

ASCENSION DAY GIFTS • PROSELYTISM • A MOTHER'S DAY TRIBUTE

MAY 2006

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness

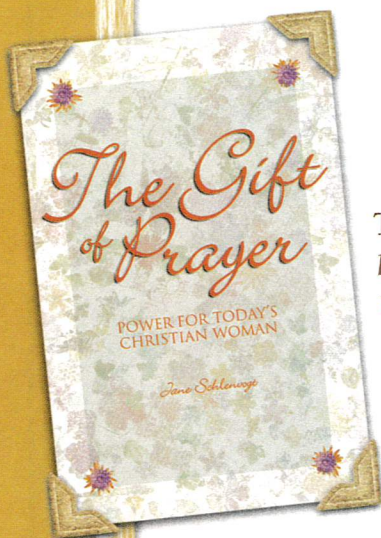
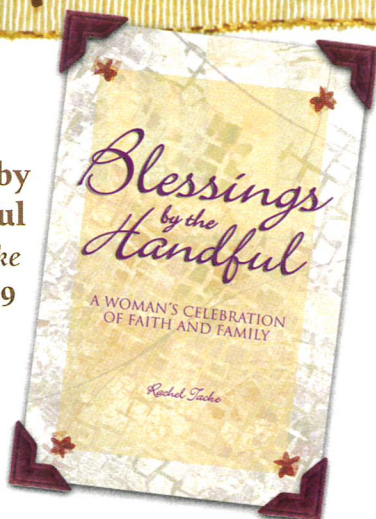
**MAKE A
DIFFERENCE**



Like opening a scrapbook...

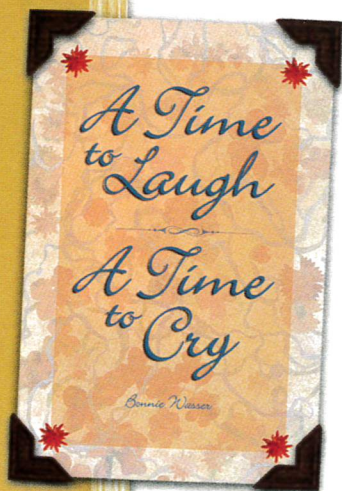
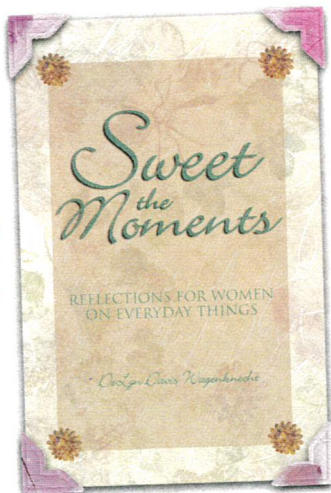
**GREAT
GIFT
IDEAS!**

**Blessings by
the Handful**
by Rachel Tacke
LU12N1780, \$12.99



The Gift of Prayer
by Jane Schlenvogt
LU12N1779, \$12.99

Sweet the Moments
by DeLyn Davis Wagenknecht
LU12N1777, \$12.99



**A Time to Laugh—
A Time to Cry**
by Bonnie Wasser
LU12N2024, \$12.99

filled with mementos of joyful times and precious memories, enjoy these tales of motherhood, marriage, and church life, which speak to godly women in every walk and stage of life. Although each story is unique, they are all united under a common theme. These authors draw on Scripture to delve into the joys and trials of their situations, creating new perspectives on living fully for God.

Book Sets

Set A: The Gift of Prayer
A Time to Laugh—A Time to Cry
LU12N2030, \$19.99*

Set B: Blessings by the Handful
Sweet the Moments
LU12N2031, \$19.99*

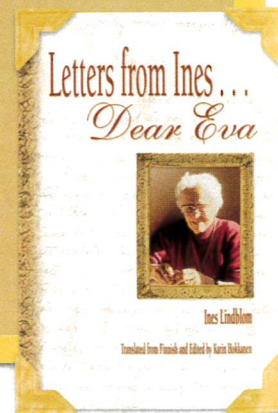
Limited time offer!

Purchase either set and receive a **FREE book: Letters from Ines** (also sold separately, LU06N0724, \$10.99).

**A savings
of \$16.98
per set!**

*No other discounts apply.
All orders are subject to shipping
and handling charges and sales
tax where applicable.

*Remember
Mother's Day
is May 14.*



To order or to receive additional information about individual titles, **visit www.nph.net** or **call 1-800-662-6022.**

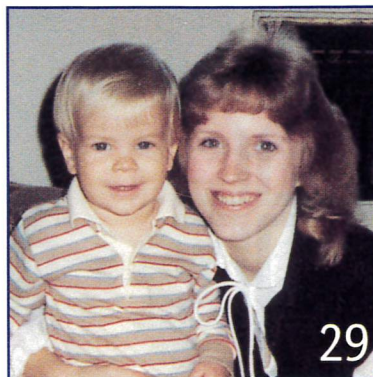


**Northwestern
Publishing House**
1250 North 113th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284

“Remember that God works on the hearts of people one at a time.”



CORBIS



Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

FEATURES

- 10 MAKE A DIFFERENCE** Sharing the gospel can make a difference in the lives of the people who need Jesus.
Michael L. Hintz
- 12 TOUCHING THE WORLD** A pastor shares how his path through the ministerial education schools prepared him to serve people with the gospel.
Aaron T. Mueller
- 14 JUSTIFICATION MOTIVATES OUR MISSION** God's objective justification not only saved us but also empowers us for our mission and ministry.
Jon D. Buchholz
- 16 SOMETHING DIFFERENT** What compels someone to volunteer to clean mold from a house?
Abby L. Janssen
- 28 LIVING LESSONS IN CHRISTIAN GIVING** A pastor shares how committed Christian laypeople encouraged him.
Arthur H. Frenz Jr.
- 29 A MOTHER'S DAY TRIBUTE** A son uses passages in Proverbs to paint a picture of his faithful mother.
Adam M. Goede
- 30 CLEANING UP OUR PERSPECTIVE** We need to put in our full effort wherever God has placed us.
Christopher J. Pluger
- 36 A CHILD'S GIFT** What was scrawled on an envelope tells us more than what was contained inside.
Lynn E. Wiedmann

WELS and MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE WALKING TOGETHER

FOCUSED

Together we maintain our strong Scriptural focus in every congregation and school.

Minori Yamaki
Preschool Teacher

"MLC prepared me to keep my focus on Christ."



CARING

Together we bring the caring message of Christ to a hurting world.

Jeremiah & Lisa Gumm
Pastor and Teacher

*"MLC helped us to see every child and adult as a **precious lamb** for whom Christ died."*



DISCERNING

Together we prepare men and women who apply the Word of God to people with real problems in the real world.

Jack Meyer
Staff Minister

"It was a blessing to study under professors who know God's Word so well and have experience applying it in the 'real world.'"



Training your next pastor,
teacher, and staff minister

MAY THE LORD OUR GOD
BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Forward in Christ magazine
WELS Communication Services
2929 N Mayfair Rd
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
Phone: 414-256-3210
Fax: 414-256-3862
E-mail: fic@sab.wels.net
www.wels.net

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rev. John A. Braun
braunj@nph.wels.net

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@sab.wels.net

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Abby L. Janssen
abby.janssen@sab.wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Laura C. Warmuth
laurachristine@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

COPYRIGHT

©2006 by *Forward in Christ*. Printed in the USA. *Forward in Christ* grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a WELS church, school, or organization, provided that copies are distributed free and indicate *Forward in Christ* as the source. Artwork may not be reproduced except in the context of its article. For other copyright questions, contact Bob Adrian, 414-454-2112; adrianb@nph.wels.net.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to *Forward in Christ*, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individual: USA—\$14; Canada—\$14.98; all other countries—air mail \$45.20. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

What really struck me about this issue of *Forward in Christ* are the varied examples of how WELS members are reaching out with the gospel. The WELS news section (pp. 19-25) is full of stories of how individuals and congregations are getting into their communities and living their faith. Whether it's a congregation trying new outreach methods, a teenager with a congenital disorder counseling others, college students making friends with people with developmental disabilities, or a volunteer using music to further her ministry in Taiwan, all have the same goal in mind—to spread the news of Jesus.

If you want to reach out to those who don't know Jesus but don't know where to start, check out our new series on how to share Jesus with friends. Pastor Mike Hintz, administrator for the Commission on Evangelism, will discuss starting a spiritual conversation, sharing our Savior, and following up in his four-part series. The first article (p. 10) covers identifying those who need Jesus and building relationships with them. It's information we all can use because we all can be missionaries wherever God has placed us. We just need to see and take advantage of the opportunities God places in front of us.

MAY

DEPARTMENTS



- 6 FEEDBACK**
- 7 DEVOTION**
I am weak, but he is strong *Stephen H. Geiger*
- 8 EDITORIAL COMMENT**
What is it you believe? *Thomas J. Jeske*
- 9 QUESTION & ANSWER**
Proselytism *Richard L. Gurgel*
- 18 WHATEVER**
Why did my parents do it? *Brianna Stein*
- 19 NEWS**

- 26 BULLETIN BOARD**
- 27 POTLUCK**
- 32 FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE**
Vocation or avocation *Karl R. Gurgel*
- 33 BIBLE STUDY**
Philippians 3:7-11: I rejoice in knowing Christ Jesus my Lord *Paul E. Zell*
- 34 A THOUGHT**
Ascension gifts *John A. Braun*
- 35 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY**
A letter of hope *Randy K. Hunter*

"ASH" WEDNESDAY

Thank you for the positive Ash Wednesday emphasis on making the sign of the cross with ashes on the forehead as told in the article "The mark on our forehead" [March]. The ancient customs and rituals of the universal church can have positive teaching value. Just because the "Catholics do it" or because some fail to see the teaching value of engaging all the senses in communicating the Word of God, doesn't mean it shouldn't be done in WELS. . . .

*James Schulz
Indianapolis, Indiana*

When I picked up *Forward in Christ* [March], the magazine opened to page 7.

The picture and the headline brought me back to my childhood when the only Protestant families in our mining community were my parents. All of our neighbors were of the Roman Catholic faith except us.

Now 60 years later I find that the Lutheran church I joined as a young adult is now trying to convert me to the same things I rejected long ago. All the pomp and show I rejected then is now showing up in WELS.

*Ralph Bailey
Pardeeville, Wisconsin*

START WITH PRAYER

I was so pleased when I read John A. Braun's article in the January 2006 magazine. I believe it is so important to start each day and end each day

with prayer. I have read this through several times and truly believe that Braun's prayers are most worthy of sharing. What a pleasure it is to read what our new executive editor believes about beginning his new position with prayer. It comes across so strongly that he does indeed believe that God is in charge of all things, and that he (Rev. Braun) puts his total trust in his Lord Jesus. I am looking forward, as I always do, to each new magazine.

*Creta Stickney
Watertown, South Dakota*

THANKS AND SUGGESTION

For about the last six years, your periodical has been read by me from cover to cover. It really is great and has become better and better—especially with the publication of the articles that are series articles. I have laminated about 30 best articles and prayers. I daily read some in my devotions. . . .

From the February 2006 issue, I photocopied the justification article and gave it to an assistant chef at a golf club last week. About a year ago his 18-year-old son was murdered. The chef is a Pentecostal, but I give him many laminated religious articles. I talked to him this noon. He told me he is riveted to that justification article every night before he goes to bed. . . .

If it is not out of line, may I suggest to you that you have your theological experts develop formats for

family devotions and publish them in a series—maybe as many as a dozen or two? There must be a vast majority of young parents of children who feel at a loss when they hear in church that they should have family devotions. How do we really do family devotions? What material do we include? . . .

*Herbert H. Freise
Seattle, Washington*

Thanks for the suggestion. It's great to hear from our readers what they would like to see in the magazine. We always welcome articles and news ideas. Send them to Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net.—ed.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Take our online quizzes on justification. The questions were developed by Pastor Jon Buchholz, who is writing a five-part series on justification (see p. 14). Go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficquiz, create an account, and see how much you know.

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

**A Gift
FOR EVERY
occasion**

Looking for a **LOW-COST GIFT** for a relative, friend, or neighbor? Feed their souls as well as their minds with a subscription to *Forward in Christ*.

This \$14 gift is good for every month of the year:

MAY—Looking for a different graduation gift? Give a gift that takes a graduate into the future.

JUNE—Attending a wedding this summer? Help a bride and groom grow in their faith with a gift subscription to *Forward in Christ*.

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

Call Northwestern Publishing House today, 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee, 414-615-5785. Or order online, www.nph.net/periodicals. Charge it—Discover, MasterCard, or Visa—or bill it.

I am weak, but he is strong

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:3

Stephen H. Geiger

His cup is empty. One gallon of milk sits close by.

A child sees the challenge. The child determines that one who has graduated from sippy cups surely is ready to pour his own drink. He moves for the jug. Dad reaches to help. "No, I do it."

Under fatherly observation, tiny arms try to lift. Many attempts. Repeated failure. Finally the child asks for help, seeing his weakness and appreciating Dad's strength.

In our weakness, we question God's word

You may have strength to pour from a heavy jug. Yet challenges remain. Cars break down. Thieves break in. Children test patience. Parents disappoint. Disease steals one you love. A hated temptation assaults. Guilt threatens despair.

In trouble we can feel so weak. If only we looked quickly to the One who can help. Unfortunately, in weakness we often find frustration. We wonder what God is doing. We question whether God is keeping his word.

Long ago God's people faced such a pain-filled moment, not uncommon in a sin-filled world. They struggled to see the loving hand of the Lord. "You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3).

Hunger brought complaint. The children of Israel concluded that the loving divider of Red Sea waters must have had evil intentions all along. Sinful flesh found fault not in itself but in God.

Our flesh can do the same. In trouble we so easily challenge our

strong God. We imagine we know better. We think God may be doing wrong.

God always keeps his word

What mercy when God humbles us even more. What mercy when God permits challenge that drives us finally to our knees. What mercy when God shows the lie of a proud heart and opens our eyes to the eternal consequence of complaint, that what God owes us is far worse than any hurt we are feeling.

