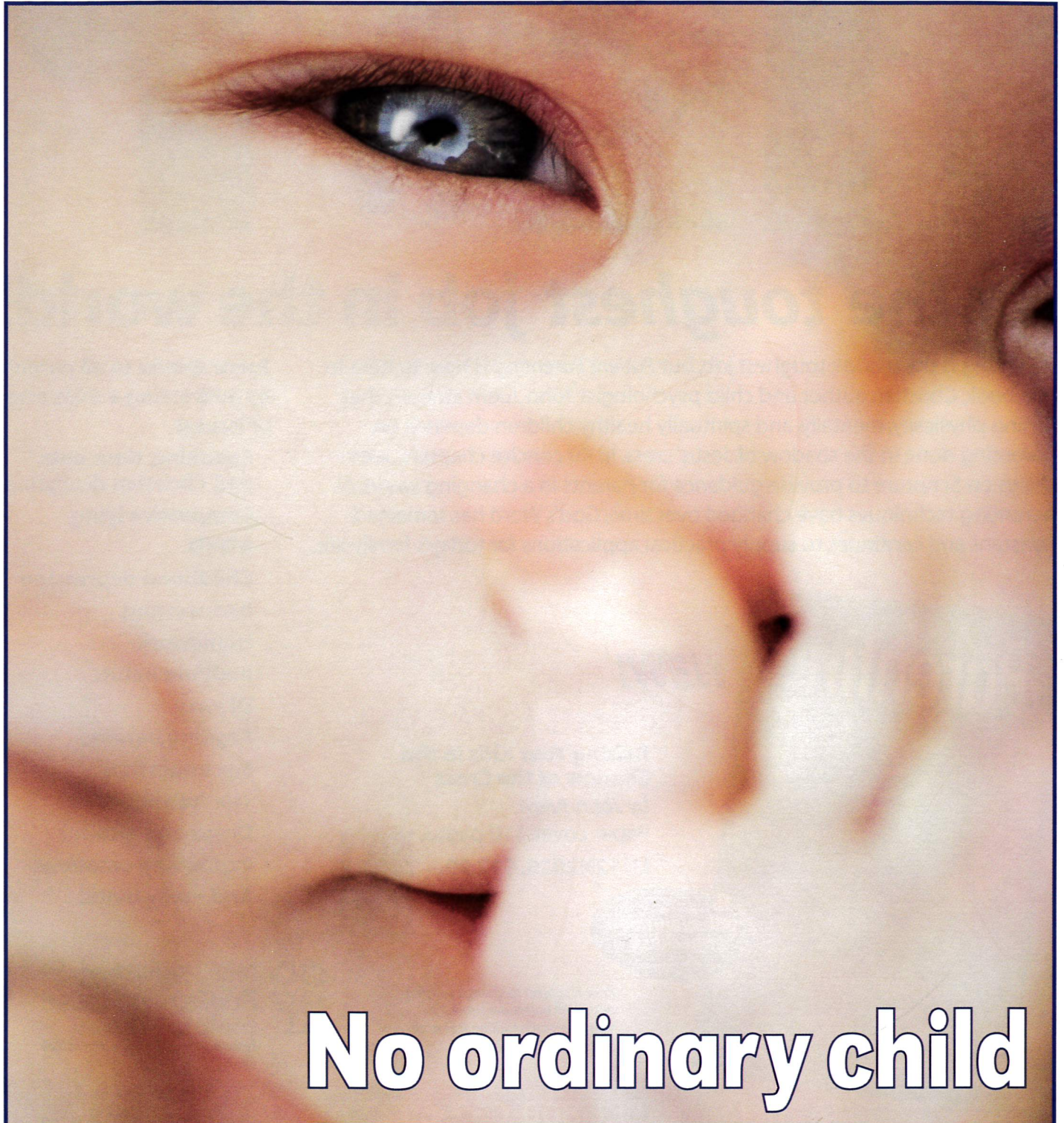


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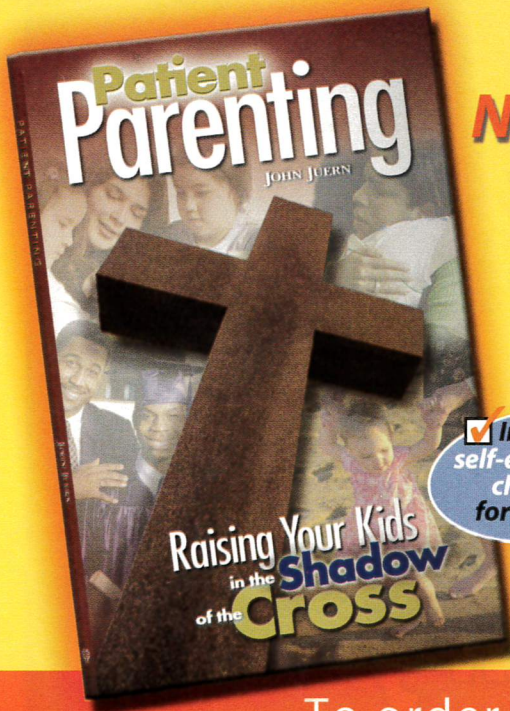


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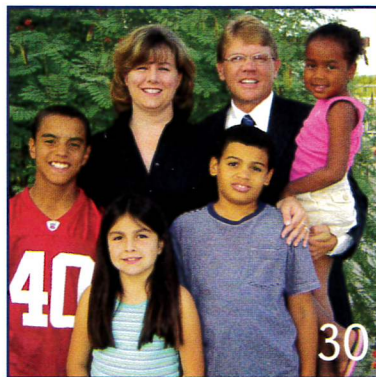


