

In John's Gospel, life, together with light and love, is a super-charged word, its sound vibrating through the Gospel from beginning to end. In John, life means the new, transformed existence of childlike trust, joy, and security in Jesus, which begins here on earth and lasts into eternity.

All this, the yes and amen of saving faith. It invites taking Jesus as he is: God made human flesh and blood, the infinite become finite, he who is outside of time come into our world of time.

**For in the flesh and blood of God's Son we meet the great stone of stumbling for crippled human reason.** On this question—"What do you think of Christ?"—the gap opens wide between believer and unbeliever. It appeared during Jesus' life (John 6:66-69). It became a system in the church of John's old age.

Already in the late first century, teachers claiming superior Christian knowledge downgraded simple faith as incomplete. It serves people in the pew and may offer a kind of half-salvation, they said. Superior knowledge, on the other hand, belongs to the favored few. It claims that a vast distance separates God's spiritual world from our evil material world, evil because it was made by one of many inferior gods (Jesus being one of them), who bridge those vast spaces between God and ourselves. Superior knowledge also demanded deeds of extreme self-denial in food and marriage to keep oneself, as much as possible, from indulging in and propagating evil material things.

**Some familiarity with the times when John wrote enlarges a person's understanding of the fourth Gospel** with its contrasts between faith and unbelief, spirit and flesh, light and darkness, truth and falsehood. Also, it deepens appreciation

for the mind-boggling "I AM's," whereby Jesus identifies himself throughout the Gospel.

Miracles in this Gospel are few, yet serve as meaningful preludes to the amazing discourses of Jesus, such as the one that inspired the temple guards to their courageous confession: "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (7:46).

Among the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, John was especially well qualified to present the profound truths proclaimed in his Gospel. Peter attracts attention as a man of impulsive word and action. Paul compels respect for his keen thought and extensive intelligence. John is the disciple of deep insights. He saw further than most others. This may account for the special bond between him and his Savior.

Because of its lofty themes, John's Gospel has been described through the centuries as "soaring like an eagle." It lifts readers to the throne of God and unwraps mysteries not for our understanding but for our worship. Luther wrote of this Gospel: "In my life I have not read a book with simpler words than this, and yet they are inexpressible words."



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