What mercy that God does all of this with a heart that loves.

God humbles that he might lift up. God reveals weakness that we might discover true strength. God uses hunger, hurt, challenge, and disappointment to remind us that true life rests not on things temporary, but "on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

Why the emphasis on words? Surely God's words are themselves power for action. To speak, "Let there be," was for earth to appear. To shout, "Lazarus, come out," brought a dead man to life. God's words are power, and at times the action announced is immediate.

But there are also occasions when fulfillment waits. Abram heard, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars. . . . So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:5). More than 10 years passed before he had his promised son. Isaiah wrote, "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). More than 700 years passed



before eyes saw God's salvation, when Jesus made our sin his own and through death and resurrection made his heaven our own.

What joy for us, that promises of the past are always kept over time. We are those stars, children of Abraham by faith in Jesus. Sin-scarred souls are healed, our complaints in times of trouble washed away in the blood of the Lamb.

Our life continues to rest on such promises, words certain to be kept. God has forgiven and God does care and God will rescue, even though, in a moment of trouble, your eyes may not be able to see.

What we can see in trouble is that we are weak.

What God shows us in trouble is that he is strong.

Contributing editor Stephen Geiger is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

What is it you believe?

Thomas J. Jeske

It came out of a time of anxiety. Different spiritual leaders in different places were putting out conflicting messages. Fear and conflict grew. Could someone write down on paper a summary of what a Christian believes?

The Apostles' Creed has three parts. The first gets on and off the stage in a hurry—one line. There is a God. He can do anything. All comes from him and is sustained by him.

How much space the Second Article takes up on the page compared to the part preceding it! These many words about Jesus are a partial answer to the question “What conflicts did early Christians grapple over?” In these lines about God’s Son lay contention. “Born of the virgin Mary . . . rose from the dead . . . will return to judge.”

The third part of our Creed is neither as brief as the first nor as exhaustive as the second. The Third Article repeats five Bible truths that a Christian must believe:

Holy Spirit: The devil is the prince of this world, Jesus revealed to his apostles. Three unflattering adjectives—dead (Ephesians 2:1), hostile (Romans 8:7), and foolish (1 Corinthians 2:14)—describe the human heart as God finds it. The Bible can describe the human existence as a slave’s life under Satan’s spiritual lordship. So the third part of the Creed wants to comfort the alarmed conscience. Here on earth operates not only the unclean spirit, but also God’s Holy Spirit.

Holy Christian church: It was in Eden that Satan destroyed the faith bond between the heavenly Father and his human children. According to Genesis 3, the LORD spoke to the serpent. Despite the wreckage Satan had caused, God declared his intention to (re)gather a family. He would put enmity between the devil’s family and Eve’s offspring. One of Eve’s descendants, a male child, would come and crush the serpent. In distinction to and in conflict with the community of unbe-

lievers, the LORD promised that there would be a gathering of believers, a family of faith, children of God, a community of saints.

Forgiveness of sins: Unforgiven is a terrible way to live and die. To be the object of God’s wrath is an appalling thought. The holy Christian church possesses the counterweight to guilt’s fearful experiences: forgiveness for Christ’s sake. Here is the church’s true treasure. We will not find full and free forgiveness anywhere else.

Resurrection of the body: Christians know that they are flesh and blood; they know that they will go back to dust. Jesus’ disciples, however, do not grieve like others who have no hope. The disciple looks forward to leaving his grave behind, just as Jesus has risen from his. It’s dismal to consider the alternative—a Christless death.

Life everlasting: None of us has any experience with life after death. The fish that dies on the stringer, the family dog buried in his blanket, the high school classmate memorialized at the side of the road—these life experiences teach

us that life is temporary and that death is final. With what an astonishing flourish, then, does the Creed end: there is such a thing as eternal life! There is a kind of life that does not wither away or come to a catastrophic conclusion or default to Satan. It is the Holy Spirit, not the evil spirit, who is the Lord of Life.

The Apostles’ Creed is our short summary of what a person needs to believe in order to be a Christian. Study it closely. Thank God for those who passed it down to you. Savor it in worship. Determine to share it with another person soon.

The Apostles’ Creed is our short summary of what a person needs to believe in order to be a Christian.

Contributing editor Tom Jeske is pastor at Living Hope, Omaha, Nebraska.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Proselytism

As evangelism efforts became a greater emphasis in our synod in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a concern about proselytizing. I don't find much concern today. If this still should be a concern, how do we avoid proselytizing?

The word proselytize comes from a Greek word used in the New Testament to describe someone converted from paganism to belief in the true God. As we use the word today, it is typically not used to describe someone being brought from unbelief to faith. To proselytize means that we would intentionally target those who are active members of other Christian denominations and try to “convert” them to our denomination.

Therefore it should still be a concern to us that we do not become guilty of proselytizing. Why is that? In our evangelism efforts we must not lose sight of the fact that the holy Christian church is much larger than our Wisconsin Synod and the other Lutheran churches in our fellowship. Wherever Jesus' gospel is taught, we know that the Holy Spirit won't let that gospel return empty. Despite the very real danger of doctrinal error, we recognize that all Christian denominations still share the gospel. If we actively look to “convert” Christians in such denominations, we ignore the promise of what the Spirit can accomplish through the gospel in their midst.

Proselytizing also has a second problem. Every believer in those Christian denominations possesses the keys of the kingdom as we do. Because they possess the keys, those Christians also have the privilege of calling public ministers to serve them. In particular, they ask their called shepherd to keep watch over their souls. We have no right to violate that call by maneuvering ourselves into the middle of that relationship between shepherd and sheep. That's why proselytizing is sometimes called “sheep stealing.”

For those two reasons, we do not intentionally aim our evangelism efforts at those belonging to other Christian denominations. For instance,

when conducting door-to-door surveys, if it is clear that the person at the door is an active member of another Christian congregation, we don't proceed to entice them with reasons why our congregation is a better place to worship.

Doesn't that mean we are abandoning people to a mixture of truth and error with no concern for the impact of false doctrine on their faith? Not at all! As a church body, we do not hide our confession of the truth. In published material, like *Forward in Christ*, Northwestern Publishing House resources, and our Web site, we clearly set our convictions before the world.

Especially on a personal level, we also listen to the encouragement of 1 Peter 3:15. We still want to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Answering “everyone” includes those from other denominations who ask about our beliefs. If such conversations lead to even more questions about our beliefs, we would not hesitate to speak with them further or share printed materials with them. Finally, if their questions continue, we would invite them to attend our congregation's Bible information class where our beliefs are laid out in detail. If discussions do reach that point, we would be wise to honor their pastor's call by encouraging them to inform their pastor.

While Christian love forbids us to actively seek out or target the sheep of other Christian flocks, Christian love also forbids us to remain silent when they take the initiative to ask us what we believe. We give thanks to God if he uses our humble and gentle witness to win them to a more faithful confession of the truth.

Contributing editor Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

Have a question? Send it to Q&A, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Look online at www.wels.net/jumpword/qa for more questions and answers.

Make a

Sharing the gospel can make a difference in
the lives of the people who need Jesus.

Michael L. Hintz

"I feel guilty about not making a better effort at sharing my faith."

I get so nervous because I am not sure what to say. If I get enough courage to speak up, I'm afraid that I will say something wrong. So it's a struggle for me to start a conversation about Jesus."

Does that sound like you? Most of us get the jitters when it comes to sharing our faith. What can we do to grow in our confidence to tell others about Jesus?

Start with a close connection to Jesus. Our Savior says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Faith in Jesus is vital for spiritual life. We can't live eternally without him. Apart from him we can't do anything, including sharing our faith. Our connection with Jesus grows stronger as we stay in his Word. God's Word is the source of knowledge about our Savior and the power to give us confidence to tell of him.

Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus with people. Many books and programs instruct and assist us with evangelism. Many of them are helpful, but they may leave us with the impression that evangelism is quite complicated. It's not.

Identifying those who need Jesus

There are three basic things needed for evangelism: the gospel, people who have the gospel, and people who need the gospel.

God has revealed the gospel in the Bible. That's the first thing needed. By God's grace, we have it. The Holy Spirit used the gospel to

bring us to faith in Christ. That's the second thing. The third thing is people who need Jesus. They are people who don't have faith in Jesus or confess Jesus but do not actively participate in a Christian church. Millions of people just in North America need Jesus, and the number is growing. The immensity of the job before us can be overwhelming, but remember that God works on the hearts of people one at a time.

To underscore that point, there is a story about an old man walking the beach at dawn. He noticed a young man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Catching up with the youth, the old man asked what he was doing. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun. "But the beach goes on for miles and miles, and there are millions of starfish," countered the man. "How can your effort make any difference?" The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it to safety in the waves. "It makes a difference to this one," he said.

Sharing the gospel can make a difference for the people that you know need Jesus. Identify them. Are there some among your family? How about people with whom you work or those that share leisure time with you? Do you have neighbors whose cars regularly stay parked in their driveways on Sunday mornings? Do you know people in the organizations or groups that you attend who have little to do with Jesus?

Write down their names, and list what you know about them. Are they single or married? Where do they live and work? What about their family? What are some of their interests? Getting to know people is an important first step toward building closer relationships with them. It's natural and more comfortable for us to share the good news of Jesus with

people that we have come to know. The trust and respect that exist in close relationships help us overcome our hesitancy and concerns. As we spend time with people and grow in our relationships with them, there will be moments to speak a fitting word about Jesus and what he means for us. Our love for these people will help us understand the importance of turning small talk into conversation about things that matter eternally.

Building relationships with those who need Jesus

There are several important things to remember as we seek to get to know people and build relationships with them.

Accept people in Christian love. Acceptance is an act of unconditional love. That does not mean approval of sinful behavior. It does mean that we will be

a friend with someone in spite of their “warts.” Such unconditional love will move the friendship to a deeper relationship in which we will have plenty of opportunity to talk about the unconditional love of our best friend, Jesus.

Be interested in people who need Jesus. Focus on them—not on yourself—to find common interests and make connections. Dale Carnegie said, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” We grow closer to people when we do things together regularly. Spend time with your friends, sharing ordinary times of life together. As Christians we build friendships not just for friendships’ sake. We have an

eternal goal in mind. We want to share the good news with our friends that Jesus is the Savior of all people.

Help people in their everyday needs. Our actions testify to the power of God’s love working in our lives. A kind word, a helpful deed, an unexpected gift are ways that we can let our faith show and generate curiosity about “what makes us tick.” Likely our charity will open up various opportunities to explain our faith.

Commit yourself to the Lord in prayer. Ask him to help you be more confident about sharing your faith. Pray for the knowledge you need for speaking about Jesus as the world’s Savior. Ask God for

the privilege of being used by him to reach out with the gospel to those people who need Jesus. Then get ready for the Lord to answer your prayer.


Michael Hintz, administrator of the Commission on Evangelism, is a member at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wisconsin.

Next month: Starting a spiritual conversation.

This is the first of a four-part series on confidently sharing Jesus with our friends.

Millions of people just in North America need Jesus, and the number is growing.

difference



The tests in high school were always challenging. Quizzes weren't easy either. When you have to memorize Latin and sometimes German words—often both—every night seemed to offer something substantial to study. College just made it more fun. Spice it up with Greek, and season the meal some more with Hebrew. After the main course, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is the dessert. There it becomes clearer why you ate the meat and potatoes for so long. All those years of memorizing and study relate in every way to theology, and theology relates in every way to ministry. That means all those years were really about people.

Now that I am surrounded by God's people, I appreciate our WELS schools all the more. The food of that Christ-centered education energized and equipped me to serve people in ministry.

I am reminded of that on a daily basis.

Real Ministry Situations

A man stopped by my home in the weeks after Christmas to drop something off. Looking a little tired from his work, he didn't seem to want to talk much.

Taking the time to probe beyond, "How are you doing," and, "Good,"

I asked him about his family. Out of the blue he began talking about how his relative had

killed someone in a brutal way. To compound the situation, the visitor and the murderer once had been roommates. The visitor kept repeating, "I never thought this person could do anything like this." Then he added, "I also have close friends of mine that are getting a divorce."

As I listened, I recalled my seminary professor talking about counseling techniques.

A middle-aged couple visited church a few months ago, and I went to their home to see them. During our discussion, the wife stated, "I have my own unknown language in which I talk to God. It started off as just a few syllables, then words, but now it has progressed over the years into a full-blown language. Do you encourage speaking in tongues at your church?"

My mind returned to a college professor in a Corinthians class at Martin Luther College discussing speaking in tongues.

A while back, someone asked to meet with me. The evening came, and a young woman showed up in a place she hadn't been for a long time: church. She described how things had gone too far. They didn't seem right anymore. She and her boyfriend had been involved with an organization of witches. It was too much, and she finally remembered her roots from childhood Sunday school. "Tell me about Christianity again."

TOUCHING THE WORLD

A pastor shares how his path through the ministerial education schools prepared him to serve people with the gospel.

Aaron T. Mueller

I was reminded of Luther Preparatory School religion class where we talked about Paul and the unique gospel opportunities he had on his missionary journeys.

A college student asked to meet me. "How does it work," the person asked. "How does what work?" I replied. "How does forgiveness work? Does God forgive everything? What about secret sins? What about guilt? Is it true that at the end of the day it just boils down to Jesus?"

Instantly there was a flash of Scripture references. There were chapels and questions asked in class. There were conversations with students and seminars by keynote speakers. "I am the way and the truth and the life. . . ." "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. . . ." "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us."

MINISTRY-MINDED TEACHING

The odd thing about each of these situations is that they really aren't new. We talked about other religions before. We compared original languages against false theology. Teachers captured our attention through their own personal experiences. They related them directly and powerfully to Scripture. That ministry-minded teaching is part of our synod schools. Through it, God continued to prepare his people for able service.

Underneath the religion classes, the tests, and the quizzes was something equally if not more important. Certainly professors daily offered their academic knowledge. But it was the sincere and heartfelt way they did it that made a lasting impression. It was more than lecture from a podium. They modeled a love of ministry for us. They shared their own encounters in ministry. They whetted our appetites through their experiences. Education wasn't just eight hours and out. It was a 24-7 curriculum, serving to mold and shape future leaders.