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Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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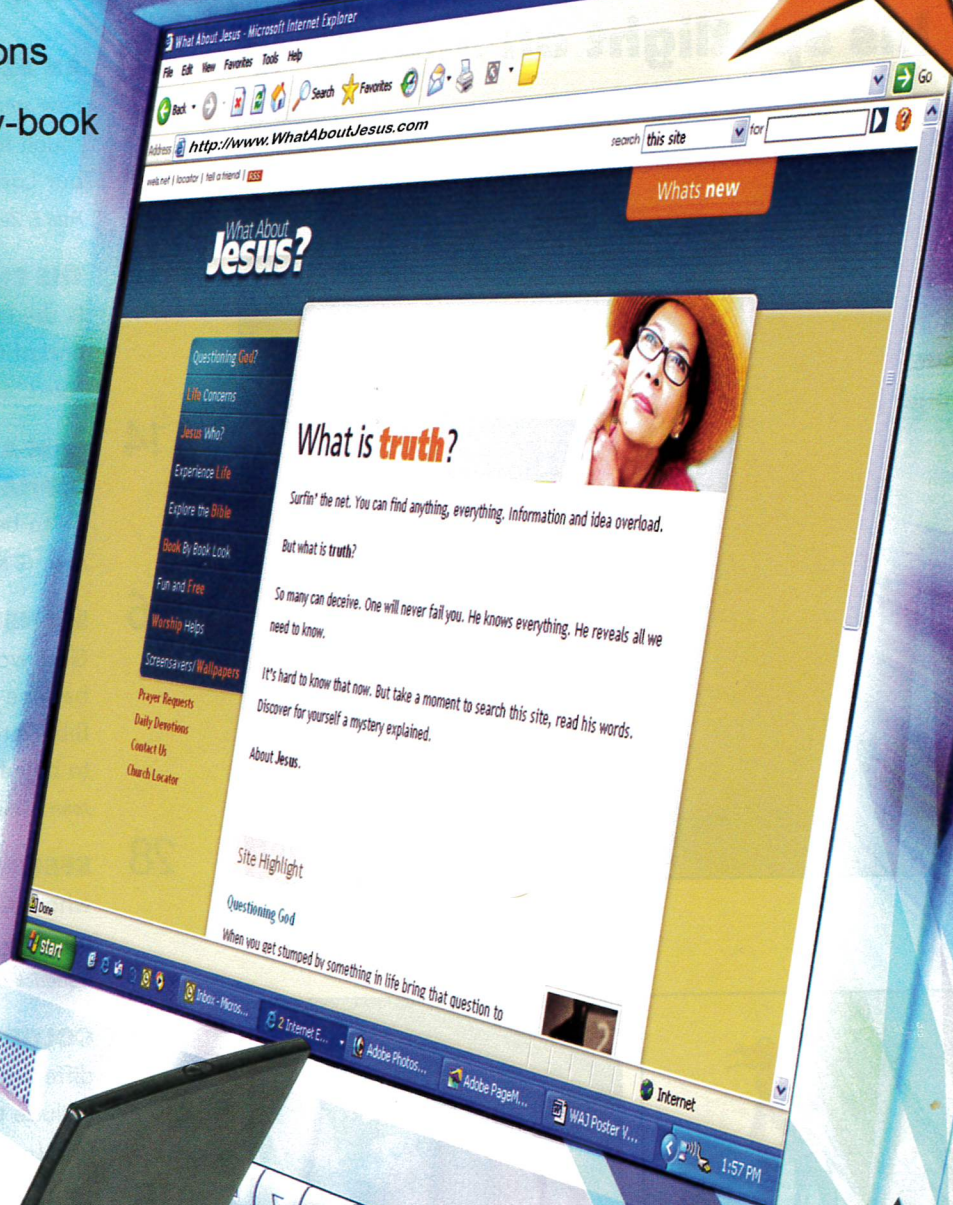
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JANUARY

WHAT'S INSIDE by Julie Wietzke

Many times in this column, I focus on the feature stories in the magazine. But you will be missing out if you don't check out the departments that are present every month in *Forward in Christ*.

Twelve contributing editors agree to provide Christ-centered content for the various departments in *Forward in Christ* over a six-year period. Three take turns writing devotions based on Scripture passages (p. 7). Three provide editorial commentary on what's going on in our world today (p. 8). One will answer your question every month for six years (p. 9). Finally, five work to help you understand God's teachings better through two different Bible studies—a regular (p. 33) and an interactive. (Meet our newest contributing editor, Pastor Jonathan Schroeder, on p. 22 and read his first interactive study on Jacob on p. 35.)

Besides these 12 contributing editors, Executive Editor John Braun and WELS President Karl Gurgel also provide social commentary and inspirational messages in their monthly columns.

Our goal is that every month you can find articles—both in our features and in our departments—that will instruct, inform, and inspire you as you continue living your life for Jesus.

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REACHING OUT

Like Martin Luther King, our synod at its 2003 convention had a dream. And that dream was to “share the peace of Jesus with North America.” What a noble, God-pleasing dream. I laud our synod and this publication for its effort to make that dream a reality. . . .

I have a dream as well. I have a plan that has the potential to make our synod’s dream a reality. I shared that dream in a pamphlet I mailed to all the active and retired pastors and professors of our synod. It was titled: “A Simple Plan to Win North America for Christ.” Because I received so many favorable responses, as well as requests to have the pamphlet in electronic form, I sent out a second pamphlet including several of these responses plus a Web site on which one can read the entire first pamphlet, responses to that pamphlet, and some pretty amazing “success stories” of those who implemented the Andrew Plan in their congregations. Check out the Web site, www.andrewplan.net, and see if you don’t agree with Pastor Thomas Fricke who said: “The Andrew Plan is an idea that meets the requirement of a great outreach strategy. It’s simple, and it gets laypeople involved so that the pastor is free to do what he’s best equipped to do—teach the Word.”

*James Lillo
Anchorage, Alaska*

HOMOSEXUALITY

In Feedback [Oct.], a reader points out that the sole focus of John Braun’s “Forgiveness transforms us” article is on homosexuality. Although the main focus of his article is homosexuality, it is not the “only” focus. Why is that? In the past two decades the agenda of gay and lesbian groups has been one of tolerance for their behavior in main-

stream society. Now the agenda has moved beyond one of tolerance to approval. As a direct result (and sometimes reaction to) we have seen a proliferation of gay marriage referendums during the past few elections in this country. We have also seen such church groups such as the Episcopal Church (2003 consecration of the openly gay Bishop Gene Robinson) gain national attention for their stances on homosexuality. Even in Indianapolis, a community church has been running a pro-homosexual yard sign campaign.