Now that the future is here, the tests seem strangely familiar. God gives them often, and they are challenging. But they are not overwhelming. Our God who gives the tests also gives the competency to deal with them and his Son to help us—and help others stand up under them.

Many people in Eau Claire still haven't heard of WELS or any of our synod schools. But the world where I live is being touched by the Word because of them. And for many, it is making a world of difference.

Aaron Mueller is pastor at St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Paul Wendland, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., shares the attitudes the seminary seeks to instill in its students through the gospel.

Confessional in stance: He is not a reed shaken by the wind, but a man who can stand on his own two theological feet. He can say with Luther, "My heart is held captive to the Word."

Evangelical in approach: He keeps the gospel at the center of all his sermons and all his actions. He preaches the law to convict, primarily, and the gospel to console, build up, and motivate. As a gospel servant, he wants to frame everything for God's people in terms of Christ.

He understands that when God's people know who Jesus is and why he came, then they know who they are and why they're here.

Mission-minded in spirit: He looks out at this dying world with the eyes of Christ. He thinks of how Christ once gazed at a throng of Galilean peasants. Now a Pharisee would have sneered, seeing a worthless rabble. But Jesus saw lost sheep, sheep in need of a shepherd, and his heart went out to them.

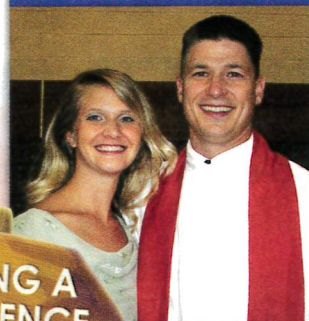
Culturally sensitive: He listens before he speaks. He is eager to learn how other people view the world. He longs

to understand others on their terms. He knows how important this understanding is if he wants to speak the truth lovingly and fittingly.

Appropriately flexible: He knows that the gospel creates its own forms. He knows that what God has neither commanded nor forbidden, we are free to do, free to change, free to improve on, or free to leave alone. But he also knows that a Christian will exercise this freedom appropriately, that is, in Christian love. What God has left free remains free, but a Christian will not use his freedom in a way that might cause a brother or sister to stumble.

Zealous to nurture and equip the saints: He is a driven man. What drives him is God's great love in Christ. He lives by the knowledge that Jesus left his home of bliss to come into our dark space. Jesus loved us when we did not love him. Jesus gave all he had to give to take our sin away, counting no cost too great just to make us his own forever. As the pastor lives by that love, so he lives to love others as Christ loved him, to serve others as Christ served him, to freely give as he has freely received.

Sarah and Aaron Mueller.



Sarah and Aaron Mueller (second and third from left) took Michigan Lutheran Seminary students to Malawi, Africa, to conduct a vacation Bible school.

Jon D. Buchholz

JUSTIFICATION: MOTIVATES OUR MISSION

God's objective justification not only saved us but also empowers us for our mission and ministry—to share the good news of sins forgiven with people who are still lost and dying

GOD'S SON HAS COME. Jesus Christ has completed his work. The sin of the world was laid upon his shoulders, and he bore its shame. His sacrifice is complete. God's verdict of "not guilty" is rendered. Jesus has restored life and immortality to a fallen world. The same simple truth applies to all people: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Sadly, most people don't know this simple truth. The vast majority of the souls living in the world are perishing in darkness, ignorance, and unbelief. Billions have never heard that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. Countless souls will live out their days unaware of the forgiveness that was purchased for them at Calvary's cross.

St. Paul asks: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14,15).

Since Jesus died for the world, he is to be proclaimed to the world. Every soul is a treasure, whose worth is measured by the precious blood of Jesus.

A powerful motivator

God's justification has given you a new identity as a forgiven child of God. It has given you a new purpose in life. It motivates your mission, as you share the good news of sins forgiven with people who are still lost and dying.

The forgiveness acquired by Jesus for all at the cross gives us confessional Lutherans the highest motivation to share our Savior. We don't preach "Jesus saves" and offer a salvation that is incomplete and just waiting for the sinner to do something to complete the transaction. We offer comfort to troubled sinners, the assurance—not the mere possibility—of salvation. We proclaim boldly, "Jesus saved." Past tense. Finished. Certain. Period.

We don't leave God's people twisting in an ambiguous morality asking, "What would Jesus do (WWJD)?" We

proclaim what Jesus did to rescue sinners, and we rejoice that God counts every Christian work of faith done in the righteousness of Christ as good.

A ticket to growth and popularity?

As we share the good news, does this mean that our churches will always see droves of people coming to hear God's Word? Is preaching repentance and faith the ticket to a growing synod? Not necessarily.

Since Jesus died for the world, he is to be proclaimed to the world.

We have a wonderful promise from God: "My word that goes out from my mouth . . . will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). The message of salvation always has an effect. It either softens people's hearts and draws sinners to Jesus in repentance and trust or it hardens people's hearts and drives them further away from God. There is no promise that preachers will be popular or that evangelists will be effective in bringing great numbers of souls to Christ.

But it's not about popularity or numerical success. We don't share Jesus because we want to reach quotas of adult confirmands or because we want ours to be the most popular church in town. Throughout Scripture, a frequent mark of true preaching was its unpopularity. The prophets and

apostles who called people to repent and held out the promise of forgiveness were persecuted and put to death. Jesus even said to his disciples, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11,12).

We don't tell people about Jesus because we want our churches to grow. We don't support mission work because we want the synod to get bigger. We don't lay our hearts on the table and risk offending a coworker because we have a martyr complex.

We share the message of sin and forgiveness because Christ's love compels us. We are witnesses to the greatest love story ever conceived: the unilateral declaration in Christ of complete justification and free forgiveness for every human being. We are participants in that all-embracing love because it has touched and rescued us. We are moved by Christ's love because it has ignited our hearts on fire for him, with passion and zeal that reach out to others.

God's objective justification not only saved us but also empowers us for our mission and ministry. "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The gospel in Word and sacrament is the living breath of the Spirit, which enables each believer to live in constant repentance. The gospel imposes no demands upon us. It only makes us alive in Christ and enables us to strive to become what we are already: declared just and holy in Christ.

To every nation

Our proclamation of the eternal gospel at home and around the world is not restricted to people of a particular race, social stratum, or income level. The gospel doesn't discriminate. Around the world the sweet sound of the gospel, proclaimed

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



JUSTIFICATION—

God's action of declaring sinners righteous or "not guilty."

OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION—

the reality that God's verdict takes place completely in the realm of God, entirely apart from human involvement.

from the lips of missionaries you have sent, has touched the hearts of Christians in far-off mission fields. Our fellow Christians around the world speak different languages, live in different cultures, view the world from different perspectives, and are in many ways different from people in the United States. But the things that unite us in Christ far surpass the things that divide us. Together we rejoice in a common Savior, who won for all people the forgiveness of sins. We share in a common confession of the truth. We rejoice in the comfort of the same gospel, are washed in the same Baptism, are bound by the same Communion, and rejoice in the same hope of eternal life rooted in a victory won for us nearly 2,000 years ago by our common brother, Jesus Christ.

Salvation is complete. Forgiveness is won. In Jesus Christ, God has turned his smiling face toward the world and announced, "It is finished. Heaven is open. Come to the feast!"

You have been justified. You are a witness of Jesus' victory. You are his ambassador. "As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' " (Romans 10:15).

Jon Buchholz is pastor at Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona.

This is the fourth of a five-part series on justification. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.

Next month: Sanctification: Heat and glow from the fire

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

TAKE OUR ONLINE QUIZZES AND FIND OUT. GO TO

WWW.WELS.NET/JUMPWORD/FICQUIZ, CREATE AN ACCOUNT, AND TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE.



Mold spores scatter throughout the scene as volunteers gut a house in New Orleans, making special respirators and hazmat suits a necessary uniform.



A Builders For Christ team works to put a new roof on the parsonage at Crown of Life, New Orleans, La.

Something different

What compels someone to volunteer to clean mold from a house? **Abby L. Janssen**

While sitting on the plane waiting for my flight to New Orleans to take off, I struck up a conversation with the gentleman next to me. This man, dressed in distressed jeans, a flannel shirt, and a baseball cap that had obviously seen better days, told me that he was a contractor from Oklahoma heading back to New Orleans to continue working. He mentioned that he had been working there for the past four months, but it was always so difficult to leave his family. When I asked him why he continued to do it, he simply replied, "I can make more money in New Orleans in four months than I can all year in Oklahoma."

His matter-of-fact answer made me think as I looked around the plane. There were several people dressed like this man. How many were on their way down to New Orleans for the same reason? I could see a number of men and women in impeccable suits carrying large briefcases. Insurance agents? Lawyers? Yet more people looking to use the disaster in New Orleans to line their own pockets? I wasn't sure. It did make me wonder what I would find when I arrived in New Orleans.

Something different

I found something different at Crown of Life, New Orleans, La. Yes, there were older men and women in flannel shirts and dirtied jeans and younger men and women in hazmat suits and heavy respirator masks all working full, tiring days. The difference was that they weren't doing it for money or to get themselves on TV. Instead they were just doing it out of love for their Savior.

The group of more "mature" workers was a Builders For Christ (BFC) crew. The BFC teams, mostly made up of retirees with skilled labor or construction backgrounds, travel to worksites around the country assisting WELS congregations with building projects. When I arrived, the Crown of Life crew had already set up an RV village in the church parking lot and was well underway in rebuilding and repairing the church, parsonage, and activity building. For many this was the second trip to New Orleans since the hurricane, and most planned to stay more than a month. When I asked one volunteer from Minnesota why he works with Builders For Christ, his reply was simple. "I don't do meetings. I can't see myself serving on a church board

or anything. I work with my hands. This is the way I can serve the Lord."

The second group of volunteers was a Faith in Action group consisting of students from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. This bunch, nicknamed the Mold Krewe, donned the hazmat suits and went into congregation members homes to prepare them for renovation. They emptied the home of all its contents (including fixtures) and then removed moldy dry-wall, insulation, ceilings, and even fireplaces. The final step was to go back and disinfect the structure to keep the mold from coming back.

Volunteer Rachel Kassulke says, "We're quite tired at the end of the day, obviously, but tired emotionally too. It's a very draining experience helping the owners of a house go through their belongings and then have to put it all on the curb."

A great feeling

As emotionally and physically draining as the work can be, there is also a feeling of fulfillment and accomplishment. "The congregation thinks we're helping them, but they are really helping us," says BFC volunteer Sue Eidler. Sue and her husband Jack have been

The parking lot of Crown of Life has been converted into "Lutherville," an RV park to house the Builders For Christ volunteers.



Volunteers from Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary traveled to New Orleans to help members gut their houses in preparation for rebuilding.



on a number of Builders For Christ job sites, yet each job is unique. Says Jack, "The camaraderie down here is so great. The people of the church are so friendly and are such a close family. It's one of the greatest feelings being down here."

Being on a BFC crew also gives him great opportunities. "As a young man I never traveled. But now as a Builder I've seen so much of the country and met so many great people. It's unbelievable."

That's not to say that the reconstruction of Crown of Life hasn't been without its problems. The city of New Orleans lacks basic resources like electricity and water. Because the city also has a shortage of workers, even the most basic tasks can be time-consuming. Volunteer Herb Mehne points out that they can only get a third of the supplies they need at the local lumberyard, so they have to travel another 50 miles outside of the disaster area to get the rest. A round-trip like that can eat up a half a day of work. Obtaining permits and

cutting through the red tape of daily decision changes by politicians are other issues unique to the rebuilding of Crown of Life. Says Jack, "These sort of things happen, but you get around it and the Lord shows you a way."

Regardless of the stumbling blocks, the volunteers are determined to get the work done and keep it all in perspective. "As we complete each house you can see how the people will be able to rebuild and restart their lives now that their house looks like a clean place to start rather than a huge mess," says MLC student Kyle Bitter.

Letting your light shine

Volunteering has also taught many valuable lessons. Kassulke points out, "It's a good reminder that life here on earth isn't about what we have. We can rebuild our physical lives and houses and we can buy more things, but knowing that we have our family and are members of a bigger [Christian] family is the most important thing."

Erika Schreiner, another student, adds, "We're going into these houses and clearing them out, not just for members but also for other people of the community. We're not directly converting people, but it really is a great way to let your light shine."

As Christians we're taught to "Love your neighbor as yourself." The volunteers in New Orleans were acting on it. They saw their brothers and sisters in trouble, and they came to help and show their love. They weren't hoping to make a quick buck; they didn't do it for publicity. Instead, they knew that in some small way, this is the best way the Lord could use them.

For people like Jack Eidler, it's simple, "The Lord put me on this earth and he taught me all these things and this is how I can use them."

To learn more about Builders For Christ or volunteer for Faith in Action, contact WELS Kingdom Workers at 800-466-9357; kingwork@wkw.wels.net.

Abby Janssen is assistant editor of Forward in Christ.

vol·un·teer (vŏl'ən-tîr) *n.*

A person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task.
A person who works for an organization without being paid.

Builders For Christ and Faith in Action volunteers aren't the only groups that have worked to help get Crown of Life back on its feet. People from around WELS and the world have aided in the recovery effort.

The list is endless. Many have given of their time, talents, and resources to help not only their brothers and sisters at Crown of Life but also New Orleans

as a whole. Says David Sternhagen, pastor of Crown of Life: "I'm not surprised that WELS members have responded so powerfully to our disaster. We are people who have been basking in the love of God for years. We are people who have heard how God loved us and sent his Son to die for us. We have all responded to a God who has lit us all on fire with his love. I'm happy, but not surprised."

WHATEVER

Why did my parents do it?

A teen learns that her parents didn't make a mistake when they adopted a child with behavior problems.

Brianna Stein

On July 10, 1997, my parents welcomed their first son. He was so much fun. I got to play house with a real live baby boy. Four years later my parents said they would be having another son. This son would be a two-and-a-half-year-old boy that they would be adopting. Yes! Another real life toy. Life is good, I thought.