Homosexuality has been thrust into the forefront of the national spotlight and in our churches. I applaud John Braun for having the courage to write this article in an attempt to bring this discussion into the church, especially in a day or age when it is easy to be attacked or dismissed for not being politically correct.

*Bud Shipe
Indianapolis, Indiana*

HALLOWEEN EVANGELISM

“A twist on trick or treating” [Oct.] by Carolyn Vaughn spurred me on for a slight variation in our church. I made 3" x 3" papers on which I printed information about our church and school and our service times on the back. On the front I envisioned a red-and-white striped candy stapled under a sentence that read, “Refresh your Spirit.” Above that, another sentence would invite neighbors to join us at church.

Stopping at the local grocery story, I could not find any red-and-white candies, so I substituted with white circular mints.

Imagine my surprise as I assembled the candy to the paper and saw the substitute candy add the word “Lifesavers” to the message. How fitting!

*Lana Ossmann
De Pere, Wisconsin*

THANKS

I read this publication from cover to cover, starting at the back (I don’t know why). Two items in the November issue really hit home: “Thank God for Thorns” by John Braun, and “Jesus, Priceless Treasure” by our president. Not to take anything away, but every page is a lesson and an education. Keep it going!

*George Lehmann
King, Wisconsin*

Just a few lines to let you know how much I enjoy your publication. The articles are so timely and spiritual. Each issue seems better than the one before.

I especially enjoy the articles written by the teenagers. I thank God for their testimonies and faith.

“Let your light shine” [Nov.] by Shirley and Jerry Dorst was the best! What an inspiration Shirley was. Her “farewell” letter was so inspiring and helpful. I know that she is enjoying the blessings of heaven and waiting for her loved ones to join her.

*Frieda Miller
Benton Harbor, Michigan*

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*.

The view from Nazareth

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth . . . "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." . . . He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up . . . All the people in the synagogue . . . got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. Luke 1:26,38; 4:16,28,29

Peter A. Panitzke

As our tour group entered Nazareth, our guide didn't immediately take us to the Church of the Annunciation. Instead we took a winding road up a hill on the south side of Nazareth to the Mount of Precipice. According to tradition, this is the spot from which the angry mob was going to throw Jesus down to his death.

God stands above history

From here the whole Valley of Jezreel spread out before us. I could see a thousand years of history. To our left was Mount Tabor where Deborah and Barak gathered to fight the forces of Jabin, king of Hazor. A little to the south was the Hill of Moreh where the Midianites and Amalekites assembled against Gideon. Farther to the south was Mount Gilboa where King Saul had fought the Philistines and died. Across the Jezreel Valley is Megiddo: captured by Joshua, fortified by Solomon and Ahab, where King Josiah died at Pharaoh's hand. Mount Carmel, the place where Elijah had stood his ground against the 450 prophets of Baal, was far to the right.

It dawned on me that this is God's view of history. As we live our lives, the events of each day loom up large in front of us. The enemies are many. The defeats are overwhelming. Victories can become monuments to our own greatness. But God stands above history. He sees it all in perspective in one grand sweep.

God steps into history

This view from Nazareth also reminds us that the God who sees all of history also stepped into history. This eternal God stepped into Mary's life, announcing that she would conceive and give birth to a son, her own Savior. This eternal God stepped into the lives of the people of Nazareth, announcing that he had come "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19).

This God has also stepped into our personal histories. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Nazareth so that he could be truly human and take upon himself the guilt of all our spiritual defeats. He has proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor to us through his Word and sacraments. He offers us the spoils of his victory: forgiveness and new life.

Mary believed that God stepped into her history. "May it be to me as you have said . . . My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:38,47). The people of Nazareth rejected him. He didn't act the way they wanted; he didn't do miracles at their beck and call. They didn't want to hear his call to repentance.

As we stand at the beginning of a new year, God sees all the defeats and victories already. This will be another year in which God will not



always act the way we would hope. But whom will we imitate? Mary or the people of Nazareth?

Join Mary in celebrating that the eternal God has come into your history. Know that this is the year of his favor. Trust that he will make even your defeats work for your good. Thank him now for all the victories you will enjoy. Sing with Mary, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47).

Contributing editor Peter Panitzke is pastor at St. Paul, Muskego, Wisconsin.

Unfair grace

Paul T. Prange

Every year a local public school sends a group of students for one day to Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), our synod's boarding high school for ministerial education in Saginaw. The public school students are part of a conference Student Council exchange program.

We always try to arrange for the students to visit one period of the senior doctrine course, which I have the privilege of teaching. On that day MLS seniors learn the Great Exchange as one simple way to explain the gospel to someone who has never heard it before.

Recently the visiting Student Council group included a young woman who was wearing a headscarf that identified her as a practicing Muslim. I wondered how she would react to hearing the Great Exchange.

I teach the Great Exchange in four parts:

Part One—What God requires

God requires you to be perfect in order to get into heaven. He says that if you have perfect holiness and no sin, you can live with him forever in the place where there is perfect holiness and no sin. "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28).

Part Two—What God sees

When God looks at each one of us, he sees someone who is not perfect. In fact, regardless of how good we look outwardly, each of us has sinned. As a result, we are not perfectly holy, and we deserve to be rewarded with eternal death in hell. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Part Three—Human solutions

When people realize the problem, they come up with their own solutions. Some people hope that they will be able to get into heaven because they are not as bad as other people they know.

The problem is that they still have sin. Other people hope that they can get into heaven because they are improving in life and are not nearly as bad as they used to be. The problem is that they too still have sin in their lives. Still other people hope that they can get into heaven because they have tried to do enough good to balance out the bad they have done. The problem is that our good works do not make up for our sin. "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 16:25). "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10).

Part Four—God's solution

God saw the problem, and sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to take care of it. Jesus lived a perfect life. He never sinned. He always did the right thing. He was righteous and holy. He deserved to live forever in heaven, but instead he took the punishment of hell and died on the cross. His death paid for our sin, and his life is our righteousness. That's the Great Exchange, our sin causing his death, his righteousness causing us to have eternal life in heaven. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

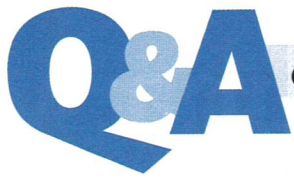
When I got to Part Four, the Muslim girl raised her hand. "That's not fair," she objected. "Everyone should be responsible for their own sin."

"You're right, that's not fair," I answered. "That's why we call it grace."

Praise God for his amazing grace.

Contributing editor Paul Prange, president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan, is a member at St. Paul, Saginaw.

His death paid for our sin, and his life is our righteousness.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Biblical movies

Two “biblical” movies were released at the end of 2006 (*One Night with the King* and *The Nativity Story*). Other “biblical” movies have been released in the past, and more will be released in the future. What is a Christian’s response to such movies?

This author makes no claim to be the WELS incarnation of Ebert or Roeper. Therefore the objective of this column isn’t to offer a “movie review.” The intent is to provide food for thought about such “biblical” movies in general.

Depending on each movie’s popularity, the potential to use that movie as a discussion starter with unchurched friends and co-workers could be significant. It’s debatable whether movies are more influenced by culture or culture by movies. Yet this much is hard to debate: movies can offer a significant “window” into the worldview of friends and co-workers. Just ask someone what his favorite movie is, and you will often see his eyes light up. As he answers your question, he may also give you significant details of the movie. As you listen, he may reveal much about his own worldview. Movies can offer that open door to discuss life’s important matters that we often struggle to find.

With that in mind, here are two encouragements. First, read the related portion of Scripture before you go—perhaps several times! Many such movies (such as *The Passion of the Christ* and *One Night with the King*) are based more on historical novels or legends than Scripture. Even when that’s not the case (*The Nativity Story*), because Scripture wasn’t written to provide screenplays, those who write them will supply much that’s not in the biblical text. In either case, it’s helpful to have a firm grasp on the biblical narrative. That way you more easily can sort through what may be questionable or downright false assumptions. This author, who thought he knew Esther reasonably well, made a beeline for his Bible after watching *One Night with the King*. It’s more helpful to be armed in advance!

In particular, be prepared that the screen portrayal may fail significantly to communicate Scripture’s core messages of human sin and divine grace. Those writing screenplays often have as their chief purpose to write a compelling human interest story that sells tickets. God and his unmerited favor often take a back seat to man and his basic goodness. Where Scripture paints its “heroes” and “heroines” of faith “warts and all,” screenwriters may apply make-up.