I was 13 years old when my parents told me of the upcoming adoption of my youngest brother, Jeremiah. I was so excited to get another brother. I figured he would be just like my other brother. I could not wait for the day he would come to our home.

The day came for us to pick him up. We were all so excited. But that joy only lasted for that day. The days that followed were very unpleasant. He would cry when he barely got touched. He bossed my parents around. He would hit my other brother. He wouldn't share. He wouldn't obey. He was in charge of his life and didn't want to let my parents take over.

My parents knew they had to discipline him and to introduce him to God's love. Jeremiah had never gone to church. Since he was new to our family, I was afraid the discipline would make him dislike living with us. My parents already had three biological children, and so I had to pray that God would help me trust my parents with their decision to discipline Jeremiah.

But the discipline didn't seem to make much difference. He was always naughty. He'd always make bad choices. We just thought his naughtiness was because he had been a foster child who had been bumped about to numerous foster homes. Maybe he thought he would soon leave our home. My family and I hoped and prayed that this was the reason and that good behavior would just take time.

Time went by and my parents still struggled with his behavior.

They decided to take him to the doctor. My parents knew there could be a chance that he could have some sort of disability because his biological parents had learning disabilities. I remember the day after my parents told me that Jeremiah was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder). I felt sad for him, but I also felt sad for myself. His naughty behavior was so hard for me to deal with. I wanted him to be like my other brother, but he's not. God allowed him to be this way. I needed to accept this and to learn to be patient with him.

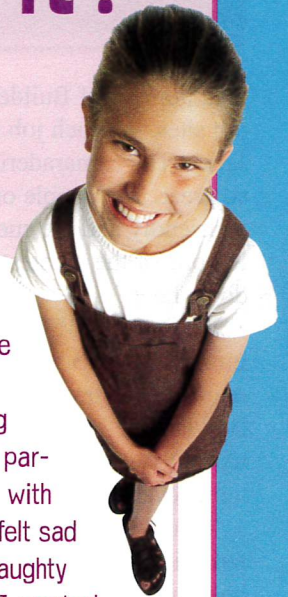
In the following months, some days were good, and some were just terrible. I would wonder, "Why did my parents adopt him? Did they make a mistake in adopting him?"

I'm 16 years old now. I know my parents didn't make a mistake. God knows what is best for Jeremiah. He is learning that Jesus loves him.

My adopted brother is from Standing Rock Indian Reservation. It is my mom's dream for Jeremiah to take God's Word to Standing Rock. Those on the reservation don't trust the white men and their religion. This may be one of the reasons God wanted us to adopt Jeremiah. With his newfound faith, he can take God's love to his reservation.

Jeremiah Robert Stein is my brother. God knew what he was doing when he gave me this gift. I know that God will continue to give me the patience to understand Jeremiah for who he is—a child of God.

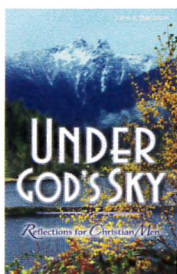
Brianna Stein, a junior at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John, Pardeeville, Wisconsin.





A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit www.nph.net or call 800-662-6022. Note: These reviews are not meant to represent the opinions of WELS or Forward in Christ.

Not just for men



\$13.99

John R. Hardison has provided an excellent series of inspirational or devotional articles in a new 176-page book—*Under God's Sky: Reflections for Christian Men*. He draws on his 60-plus years as a Christian, experiences as a former school teacher and part-time cowboy, and the challenges and rewards of family life to illustrate the wonders of God's creation and the grace we all share. The book contains 66 articles with an average length of about two pages, which took me about four minutes each to read. A few articles appeared in his previous book, *The President's Corner*, produced for his home congregation at Redeemer, Yakima, Wash.

Hardison's anecdotes are easy to read and quite picturesque as he describes his spiritual growth in scenes from his childhood on a citrus and cattle ranch in rural Southern California, his various travels in the United States and Canada, and then his settling into a congregational leadership role in central Washington state. A few of the articles contain poetry, which I must confess, did not reach me. (Perhaps I'm too much of an engineer and not enough of an artist.) But, the vast majority of them hit home, with some eliciting strong emotions.

I recommend this book for both personal and group devotions. Each of the articles will easily work at the breakfast table, in the breakroom at work, or on the evening recliner. Also, let me extend my recommendation to include women. The subtitle "Reflections for

Christian Men" may sell the book short. Illustrations that involve childhood holidays, skiing, school teaching, horseback riding, and so on, can be equally appreciated by all adults. The various underlying themes of Christian upbringing and education, evangelism, stewardship, and care and support of the people around us are good for everyone.

Bob Kaylor
Saving Grace, Mobile, Alabama

Editor's note: The final two books in NPH's God's People series are available: *Peter: Bold Disciple* by Stephen M. Luchterhand and *Moses: God's Deliverance* by Mark R. Bitter. Each book costs \$6.99, or you can order the entire 12-book series for \$75.49.

Obituaries

Robert P. Krause 1918-2006

Robert Krause was born Nov. 5, 1918, in Manitowoc, Wis. He died Feb. 21, 2006, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1943 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Christ the Lord, Brookfield; Wisconsin Lutheran High School and St. Michaelis, Milwaukee, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Olive. He is survived by four sons; four daughters; and 17 grandchildren.

Jay L. Roth 1944-2006

Jay Roth was born Oct. 4, 1944, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Feb. 6, 2006, in Mesa, Ariz.

A 1968 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served St. Stephen, Beaver Dam; Peace, Hartford;

and Trinity, Minocqua, all in Wisconsin; Our Saviors, Zion, Ill.; and Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), Mankato, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Cheryl; one son; two daughters; and one grandchild.

Marvin H. Hanke 1918-2006

Marvin Hanke was born May 9, 1918, in Town of Lincoln, Wis. He died Feb. 23, 2006, in Gallup, New Mexico.

A 1944 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Peace, Isabel/St. Paul, Timber Lake, S.D.; St. Paul, Montrose, Minn.; Timothy, St. Louis Park, Minn.; St. Peter, Chaseburg, Wis.; and St. John, Pigeon, Mich.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Henrietta. He is survived by one son, one daughter, and seven grandchildren.

**READ
THROUGH MY
BIBLE IN 3 YEARS**

JUNE 2006

1. Judges 3:7-31	16. Jdg. 21
2. Jdg. 4	17. 1 Peter 1:1-12
3. Jdg. 5	18. 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3
4. Jdg. 6	19. 1 Pet. 2:4-17
5. Jdg. 7:1-23	20. 1 Pet. 2:18-25
6. Jdg. 7:24-8:35	21. 1 Pet. 3:1-12
7. Jdg. 9:1-10:5	22. 1 Pet. 3:13-4:6
8. Jdg. 10:6-11:28	23. 1 Pet. 4:7-19
9. Jdg. 11:29-12:15	24. 1 Pet. 5
10. Jdg. 13	25. Ruth 1, 2
11. Jdg. 14, 15	26. Ruth 3, 4
12. Jdg. 16	27. 1 Samuel 1
13. Jdg. 17, 18	28. 1 Sam. 2:1-11
14. Jdg. 19	29. 1 Sam. 2:12-36
15. Jdg. 20	30. 1 Sam. 3:1-4:1a

WELS 2006 district conventions are approaching

Each of the 12 districts holds a convention once in each biennium, generally in the even numbered years. Every pastor, professor, and male teacher of the district plus a lay delegate representing each congregation attends the convention as a voting delegate. Other members of the district are welcome to attend as guests.

District conventions are held for the following purposes:

- To meet as a group to carry out the legislative responsibilities of the district, such as holding elections, formulating resolutions to send to synod convention, etc.
- To celebrate God's blessings.
- To nurture faith.

Some of the synodwide issues the districts will be discussing this year are the challenges in the WELS VEBA plan, the endowment funds effort, suggested Constitution and bylaw changes to support the restructuring plan, and the Synodical Council's contingency plan for backing the current biennium's ministry. They will also hear about the blessings on our ministerial education advancement efforts, the changes in Home Missions' approach to opening new ministries, and the many open doors in our World Mission efforts. More information about these things can be found in the *Report to the Twelve Districts*. This publication is sent to every congregation and to all male called workers. You can also find it online after May 1 at www.wels.net/jumpword/rttd.

Here is the schedule of the 2006 district conventions:

Arizona-California

June 12-14
Arizona Golf Resort, Mesa, Ariz.

Dakota-Montana

June 13-15
Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.

Michigan

June 6-8
Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Minnesota

June 13-15
Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Nebraska

June 12-14
Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

North Atlantic

June 15-16
King of Kings, Clifton Park, N.Y.

Northern Wisconsin

June 11-13
Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

Pacific Northwest

June 15-16
Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.

South Atlantic

June 5-7
Indian Rocks Beach, Tampa, Fla.

South Central

June 5-6
Calvary, Dallas, Texas

Southeastern Wisconsin

June 6-7
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

Western Wisconsin

June 4-6
Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Questions about specific district conventions may be directed to the president or secretary of that district.

Seminar leads to new outreach ideas

For the small congregation of Abundant Life, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, reaching out to the community is an important part of church life. The congregation has an organized activity committee to try to meet people within the area and do pre-evangelism work. It also hosted a Commission on Evangelism Prospecting Seminar in the fall of 2005 to learn more about reaching out.

The seminars provided a great way to generate ideas and adapt other successful programs for use at Abundant Life. One of the biggest ideas was when Pastor Brian Pechman connected with a member who runs the Welcome Wagon in Saskatchewan. With the member's contacts, Pechman was able to address 600 to 700 people at a bridal showcase about what God says about marriage. Pechman was also able to use the opportunity to invite attendees to a couples' pre-marriage class.

Other ideas that Abundant Life is looking to try include some that show its commitment to the neighborhood. Among the ideas is a trick-or-treat patrol in conjunction with local police to help keep kids and families safe during the evening of Halloween. The patrol will invite neighbors to a "warming station" in the church that will offer hot chocolate and protection from the elements during what can often be a cold night in Canada.

Pechman points out that Abundant Life is looking at ways for members to take the lead on planning and carrying out the events so the community gets to know not only the church but also the church's membership.

For more ideas for reaching out in your community, visit www.wels.net/jumpword/evangelism.

Making “New Friends”

Jesus Cares Ministries recently began an exciting new outreach opportunity aimed at college students.

“New Friends” pairs college students in WELS campus ministry programs with community participants who have a developmental disability. The pairs meet monthly for a devotion, meal, and activity. This provides the foundation for building relationships and trust that lead to opportunities for the college students to invite their new friends to other Jesus Cares Ministries programs.

According to Staff Minister Mike Hennig, youth initiative program coordinator for Jesus Cares Ministries, UW-Milwaukee, Michigan State, and Central Michigan University have already firmly established the program on their campuses.

Judging from the excitement from the participants with developmental disabilities, the program is a success. “They love it,” Hennig notes. “You can see it in their actions and in their eyes that they are happy to be at New Friends.”

For the students, there is also joy and excitement. “When we gather for our monthly event, I know that everyone is thankful to have the opportunity to reach out to the community,” says Nicole Wilke, New Friends project manager at UW-Milwaukee. “The air is always charged with excitement from the moment our first guest arrives until the tables have to be put away. I know that we all feel a deep sense of being connected to each other and our new friends through the love of Christ. It’s

really nice to be reminded that God loves us all as his children, no matter what our different abilities might be.”

That excitement can only grow, according to Hennig. “People are beginning to hear more about the program and have expressed interest. My hope and prayer is that New Friends will take place on many of our college and university campuses in more states in the years to come.”

New Friends is funded through a Youth Initiative Grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and the Siebert Lutheran Foundation. Students can get involved by contacting Hennig and requesting a New Friends presentation. When the students feel ready, an orientation and training event is scheduled, and student leadership is chosen.

Hennig points out that each student project manager gains valuable experience in project management, planning, and even grant writing. Yet all students

involved take away so much more. “The program has given students a better understand of whom people with developmental disabilities are,” says Hennig. “They are people just like us who also need to hear that wonderful message that Jesus loves them and came to die for their sins. This is an opportunity for those students to witness and share their faith.”

Jesus Cares Ministries, a ministry of The Lutheran Home Association in Belle Plaine Minn., assists congregations in providing support, Christian education, adapted worship services, and monthly fellowship activities to their members who have a developmental disability.

For more information on New Friends and other Jesus Cares Ministries programs and services, visit www.wels.net/jumpword/jcm or call 877-505-3675.



Nick Johnson, a student at Michigan State, works with two New Friends participants on an art project.

PJ Praise gets kids into worship

At St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada, parents have options when it comes to bringing their kids to church. “PJ Praise” is a new alternative for families with small children who want to teach about faith but worry about their children being a disturbance during regular Sunday services.

“PJ Praise” meets every second and fourth Saturday at 6 P.M. Parents are encouraged to bring their children to

church in their pajamas. During the half-hour service, children sing children’s praise songs, learn about parts of the church liturgy, and listen to an object lesson based on Sunday morning’s sermon. The average attendance at PJ Praise had been around 25 people. St. Peter’s Sunday service averages about 70 people.

“The people who come have loved it. The little ones really get into it, and it’s a good way for the parents to teach the

faith to their children,” says Michael Vogel, St. Peter’s outreach coordinator.

St. Peter is looking to expand the program next fall. Realizing the potential with a program like this, Vogel says that they are planning to reach out to the community either through personal invitation or with a big kick-off event to encourage prospective members to attend. “I think once they do, they’ll really enjoy it,” says Vogel.

Sunday schools that fit

I can't recall too many details about my Sunday school days, but I do remember our closing ritual. Every Sunday after the lesson was over, we'd stand in a crooked line at the classroom door, all clutching the brightly colored pictures that went with the day's lesson. Then we'd sing: "Jesus, Savior, wash away all that has been wrong today. Help me every day to be good and gentle more like Thee."

Things hadn't changed much 15 years later when I taught my first Sunday school class. The WELS' strong commitment to educating children in God's Word was still evident. Yet today, while many Sunday school programs may closely resemble those from generations ago, some appear to be a whole new breed.