For instance, in *One Night with the King*, the “beauty pageant” in which Esther participated was pictured as a chaste activity. But it was rather something that rendered all participants “concubines” of Xerxes (Esther 2:14). Such a change stole at least some of the beauty of God’s grace, which brought deliverance from the midst of a rather sordid situation. Such is the beauty of God’s grace, that even when our own sin has a direct role in our struggles, he still works to make even that serve our good (Genesis 50:20).

Once you’re prepared to view the movie with “Scripture-vision,” the second encouragement would be to look for opportunities for “movie-outreach.” Invite an unchurched friend to popcorn and a movie. Even if they decline, it still may be wise to see the movie so that you’re prepared for possible breakroom discussion. Having seen the movie gives you a sense of authenticity that others may not grant your words if you haven’t experienced the movie itself.

Of course, in all of this, be prepared to share the real heart of the greatest story ever told—Jesus!

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/jump/qa, for more questions and answers.

Few accounts in Scripture stir up as much fascination and speculation as our Lord's epiphany to the Gentiles. A star leads wise men to a baby in Bethlehem.

An extraordinary Epiphany

Paul E. Zell

Do those wise men intrigue you? How about that star? What really brought the wise men to Bethlehem? And those three gifts—did they carry profound significance?

No ordinary men

They showed up at King Herod's doorstep some time after Jesus was born. St. Matthew refers to them as "Magi," an old Persian word from which we also get the word "magic." Typically these were experts in astrology, dreams, fortunetelling—the so-called "secret arts" of pagans. They studied literature. They paid close attention to world affairs. They loved knowledge of all sorts.

Some have said it was 12 wise men that came from the East. Others say it was three, one for each gift. Some have given them the names Gaspard, Balthasar, and Melchior. Others call them Magalath, Galgalath, and Sarasin; or Ator, Sator, and Perator. But Matthew is silent about

their number and names. Instead he points to the purpose of their journey. "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" they asked. "We ... have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2).

These were prominent Gentiles intent on worshiping a Jewish king. To find him they hiked hundreds of miles at great cost and risk. Why such astonishing devotion? Several hundred years earlier Daniel was appointed "chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners" of Babylon (Daniel 5:11). Had the prophet's faithful testimony to the Lord of Israel been preserved in the lore of Babylon's Magi? Tens of thousands of exiled Jews settled down along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers even after many of their countrymen returned to Palestine. Had they continued to testify that a descendant of King David would rule forever? Did the Magi themselves pore over the Hebrew Scriptures?

But St. Matthew is silent; he gives us no answers.

No ordinary star

One night a new star appeared above the horizon. This group of Magi identified it as "his star," the one signaling the birth of "the king of the Jews." How did they make the connection?

Perhaps the wise men were familiar with the ancient oracle of Balaam. He prophesied, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). From our New Testament perspective we recognize Jacob's royal star as a reference to Jesus. To put it another way, we interpret the star figuratively. But might the Magi have been watching for a literal star? Still, what was it about this particular star that brought to mind such prophecy? Might something else have connected the rising of this star with the birth of this majestic king? Was there a God-given dream? Did God show the Magi a vision? Did he communicate through an angel?



As for St. Matthew, he responds to such questions with silence.

No ordinary discovery

By the time the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, "his star" was no longer visible in the sky. They spoke of its first appearance but could no longer show it to Herod. The chief priests and teachers of the law consulted the Scriptures. They determined from the prophet Micah that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod sent the Magi on their way. Suddenly the star made another appearance. This time it was moving. It kept going ahead of the Magi till it came to a standstill—right above where Jesus was.

How do you explain such a startling event? Johannes Kepler, "the first astrophysicist," theorized that it was a supernova, a star that explodes and gives off enormous amounts of light for a short time. Some have speculated that it was the passing of Halley's Comet. Others have proposed a brilliant conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. But could a natural star of any sort really have moved ahead of the Magi "until it stopped over the place where the child was" (Matthew 2:9)?