Congregations around the country are examining their changing situations to determine what type of Sunday school will best suit their needs. Many of them are motivated by the desire to reach out to non-members through their Sunday schools. Depending on the personality of the congregation, this process may include making small, gradual changes or taking major leaps, such as seeking a new curriculum or even developing one. Months or years of "testing" may

be necessary before a congregation feels it can accurately assess the results of the changes. But whether it leads back to a similar program or ascertains that change is necessary, the process itself is worthwhile.

In North Hollywood, Calif., St. Paul First is in the process of changing its Sunday school program. One Sunday a month instead of separate kids Sunday school and adult Bible study, it has an intergenerational Bible class. "The main thrust behind our changes and modifica-



Children at St. Paul First, North Hollywood, Calif., enjoy themselves at the church's monthly ESPN (Eat, Study, Play Night).

tions," shares Pastor Gary Pufahl, "is to have families together building each other up." The congregation also has an E.S.P.N. (Eat, Study, Play Night) one Friday a month. It has a potluck dinner and a Bible study and then plays games and sports or watches a movie.

The possibilities are as endless as your creativity (or your research). After a group lesson, students at Salem in Milwaukee go to their chosen "intelligence areas" for activities that help them use their interests and abilities to serve the Lord. Or how about "Bible Song Sunday School" (Abiding Faith, Pinehurst, Tex. and St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.)? This program takes students through the entire Bible in four years, teaching them a Bible passage set to music every week. With an abundance of new Sunday school ideas and curriculums, your congregation is sure to find one that fits.

For more information about these and other Sunday school ideas, visit www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship. Click on "Consultation and Resources" and look for the articles "New Sunday School Models in WELS" and "Conceptual Models for Sunday School."

Laura Warmuth

News briefs

Commission on Youth Discipleship
414-256-3224; cyd@sab.wels.net
The **2007 WELS International Youth Rally**, under the theme "LOL—Laugh Out Loud!," will be held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Dallas, Tex., from

July 4-7. The Bible verse chosen for the rally is "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Three teens, Kayla Mundstock (Deer Valley, Phoenix, Ariz.), Bethany Wehrenberg (Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.), and Stephen Vandenberg (Riverview,



Appleton, Wis.) are serving on the rally planning committee. Also several district youth rallies are planned for 2006. To learn more about the 2007 International Youth Rally and the 2006 district rallies, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/youthrally.

Board for World Missions

414-256-3233;
dan.koelpin@sab.wels.net

North American Outreach Phase 3 materials are now available online at www.wels.net/jumpword/nao. Resources include materials for several worship services that can be held throughout the year as well as links to more information to help carry out the theme for Phase 3: "Every mem-

ber a missionary." Materials were mailed to all congregations in April.

DEFINING RELIGION

Spiritually blind: to be unable to see the path to heaven and unable to grasp God's truth. By nature every human has a veil over his eyes that prevents him from taking God at his word and trusting his promises. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual sight when he brings people to faith through the means of grace (2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 3:14-16, Colossians 1:13,14).

MLC offers Master of Science in Education degree

Like most teachers, Dan Markgraf of Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio, wants to keep up with the latest ideas in education. In addition to reading journals and attending conferences, Markgraf decided to pursue his master's degree in education.

He was concerned, however, about finding a program that did not interfere with his already-full schedule of family, church, and school duties. The solution: the new Master of Science in Education degree at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn. It's a classic master's program in many ways, but it's also an innovative program designed especially for teachers in WELS schools and made convenient through its online format.

Martin Luther College, encouraged by a resolution at the 1999 synod convention, offered its first two master's courses in 2004. In 2005, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, MLC's accreditation agency, not only granted approval for this program, but also asked to

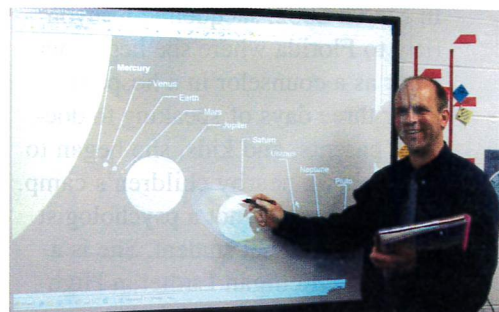
use Martin Luther College as a model for other institutions that are hoping to offer an M.S.Ed. degree.

Markgraf has already taken five courses, three of them entirely online. "I like the independence of the online courses," he says. "I can do the work early in the morning or late at night."

Director of Graduate Studies John Isch says this is typical. "Most teachers in the program have family responsibilities, and all have numerous responsibilities in the congregations they serve besides teaching in the classroom. Typically, they are working online between 8 P.M. and midnight."

Martin Luther College wants this program to be convenient, but it is not a cakewalk. Says Isch, "We estimate that students need to commit about 100 hours to an online course."

Of the three emphases—leadership, instruction, and special education—Markgraf chose the leadership emphasis. He hopes to finish his 10 courses in two years and then work on his final project. But he is reaping the benefits



Dan Markgraf, a teacher at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio, is pursuing his Master of Science in Education degree through Martin Luther College. He is one of the 22 students currently enrolled in the program.

already. "I think that I already have more confidence because of some of the courses I've taken," he says. "In many cases, it's been confirmed that I'm doing the right things! The students and families at Beautiful Savior have also benefited, I believe, from the new ideas that I've learned and put into practice."

For more information, contact Dr. John Isch, 507-354-8221; ischjr@mlc-wels.edu, or go to MLC's Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.

Synodical Council approves financial contingency plan

At its February meeting, the Synodical Council approved a financial contingency plan to balance the synod budget through 2007. The plan, put together by WELS President Karl Gurgel in consultation with synod administrators, stated that WELS will forego internal repayments to cover anticipated deficits at its ministerial education schools.

Although the ministerial education schools—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.—have collectively been blessed with more than \$3 million in gifts since the opening of advancement offices at each school in 2005, additional resources are needed. Michigan Lutheran Seminary will need \$1.7 million, and Martin Luther College \$900,000 through 2007.

"In keeping with a synod convention resolution that affirmed the importance of the prep school system, we did not feel we could decline to cover the operating deficit at Michigan Lutheran Seminary," says WELS President Karl Gurgel.

Payment on internal loans is being deferred so more mission and ministry programs won't have to be cut.

"We could have balanced the budget by curtailing approximately \$1 million of ministry this year and next," says Gurgel. "However, that would mean the loss of 20 positions, including professors and world and home missionaries. That is just too high a price to pay."

He continues, "As important as it is to balance the budget, it's even more important to use our best judgment in allowing as much mission and ministry to go forward as possible."

God continues to work through WELS to spread the gospel. Since 2004, Home Missions has partnered with congregations to help establish 19 new congregational groupings. In India, 75 students are in WELS pre-seminary and seminary programs. In Ministerial Education, 1,600 students are preparing for full-time service in the church. Forty thousand prisoners are being served on a regular basis, and thousands of Christian leaders are being trained.

Gurgel will present a contingency plan for the next four years (2007-2011) at the Synodical Council meeting in late April. The plan will outline possible adjustments to each area of ministry depending on the amount of support received. Preliminary forecasts indicate that there could be a shortfall of \$3 to \$4 million annually beginning in 2007.

Hands to love

In March 2002, Jacqueline Kenyon flew to Florida where she began her work as a counselor in a hospital. After three days of speaking to doctors, parents, and kids, she began to counsel at a nearby children's camp.

But Kenyon is not a psychologist or even a medical student. She is a junior at Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich., and was, in fact, only 11 years old when she made this trip.

Kenyon, a member at Trinity, Bangor, Mich., was born without all her fingers due to a congenital disorder called Amniotic Band Syndrome. She had a number of surgeries before she was five, and when her occupational therapist told her about Hands to Love, a camp in Florida for kids with congenital hand differences, Kenyon knew she wanted to be involved.

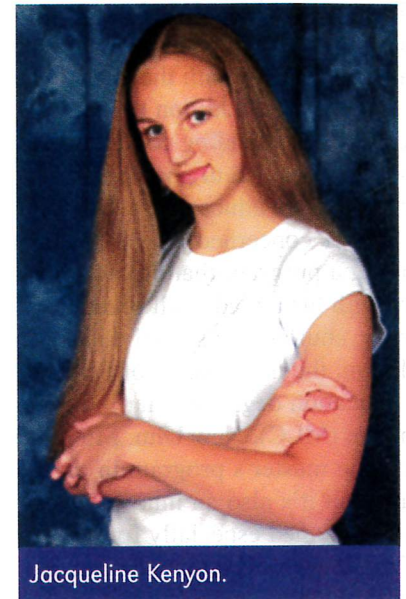
Since that first trip when she was 11, Kenyon has volunteered at each annual camp. "I have had many experiences with my hands and can help those who aren't comfortable with their differences," Kenyon reflects.

"I can share my stories of successes and failures so that they may become secure individuals in spite of their anomalies." Now 16 years old, Kenyon has been an ambassador for Hands to Love for four years. This past year she spoke at two major benefits for the camp.

Counseling both children and their parents, Kenyon shares the strength and wisdom God has given her through her experiences with her hands. "What you do or don't have doesn't matter," she tells the kids. "It's the real live person that you are that people will see you for."

Kenyon was recently named Michigan's top high school volunteer for 2006 by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards. She'll travel to Washington D.C., this May to be honored alongside students from each of the other states.

"There are many times when I have walked into a store, paid for gas, or handed a cashier money, and that person jumps," Kenyon shares. "This is hurtful, even though I am sure it is not intended in that way.



Jacqueline Kenyon.

It is monotonous and can beat on my self-confidence. . . . But then I step back and think of the gifts God has given me through this camp. A way to touch others' lives. A way to help them be secure with their differences. A way to celebrate who they really are. Then my feelings of frustration go away. I am truly blessed to be a part of this organization."



The Internet has become a vast maze of information. Knowing where to look for strong Christian content can make the journey easier.

Search the Internet while giving to WELS with GoodSearch.com.

GoodSearch is an Internet search engine—powered by Yahoo!—with a simple concept and unique mission. GoodSearch enables users to help fund non-profit organizations or schools through the simple act of searching the Internet. You use GoodSearch.com like any other search engine, but each time you do, money is generated for your favorite cause.

WELS is already listed with GoodSearch.com. When visiting GoodSearch.com to begin your search, simply choose "Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Milwaukee, WI)" from the pull-down menu. Each search will generate approximately \$.01 for WELS.

GoodSearch.com can also be linked to your church or personal Web site.

In the news



The *Vilas County News Review* ran an article in its March 1 issue about **Jerry and Lyn Zimpelmann** and their work in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. The article discussed how the Zimpelmanns,

members of Christ, Eagle River, Wis., volunteered through WELS Kingdom Workers to first help with cleanup at Crown of Life and its members' homes and later to help with rebuilding in New Orleans. "We have been very blessed and were looking for opportunities to serve and give back for the blessings the Lord has given us," says Lyn in the article.

District news

Minnesota

The women's basketball team at **Martin Luther College** won their first ever Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC) Championship on Feb. 25. Senior **Emma Babinec** was named UMAC's Player of the Year.

The Minnesota Valley Chapter of WELS Kingdom Workers recently sponsored a canvassing trip for more than 30 people to assist **Shepherd of the Lakes, Milford, Iowa**. Shepherd of the Lakes is a daughter congregation of Shepherd of the Lakes, Fairmont, Minn. The Milford church is currently in the process of purchasing a church building.

Northern Wisconsin

The Northern Wisconsin District Convention, held at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., will begin on Sunday evening, June 11 and end on Tuesday, June 13. This is a change from the original schedule of June 12-14. For more information on the district conventions, visit www.wels.net/jumpword/diconventions.

South Central

Pastor Matt Doebler has accepted the call to serve **Christ the Rock, Round Rock, Tex.**, a new mission congregation. The mission, a daughter congregation of Holy Word, Austin, Tex., is 10 months old and has an average attendance of 50. Christ the Rock's



Nearly 80 students from Martin Luther College devoted much of their recent spring break to doing volunteer work. Two teams of 10 students traveled to help with the rebuilding in New Orleans, La., and another 60 students made up 12 Travel-Canvass-Witness (TCW) teams that spread out through the country. The TCW teams canvass neighborhoods to introduce people to a mission church or to promote church events. There were also opportunities for those with Spanish-speaking ability to canvass in Hispanic neighborhoods. Pictured are (l to r) Nicole Lehman, Claire Hagen, and Lauren Moll after their first day helping Mighty Fortress canvass in Dallas, Ga.

worship services are currently being held in the Round Rock Public Library every Sunday evening.

Atonement, Plano, Tex., recently hosted a "Family Life Issues" seminar. The three-part series was taught by Pastor William Gabb and an Atonement member who is an adjunct biology professor at Southern Methodist University. The series focused on human sexuality, abortion, reproduction, STDs, and stem cell research in light of God's Word.

President Karl Gurgel led a Men's Retreat at **Camp Shiloh, Lake Bob Sandlin, Tex.**, on April 21-23. Gurgel used the theme "Get a Life" to help attendees in developing a devotional and prayer life for themselves.

Western Wisconsin

More than 60 members (teachers, laity and pastors) from 10 congregations met for a **School of Worship Enrichment** seminar on Jan. 28-29 in Watertown, Wis. The seminar, conducted by the Commission on Worship, focused on the purpose and goals of worship and some of the new forms of worship being published by Northwestern Publishing House.

Prof. em. Daniel Deutschlander spoke to nearly 50 pastors at a seminar on preaching in Watertown, Wis., in February. Participants left with a renewed encouragement to be both deeply textual and gospel-centered in their preaching.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Joel Lillo; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Martin Baur.

World news

Study finds children's TV may be more violent than adult-oriented TV

Children's television programs may be more violent than prime-time programming, according to a study by the Washington-based Parents Television Council.

After analyzing 443 hours of children's programming, the council found 3,488 instances of violence—an average of 7.86 violent instances per hour. There were also 858 incidents of verbal aggression; 662 incidents of disruptive, disrespectful

behavior; and 275 instances of sexual content.

The study focused on before and after school and Saturday morning programming for children ages 5 to 10, looking at eight networks: ABC Family, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, ABC, Fox, NBC, and WB.

South Dakota governor signs bill banning most abortions—South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds signed into law the first abortion law in the United States since "Roe v. Wade" in 1973. The law bans most abortions in the

state, excluding those abortions necessary to save a woman's life. Doctors who are convicted of performing abortions face a felony charge of up to five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine. The law takes effect in July.

State lawmakers in Georgia, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Indiana also are considering legislation that would ban nearly all abortions.

[*LifeWire*, 03/07/06]

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*.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Brandt, John P.**, to Immanuel, Black Creek, Wis.
- Chworowsky, John F.**, to retirement
- DeVries, Eugene M.**, to Redeemer, Saint Croix Falls/St. John, Centuria, Wis.
- Dorn, Steven P.**, to Fount of Life, Colorado Springs, Colo.
- Hackbarth, Jonathan P.**, to Salem, Woodbury, Minn.
- Pautz, Larry L.**, to retirement
- Zabell, Jon F.**, to St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.

Teachers

- Albrecht, Michael P.**, to Calvary, Thiensville, Wis.
- Baumann, Linda A.**, to St. John, Lomira, Wis.
- Brown, Eric R.**, to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.
- Buelow, Ronald A.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee
- Diercks, Belinda A.**, to Fairview, Milwaukee
- Graf, Terrence**, to Siloah, Milwaukee
- Groth, Matthew P.**, to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
- Hansen, Rachel M.**, to St. Mark, De Pere, Wis.
- Kiecker, Craig K.**, to St. Thomas, Goodyear, Ariz.
- Lindeman, Angela R.**, to Christ, Big Bend, Wis.
- McEachern, Timothy J.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.
- Monroe, Scott D.**, to Eastside, Madison, Wis.
- Rosenbaum, Steven J.**, to California LHS, Wildomar, Calif.
- Scott, Stacy L.**, to St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.
- Sorum, Lisa A.**, to Christ, Milwaukee
- Uhlenbrauck, Gena L.**, to Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.
- Unke, Jacqueline D.**, to Trinity, Kiel, Wis.
- Van Brocklin, Christi**, to St. Peter-St. Paul, Hopkins, Mich.

Staff minister

- Scriver, Neil H.**, to Ministry of Christian Giving, Milwaukee

ANNIVERSARIES

- Novi, Mich.**—Good Shepherd (25). May 7. Service, 4 P.M. Dinner to follow. RSVP, 248-349-0565; pastor@welsnovi.org.
- Greenleaf, Wis.**—Morrison Zion School (140). May 21. Service, 9 A.M. Dinner, 10:30 A.M. Program, noon. Dennis and Paula Griepentrog, 920-864-2539.
- Wonewoc, Wis.**—St. Paul school (125). June 11. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Lunch & fellowship, 11:30 A.M. 608-464-3212.
- Waterloo (Newville), Wis.**—St. John (150). June 11. Service, 10:30 A.M. Church picnic to follow. RSVP, 920-648-5205.
- Redgranite, Wis.**—Trinity (100). June 25. Service, 3 P.M. Dinner, 4:45 P.M. Freewill offering. RSVP by May 25, 920-566-2742 or 920-787-2879.

- Helena, Mont.**—Valley View (25). July 23. Service, 3 P.M. Dinner to follow. 406-443-6663.
- Lime Ridge, Wis.**—Trinity (100). Aug. 27. Services, 10:30 A.M. & 2 P.M. Dinner, 11:30 A.M. 608-727-4271.

COMING EVENTS

Commencement events

- **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 19. Concert, 7:30 P.M. May 20. Graduation service, 10 A.M. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.
- **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 23. Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 24. Anniversary festival concert, 7:30 P.M. May 25. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M. May 26. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
- **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 26. Concert, 7 P.M. May 27. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
- **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 26. Concert, 7 P.M. May 27. Graduation service, 10:30 A.M.

WELS Church Librarians' Organization meetings—May 6. Christ, Baxter, Minn. \$10. Bev, 218-746-3732. Sept. 16. St. Paul, Mauston, Wis. \$10. June, 608-464-5532. Visit www.wels.net/jumpword/clo.

Mission for the Visually Impaired dedication of new facility—May 7. Service 3 P.M. Crown of Life, West St. Paul, Minn. Tours of new building to follow.

College course—"What is a proper defense of creation?" June 12-30. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Graduate credit possible. Limited enrollment. Middle and high school teachers of science preferred. Grant supported. Contact Dr. Paul R. Boehlke, paul.boehlke@wlc.edu, or check the biology pages at www.wlc.edu.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society National Convention—June 22-25. Tacoma, Wash. Hosted by Evergreen and Cascade Circuits. 414-321-6212.

OWLS Convention—July 11-13. Holiday Inn and Austin Conference Center, Austin, Minn.; owls@newulmtel.net.

Summer Hebrew Institute—July 17-21. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Prof. Thomas Nass, nasstp@mlc-wels.edu.

WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Convention—Aug. 4-6. Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis. Dean Weigand, 262-547-3096 (V/T) or mdhhdweigand2005@sbcglobal.net.

WELS/ELS Women's Conference on Mormonism—Sept. 22-24. University of Utah. Hosted by Light of the Valley, Layton, 801-444-1591; Prince of Peace, Taylorsville, 801-261-3808; and Hope (ELS), West Jordan, Utah, 801-963-4151.

WELS marriage retreats

- June 23-25, Wyndham, Phoenix, Ariz.

- Sept. 15-17, Belleview Biltmore, Tampa, Fla.
 - Sept. 22-24, Beaver Run, Breckenridge (Denver), Colo.
 - Sept. 29-Oct. 1, Embassy Suites, Omaha, Neb.
 - Oct. 13-15, Summit Lodge, Snoqualmie (Seattle), Wash.
 - Oct. 20-22, Alyeska Resort, Anchorage, Alaska
 - Nov. 10-12, Del Lago Resort, Houston, Tex.
- Register at www.welsmarriageretreat.org.

Class reunions

- **1986 class of Martin Luther Preparatory School**—June 16-18. Schwan Retreat Center, Trego, Wis. Eric Brucker, ebrucker@rmlhs.org or visit www.rmlhs.org/mlps.
- **1975-1977 classes of Martin Luther Academy**—July 7-9. New Ulm, Minn. Deb Walz, walz@frontiernet.net or Doug Weishahn, oxdougw@aol.com.
- **1974-1979 classes of Northwestern Lutheran Academy**—July 7-9. St. Croix LHS, West St. Paul, Minn. Tom Krueger, E5401 470th Ave., Menomonie WI 54751; tomkrueger@wwt.net.
- **1981 class of Northwestern Preparatory School (25)**—July 8. Sprecher Brewing Co., Glendale, Wis. Jennifer Marr, heyjenmar@yahoo.com or Chris Schwan, cwschwan@cox.net.
- **1981 class of Martin Luther Preparatory School (25)**—July 14-16. Prairie du Chien, Wis. Paul Hirsch, 402-462-9623 or Phil Malchow, 915-822-3748.

NAMES WANTED

Soldiers at Fort Knox, Ky.—Paul Horn, 270-351-2391; revhorn@yahoo.com.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Maintenance and housekeeping—St. Thomas Lutheran Ministries assisted living home, Goodyear, Ariz., is seeking a couple or single to provide maintenance, housekeeping, and cooking chores. Salaried position with living quarters. Office, 623-925-1095.

Director of parish music—part time. Christ the King, Palatine, Ill. 847-358-0230 or pastor@byfaithalone.org.

GUEST PREACHER NEEDED

Missoula, Mont.—Mt. Zion. June 18, 25, & July 2. Lodging provided along with reimbursement for preaching. Justin Cloute, 406-543-8222.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sab.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. An updated bulletin board is available at www.wels.net/jumpword/bulletinboard.

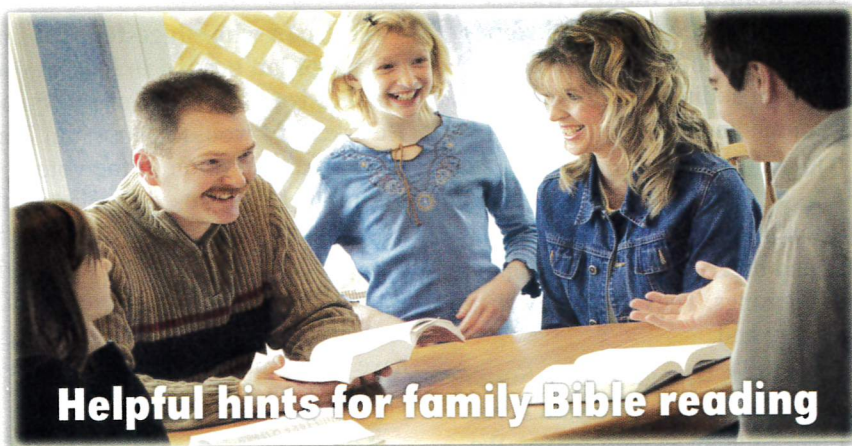
Picture this



The congregation of Christ the King, Palatine, Ill., was blessed with seven infant baptisms in 2005. What makes this unique is that all the infants were boys. Although the congregation was hoping for a future baseball team, they accepted a basketball team with a full bench! The babies surrounding Pastor Thomas Schultz are (l to r): Tyler, Joseph, Jacob, Adam, Gavin, and Eric. Missing is Andrew.

Submitted by Pastor Thomas Schultz

Send pictures to "Picture this," *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.



Helpful hints for family Bible reading

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- Have Bible reading at the same time every day so kids know to expect it.
- Place colored dots next to different Bible verses and allow children to choose which color should be read.
- Once basic Bible stories are learned, use Bible trivia cards to test children's memories.
- Encourage memorization of simple Bible verses.

FOR TEENS

- Use *Meditations* or a few pages from the People Bible Teaching Series books and encourage personal devotion time in the morning.
- Distinguish law and gospel verses in the Bible.
- Use *Luther's Catechism*, *Christian Worship*, and other books to start discussions.
- Talk about the scriptural aspects of topics important to teens, such as dating and marriage.
- Scour newspapers for religious editorials or articles to kick off a discussion.

Submitted by David J. Schlossin, Shepherd of the Hills, Duluth, Minn.

THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

A Sunday school teacher asked her students to write down questions that they wanted to ask God. Here are some of the responses she received:

Dear God,

In Sunday school they told us what you do. Who does it when you are on vacation?

Jane

Dear God,

Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

Natalie

Dear God,

Who draws the lines around the countries?

Melissa

Dear God,

What does it mean you are a jealous God? I thought you had everything.

Jenna

Dear God,


Thank you for the baby brother, but can I trade him for a puppy?

Gina

Dear God,

Why is Sunday school on Sunday? I thought it was supposed to be our day of rest.

Tommy



Arthur H. Frenz Jr.

LIVING LESSONS in Christian giving

A pastor shares how committed Christian laypeople encouraged him, especially in the area of Christian giving.

An article on Christian giving? Who? Me? You have to be kidding!

That was my first reaction to a request to write a stewardship article. So then why am I writing it? I began to think about members whom the Lord has used as blessings in my ministry, especially in the area of Christian giving. Here are a few of the “living lessons” who came to mind.

The man who encouraged me to preach the whole counsel of God. This Christian gentleman from time to time reminded me gently, but firmly, that part of my calling was to preach about money, even if I was not comfortable doing it.

The man who trusted the Lord in all things. He simply believed that the Lord could make anything happen. If the Lord wanted us to have a new church, he would move the members to give time, talents, and money to do it. How true! The church was built.

The Christian couple who encouraged other members in cheerful giving. They could have contributed more money than was needed for the congregation’s mission budget. But they knew that would not have been good for the congregation. Other members needed to learn the joy of Christian giving. Instead, they looked for special

mission projects to support besides their regular gifts to the congregation.

The woman of modest means who always seemed to find something to give to various mission projects in addition to supporting her church and synod.

The couple who appreciated the goodness of their Lord. They were filled with thanksgiving, even in the dark and dreary days. They counted their blessings. They cheerfully shared what they had.

The elders who gave me a Sunday morning stewardship lesson. It was my first Sunday as their pastor. We were visiting before the service when the treasurer came in. He informed the men that there was not enough money to pay the bills. How’s that for a first Sunday shock! What to do? The chairman of the congregation calmly said, “Pastor, after the service tell the members that there is not enough money to pay the bills. They know what to do.” The announcement was made. In a short time the bills were paid. There was even a balance.

Some might consider that poor stewardship . . . giving to pay the bills. But this was a rural congregation. They had just gone through the planting season. Seed bills. Fertilizer bills. Money was tight, but they loved their Lord. They

faithfully supported his work at home and through the synod. All they needed was a simple reminder.

The man who suggested that our congregation needed to look beyond our needs to the needs of the synod. He asked if I would oppose him if he brought a resolution to the voters’ assembly. He proposed to increase the percentage of our budget that went to the synod by one percent a year until we reached 20 percent, exclusive of any mortgage payments that we might have in the future. Why would I ever oppose that? It passed. It worked.

The council members and voters who had the courage to follow that budget formula even in the lean times. It has not always been easy. But they were moved by the Holy Spirit to do what they knew to be good and right.

What a wonderful blessing committed Christian laypeople are to God’s church. They are living lessons in Christian giving. They know the love of God in Jesus. They show their love in return. This includes Christian giving. What could this pastor have done without them? Praise the Lord!

Arthur H. Frenz Jr. is pastor at Christ, Baxter, Minnesota.

A son uses passages in Proverbs to paint a picture of his faithful mother.

A Mother's Day

A [mom] of noble character, who can find? She is worth far more than rubies."

This first passage from the epilogue of Proverbs actually uses the word "wife" instead of "mom," but I like to think that Proverbs 31:10-31 also applies to mothers. Part of being a noble wife is being a noble mother, and this is the case with the woman described—"her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value" (v. 11). "He praises her" (v. 28). "She brings him good" (v. 12), and "her children arise and call her blessed" (v. 28). It is because of her faith that the Bible calls her "noble" (v. 29)—"a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (v. 30).

I remember these passages serving as the text for a Mother's Day worship service when I was younger. I associate the woman described by the text with my own mom—as I am sure others picture their own mothers—because her life has been built on her faith. She has brought "good" to our family because of it. Here is the portrait of the noble mother I know best.