St. Matthew doesn't explain the star as a natural phenomenon. He doesn't try to explain the star at all. He simply allows the reader to marvel at one of God's miracles.

No ordinary gifts

By this time Jesus was several weeks old, perhaps several months. Joseph had moved his family out of the cattle stall to a more suitable dwelling. "On coming to the house," St. Matthew writes, the Magi "saw the child with his mother Mary" (Matthew 2:11). Quite a sight after an arduous search. Reverence for an exalted ruler kept them from making direct eye contact. In the custom of the day they fell forward

and lay flat, eyes to the floor. "Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

The gold acknowledged Jesus' royalty; the incense respected his deity; the myrrh anointed him for death and burial. Allegories of early Christians, at least, explained the gifts that way. Over the centuries others have suggested that the three gifts symbolized purity, prayer, and mercy; or faith, love, and hope; or reasonable faith, pure reason, and good works. Still others have speculated on a completely different level. They see the gold as financial support for a poor family about to flee the country, the incense sweetening their prayers to God, and the myrrh soothing the skin of a newborn.

The Holy Spirit's writer resolutely holds his spotlight on Jesus.

What does Matthew say about the significance of the three gifts? Not a single word.

No ordinary child

The Holy Spirit's writer resolutely holds his spotlight on Jesus. Even when fascinating figures cross the stage, his aim doesn't waver. Back in chapter one, St. Matthew listed more than 40 names to demonstrate that Jesus is the descendent of Father Abraham and King David, just as Scripture had foretold. Many of the names are noteworthy, but the focus

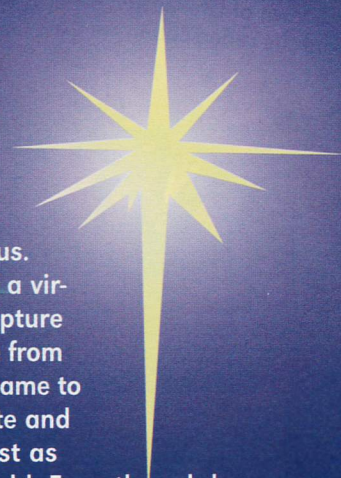
remains on Jesus.

He was born of a virgin, just as Scripture foretold. People from faraway lands came to bring him tribute and worship him, just as Scripture foretold. Even though he was "born king of the Jews," Gentiles thrilled to his royal majesty and enjoyed the favor of his presence. The details stir the imagination, but the spotlight remains on Jesus.

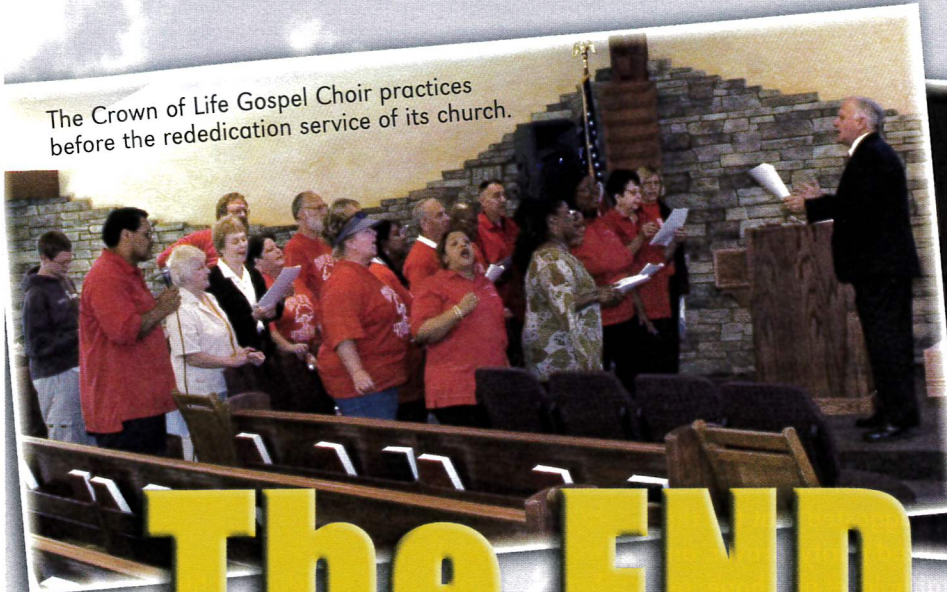
Soon the Magi exited the scene, trekking back to the East. The star faded from view. The three generous gifts were not mentioned again. Jesus alone remains under St. Matthew's spotlight—protected from a homicidal king. Matthew goes on to describe how Jesus returned to Nazareth, was heralded by the Baptist, and was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus would demonstrate supreme authority over the devil, over ungodly men, and over every disease and sickness. He would teach with authority. This king would die in humility, then rise in victory over sin and death. He would send forth his disciples to baptize and teach, promising that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