I will start with the decision that took the most faith for my mom. She stayed home with us when we were kids instead of working professionally during the day. There was a lot of pressure on her to do otherwise, but she felt that, in our family's case, being with us during the day would be the best way to "train [us] in the way [we] should go" (Proverbs 22:6) so that we would not depart from this path as adults. She trusted God to make things work, and her decision brought many blessings to our family.

Just as Proverbs says that the woman of noble character does "not eat the bread of idleness" (v. 27), in our days home with Mom we witnessed a woman who "[set] about her work vigorously" (v. 17). During weekdays my dad would often come home to join us for a lunch she had prepared—"she provides food for her family" (v. 15). My mom acted as an at-home teacher to us, helping us with schoolwork as well as teaching us practical things like handling household chores, understanding finances, and setting goals.

My mom modeled the woman of Proverbs in other ways as well. As kids we developed relationships with the neighbors, and she was there to guide us when God provided opportunities—"faithful instruction is on her tongue" (v. 26). She encouraged me to share my faith with neighborhood kids, including my good friend Tommy. We invited him to church more than once. The result was, at least while we grew up together, Tommy and his family seemed interested in learning more about God.

As kids we enjoyed family time at suppers as well as nighttime devotions and prayer. Often I would discuss with her the real-life applications of the Bible to the news or events in my life. Listening to her answers, I realized her faith "clothed [her] with strength and dignity" (v. 25). Anytime we talk, we still enjoy lengthy discussions about religion. I am amazed—not surprised, but amazed—at the wisdom she has taught me over the years. This wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit.

That is why Proverbs, a book introduced with the theme "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7), ends with this epilogue. The noble woman "speaks with wisdom" (v. 26) because of her fear of the Lord. A mom like this may be a rarity in today's world. Yet, how many of us have been blessed with a mom like this? God has been good to us. Therefore, do as the final verse says: "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise" (v. 31).

Adam Goede is a member at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.



Adam and his mother, Christine, in the 1980s.

Tribute

Adam M. Goede



CLEANING UP OUR PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes we are not content with our circumstances and use that discontent as an excuse for envious, half-hearted effort. Instead we need to put in our full effort wherever God had placed us.

I was a high school janitor for a brief time before I became a high school teacher. I like teaching a lot better. I hated being a janitor, and that made me a bad janitor. You know that stereotypical sweeping dust under the rug? I did that. I remember thinking, “Kids will be using these toilets again in eight hours. Why bother with the extra effort?” I was a half-hearted janitor at best.

But do you know the worst part? The envy. I was a janitor at a high school. As I cleaned the whiteboards in a classroom, I would think to myself how I could (and should!) be doing the teaching and the writing on the boards, instead of just washing them. I’d see a board full of Latin verb conjugations and amuse myself with memories of *sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt*. I thought of my janitor job as less important, less valuable, and less desirable than the work that had gone on in those classrooms during the day. I was an envious, half-hearted janitor.

OUR HALF-HEARTED EFFORTS

After six years of teaching, I now look back on my janitor days with a bit of humor. But I really am confessing my sin to you—a rather serious sin at that. It’s the same as the sin of

the prodigal son: not being content with the circumstances in which God had placed me and using that discontent as an excuse for envious, half-hearted effort. Sometimes when no is the answer to the question, “Is this what you want to be doing?”, that becomes a ready-made excuse for half-hearted effort.

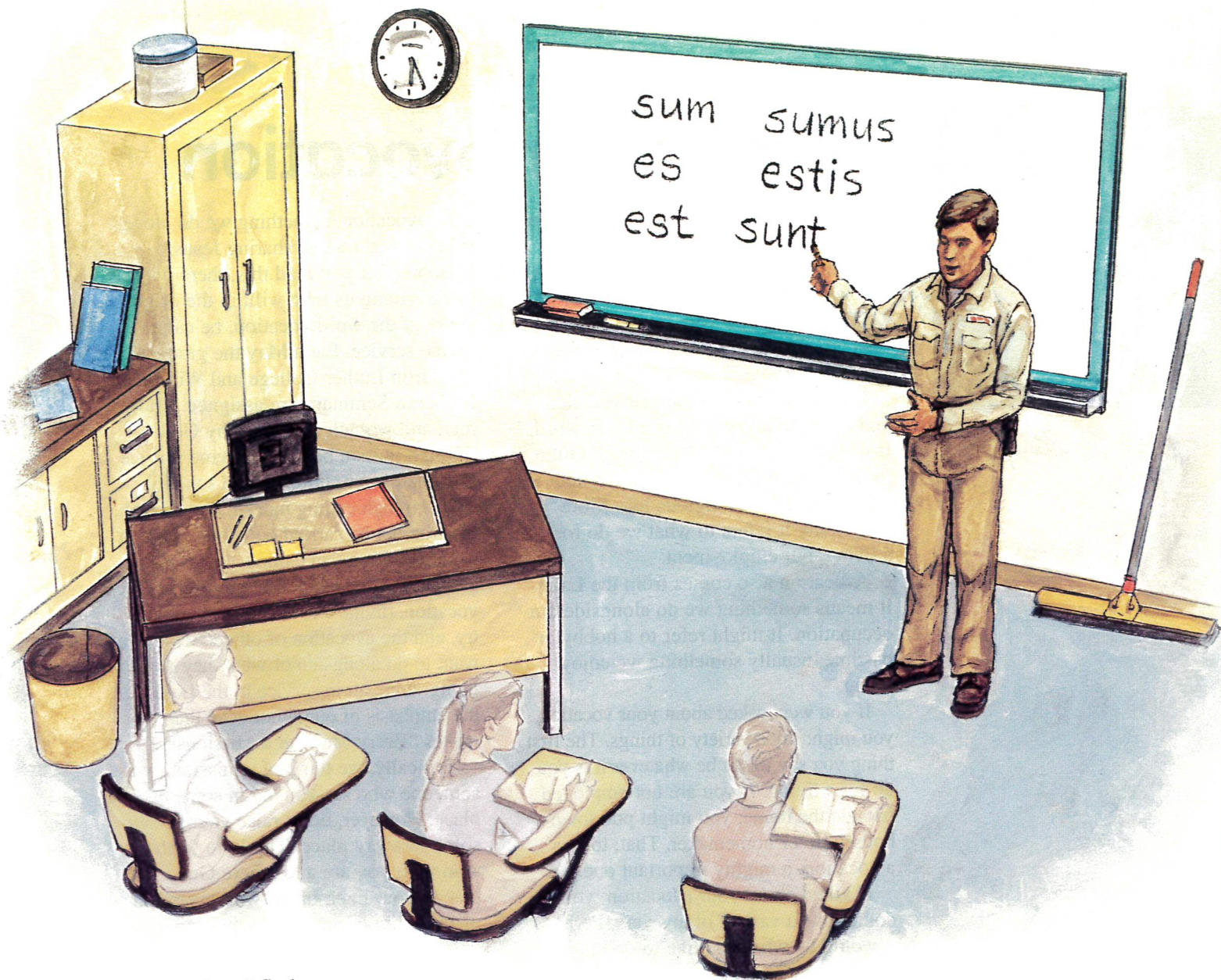
God has given you talents to use, not to bury.

The prodigal wasn’t happy with his circumstances as youngest son, so he wanted to take his money and run to something better. Then when he got there, he quickly ended up in a job he didn’t particularly like. I imagine the prodigal wasn’t much of a farmhand. I’ll bet he didn’t put much thought into whether or not the pig slop ended up in the trough or just spilled in the barnyard. We know he was unhappy as he went about his work. Like me, envying the teachers with the “better” job, the prodigal son perhaps was envious of others who had different jobs.

I don’t want to confess your sins for you, but if you’re honest with yourself I’ll bet that you can think of a few times in your life when you were less than faithful in doing your job. If you’re a student, how diligent are you with your homework—not just that math that you sort of enjoy, but that detestable Spanish that you have to spend extra time on just to stay afloat? If your current job has you pushing a broom or stocking shelves, how clean does the floor get? If a lot of your day goes unsupervised, do you find your attention wandering and your effort declining? Do you ever find yourself working harder when the boss is in the room?

Now, if you find yourself pushing a broom and that’s not something you really want to be doing, you can look for other jobs to use your God-given gifts, talents, and interests. God has given you those as talents to use, not to bury. But it’s also no reason to put in less than your full effort. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23). Talk about working harder when the boss is around!

Even now as a teacher I don’t find myself free from those prodigal moments. I catch myself thinking “good



enough" far too often. I find myself rushing through a lesson plan or skimping on careful grading. And I'm still not free from that specter of envy.

CHRIST'S FULL EFFORT

If this is you, then join me on my knees confessing my sins to Almighty God. Sins of not loving him as I should. Sins of missing opportunities to help others through my work. Sins of expecting an honest day's pay without doing an honest day's work. I have coveted others' positions, pay, and prestige. I have coveted their hours and their honors, their office space and their parking space. I disparage my own God-given vocations and long for the greener grass of someone else's calling.

Yes, join me and the prodigal in confessing, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." Join us at the foot of Christ's cross. See Christ's 33 years of unflagging effort and unflinching devotion to God's cause reach their horrible and necessary conclusion. See the spotless Lamb of God—sinless not only in that he never committed a sin, but also in that he never missed an opportunity to work and labor and strive for the kingdom. Your sins and mine are forgiven. The Father rejoices, for we were dead but are alive again; we were lost but now are found.

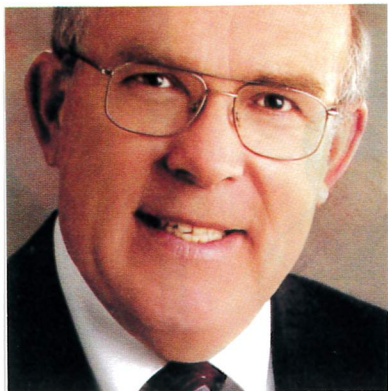
Lest this image pass into the obscurity of our daily activity and cease to make an impact on us, imagine one

more thing. Imagine that prodigal son the next day. The party is over, the fattened calf has been eaten, the guests have all gone home. The father asks his son for some help on the farm. The servants are out, busy with other chores. Would he mind feeding the animals?

Would he mind feeding the animals? The very same job about which he moaned and complained. Would he mind doing it for his father, who put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet? The very same job with an entirely new perspective.

How different it is to live and work as forgiven prodigal children!

Chris Pluger is a member at Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio.



Carl R. Gungl

Vocation or avocation

“What’s your vocation? What about your avocation?”

“Why don’t you cut out the big words? Say what you mean!”

“Okay. What do you do for a living? And, alongside of your job, what else do you enjoy doing?”

Let’s describe and contrast vocation and avocation. Vocation is a Latin word. It might be translated “a calling.” Often, in the past, it referred specifically to a divine call to the religious life. More commonly it refers to what we do for a living, our employment.

Avocation also comes from the Latin. It means something we do alongside our occupation. It might refer to a hobby or pastime, usually something we enjoy doing.

If you were asked about your vocation, you might say a variety of things. The first thing you say might be whatever it is you do for a living. If you are not employed outside the home, you might put down housewife or homemaker. That, too, is a vocation, a mighty important one.

If asked about your avocation, you could give a variety of answers. Perhaps it would be what you like to do in addition to your regular work. It might be church work. Helping with a variety of congregational or synod activities might be considered an avocation.

Recently, someone listed his church work as his vocation. What he did to earn a living—his occupation—he regarded as his avocation, something he did alongside of what he really wanted to do—serve the Lord.

Our vocation, our job, and our avocation, what we enjoy doing, are not necessarily separate. What we do for a living can be something we thoroughly enjoy, especially because it may give us opportunities to share Jesus with others. Then we could say our full-time employment

is an avocation, something we do alongside our real task of sharing Jesus.

Soon after you read this, there will be some among us who will, in the original sense of the word vocation, be called to divine service. Each May the graduates of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are assigned. Those men and women are called by God through human beings to divine service at some of our churches and schools.

It is a high calling indeed, one, though, that can not be carried out alone. Each of us, in our Christian calling, stands right alongside of called public ministers. Their vocation, divine call to the public ministry, and the avocation of others, what they want to do alongside of what they do for a living, unite all in service to the Lord. In the emphasis of our synodwide theme, it makes “Every Member a Missionary.”

Typically, we think of a missionary as someone who serves God in some distant place. However, don’t raise your eyes to some faraway place. Think no further than who you are and where God has placed you. Each of us, wherever God places us in life, can be a missionary.

It might be at work. A coworker, without you saying a word, notices the humble confidence in your life. One day, when things aren’t going so well for him, he asks you what gives you such inner strength. When you tell him that God does, you’re being a missionary.

And so, whether it is your vocation, your full-time calling, like that of a pastor, teacher, or staff minister, or your avocation, what you enjoy doing alongside of what you do for a living, it makes no difference. You are exercising the special privilege God gives each of us, the privilege that makes every member a missionary. It’s all a part of proclaiming peace through Jesus.



I rejoice in knowing Christ Jesus my Lord

Philippians 3:7-11

⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Nothing is better than having “the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” in Jesus.

Paul E. Zell

Saul of Tarsus had once lived like many other men. He spent years trying to put his own imprint on the world and raise his own status. Then the risen Lord spoke to him on the road to Damascus. Afterwards nothing was the same. Certainly Paul’s reputation in the church grew. Yet as Paul wrote this epistle he still had no desire to promote himself. His life, he wrote, was all about “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Nothing gave him greater joy.

Having righteousness through faith in him

Did any first-century Jew have a more impressive reputation? Paul was “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Philippians 3:5,6). Who had a greater incentive to boast about himself? Yet he refused to do it.

You see, Jesus had credited Paul with something far better. He filled every line of Paul’s ledger with the record of his own perfectly holy deeds. Paul scribbled his own accomplishments in the “loss column.” Can you blame him? Nothing is better than having “the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” in Jesus.

We might be tempted to trumpet our own accomplishments, our work for the Lord, our good reputation in the neighborhood. But you wouldn’t dare boast about them before God, would you? You and I admit that we have no “righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law.” The Judge

has declared us not guilty for Jesus’ sake. Like Paul we “consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus [our] Lord.”

Sharing in his sufferings and in the power of his resurrection

Paul’s zeal for knowing Christ Jesus seems to have increased over the years. He had learned firsthand what it felt like to be scorned, threatened, and beaten just as Christ had been. Yet he didn’t fear such trials; he treasured them. “Always bearing about in [his] body the dying of the Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:10 KJV), even as he anticipated the joy of the resurrection of the dead, the apostle recognized he was being pulled closer and closer to his Savior.

Christians live, suffer, and die in Christ. The new convert hears the voice of Jesus in adult instruction class and thrills to the wonder of his grace. “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,” he says with Paul. Then it happens. He makes a bold confession, experiences persecution, and feels privileged for it.

We also strive for the goal of “knowing Christ Jesus,” don’t we? We prize each daily opportunity to hear and learn his Word. With the strength the Holy Spirit imparts, we suffer, face death, and lean on the power of Jesus’ resurrection year after year. What a joy to know Christ Jesus our Lord!

Contributing editor Paul Zell, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee.



John A. Bann

Ascension gifts

Did you get your Ascension gift yet? I've never seen an ad that encourages anyone to spend money for an Ascension Day gift. No one does that. Ascension Day comes 40 days after Easter, but it quietly slips by unnoticed while other Christian holidays come with trumpets.

Yet we all received more than one Ascension Day gift, and we will be getting more of them too. We do not exchange gifts on this occasion as we do at Christmas. Instead we simply receive the gifts that our Lord gives to his church. They are precious gifts of his grace, and I want to celebrate those gifts.

What are they? The apostle Paul discusses the holy Christian church in Ephesians 4 and refers to Christ's ascension. When Jesus ascended into heaven he had completed his work of redeeming us and overcoming sin, death, and hell. He now rules all things for the benefit of his church. Paul notes that Jesus grants grace to each member of the church as he "apportioned it" (v. 7) and also gave some "to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service" (v. 11). Those are the Ascension Day gifts I want to celebrate.

The first of these gifts is the talent the Lord gives to the wonderful people that he gathers into his church. Each of us has different abilities, talents, strengths—and weaknesses too. We are all here because Jesus wants us to be here. We have a place and a function in his church—no exceptions. Even if we don't always understand how he is using us and our talents, even if we think we should be somewhere else and doing something else, Jesus has us where he needs us.

We ought to celebrate each other. It's time to celebrate the way Jesus made us and how he grants us the privilege of serving him in the role he has determined. As Peter wrote, we are a chosen people—

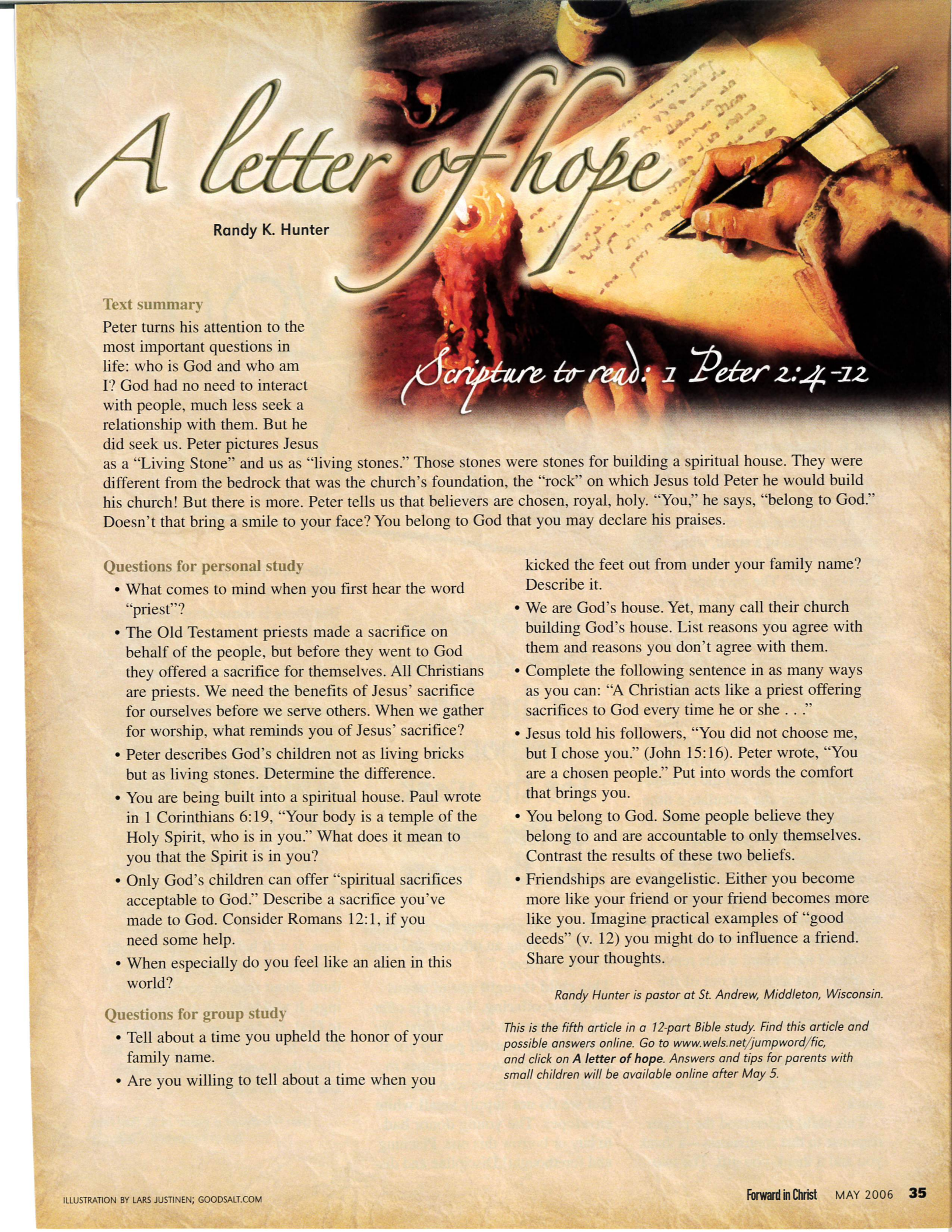
royal, holy, and belonging to God. In the midst of all our troubles and challenges, pause this Ascension Day to celebrate God's gifts to his church. They are people who believe in the Lord Jesus and who desire to serve him with the talent he gives. Thank the Lord for all of them.

The second gift Paul calls the "pastors and teachers" that Jesus gives his church, that is, all those who serve the Lord's people in the public ministry. Like other gifts they are undeserved gifts of the Lord's grace. Every year we observe the completion of their studies at graduation from Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Because it happens every year, maybe we take it for granted, like Ascension Day, but for over a century and a half the Lord of the church has been giving us these gifts.

When I see these young men and women, I see a miracle of the grace of God. They are bright, talented, dedicated, and eager to serve. Many of them have bypassed other careers and professions with more financial benefits and greater prestige in our world. I celebrate the grace of God that has worked within them to serve the Lord's church as ministers of the gospel.

I also celebrate their families—the dads and moms that also love Jesus and desire their sons and daughters to serve. I celebrate the grandfather, a simple farmer, who loved the Savior. Twenty-four of his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren now serve as pastors or teachers in the church he loved. Let me celebrate the grace of God that lived in him and others like him.

Celebrate them. Celebrate the pastor who speaks the gospel to you. Celebrate the teacher who shares Jesus with your children. Celebrate the staff minister. Celebrate your fellow believers. They are all Ascension Day gifts.



A letter of hope

Randy K. Hunter

Text summary

Peter turns his attention to the most important questions in life: who is God and who am I? God had no need to interact with people, much less seek a relationship with them. But he did seek us. Peter pictures Jesus as a “Living Stone” and us as “living stones.” Those stones were stones for building a spiritual house. They were different from the bedrock that was the church’s foundation, the “rock” on which Jesus told Peter he would build his church! But there is more. Peter tells us that believers are chosen, royal, holy. “You,” he says, “belong to God.” Doesn’t that bring a smile to your face? You belong to God that you may declare his praises.

Scripture to read: 1 Peter 2:4-12

Questions for personal study

- What comes to mind when you first hear the word “priest”?
- The Old Testament priests made a sacrifice on behalf of the people, but before they went to God they offered a sacrifice for themselves. All Christians are priests. We need the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice for ourselves before we serve others. When we gather for worship, what reminds you of Jesus’ sacrifice?
- Peter describes God’s children not as living bricks but as living stones. Determine the difference.
- You are being built into a spiritual house. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you.” What does it mean to you that the Spirit is in you?
- Only God’s children can offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.” Describe a sacrifice you’ve made to God. Consider Romans 12:1, if you need some help.
- When especially do you feel like an alien in this world?

Questions for group study

- Tell about a time you upheld the honor of your family name.
- Are you willing to tell about a time when you

kicked the feet out from under your family name? Describe it.

- We are God’s house. Yet, many call their church building God’s house. List reasons you agree with them and reasons you don’t agree with them.
- Complete the following sentence in as many ways as you can: “A Christian acts like a priest offering sacrifices to God every time he or she . . .”
- Jesus told his followers, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” (John 15:16). Peter wrote, “You are a chosen people.” Put into words the comfort that brings you.
- You belong to God. Some people believe they belong to and are accountable to only themselves. Contrast the results of these two beliefs.
- Friendships are evangelistic. Either you become more like your friend or your friend becomes more like you. Imagine practical examples of “good deeds” (v. 12) you might do to influence a friend. Share your thoughts.

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

*This is the fifth article in a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online. Go to www.wels.net/jumpword/fic, and click on **A letter of hope**. Answers and tips for parents with small children will be available online after May 5.*

A Child's Gift

What was scrawled on the outside of an envelope tells us more about this child's offering than what was contained on the inside.

Lynn E. Wiedmann

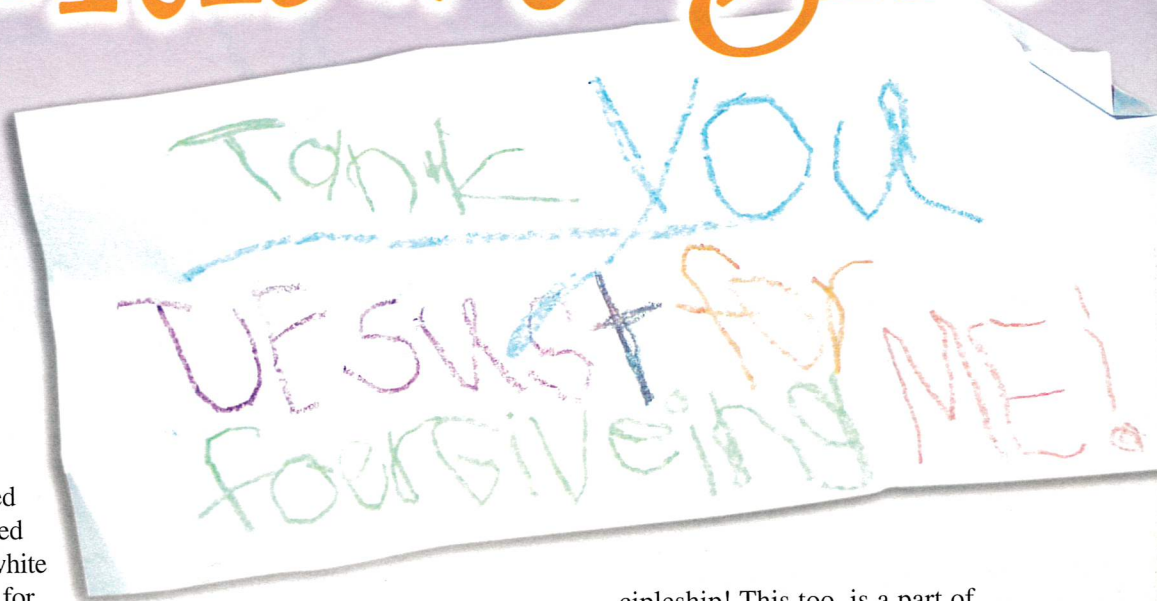
The words were underlined for emphasis and scrawled across the front of a small, white envelope: "Thank you Jesus for forgiving me!" The envelope contained an offering. But what was written on the outside of the envelope tells us more about the offering than what was contained on the inside.

Our young author understands the purpose of offerings. Does he or she know the financial trouble of the synod, the mission statement of St. Paul First, or its opportunities for mission outreach in the community? Did he or she calculate a tithe of current net income using IRS Form 1040 line 31 as a basis?

This young person simply put a cross after the word "Jesus." The offering was a response, a thankful response, for the work of the Savior on the cross. "You forgave me."

Often I have heard adults remark, "I didn't get anything out of the service." Apparently this child has "gotten something out of going to church." The child understood the whole point of the gospel: Jesus forgave me! Note the exclamation mark!

This child understood the proper response to that forgiveness—a thank you and a thank-you gift. The two



The offering was a response, a thankful response, for the work of the Savior on the cross.

have always gone together in biblical worship. "Bring an offering and come into his presence."

This child thought ahead about his or her offering. We supply offering envelopes at St. Paul First. We have a fancy tear-off pad of envelopes. We even have envelopes in small racks for those who need one. But we do not supply small white envelopes. The young donor had to buy or borrow this one. Planning and forethought! Discipline and dis-

ciplineship! This too, is a part of Christian giving.

But there is something more about this little sermon carefully written on the front of the envelope. Christian generosity produces thanksgiving to God. When I walked in to greet our counters, they had to share the message written on the envelope. They shared it with joy and gratitude to God for the parents and teachers of this little one. They thanked God with me for the gospel-generated faith so clearly and accurately expressed in the words of a child.

I don't believe that I will forget this little sermon for a long time. It will help me think more clearly about why I fill my offering envelope. It will help me keep the right motivation for giving. It will help me think about regular, generous offerings. It will help me to give thanks to God. He has planted faith in the future leaders of the church. He has filled their hearts with the gospel, and it is working.

Lynn Wiedmann is pastor at St. Paul First, North Hollywood, California.