Gentiles still come. All kinds of intriguing events disrupt their lives, yet God repeatedly directs their attention to the comfort and joy of his Word and sacraments. They worship. They give gifts. And the spotlight remains on Jesus, their gracious and glorious king.

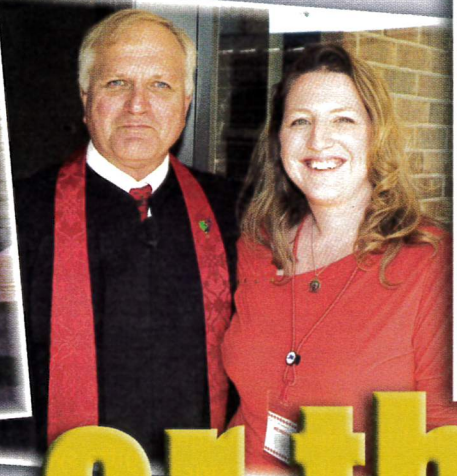
Paul Zell, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee.



The Crown of Life Gospel Choir practices before the rededication service of its church.



Pastor Sternhagen and member.



Members and



The END or the

Is the rededication of a church the end of the story or is there more?

Abby L. Janssen

When I heard that Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., was being rededicated, I wanted to be there. I had watched the story of Crown of Life unfold from those first hours after Hurricane Katrina when reports came in that the church was flooded. I had visited New Orleans to talk to Builders For Christ volunteers as they worked on the church property through the winter of 2005. I had sat in the living rooms of congregation members and listened as they told me their Katrina stories. I suspected that traveling to Louisiana for the rededication would provide a nice ending to the story. Like many stories before it, this one had a beginning, it had a middle, and it was going to have an end. Or so I thought.

Finding an ending

You couldn't have asked for a better day to hold a rededication service. Under a cloudless sky and a moderate 70 degrees, people congregated outside Crown of Life, greeting each other with exclamations of "You made it!" and warm handshakes and hugs.

The service itself was uplifting and inspiring. The choir sang songs that shook the rafters and brought tears to most eyes. Pastor David Sternhagen reminded the assembly through his sermon on John 3:16 that the rededication was possible because of the love of Christ working through his dear children. As the last notes of the choir's benediction hung in the air, and Sternhagen once again expressed his gratitude on behalf of the congregation, I thought I had my story. All I needed to do was interview a few people, and the article would write itself.

Things changed, though, as I began talking to my first interviewee, Wanda Webb-Theodore. I asked her to tell me her story. Emotions were close to the surface for many people that day, and Webb-Theodore was no exception. The tears quietly fell as she said, "We lost everything. Our house was gutted from floor to ceiling. It's hard. It's still hard. We've only been back since June."

It was then that I realized that this story wasn't just about a rebuilt church and tying things up in a nice neat bow. It was and continues to be about people whose homes are still in ruins, who are just getting back to work, and who harbor deep scars from a tragedy no one understands unless they lived

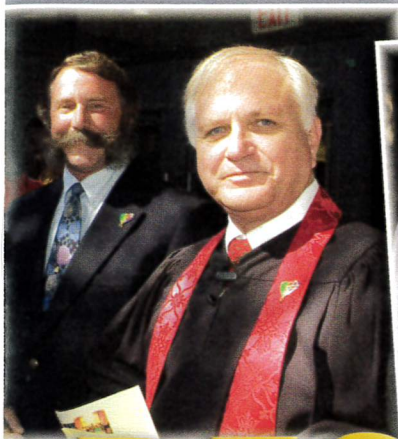
through it. It's a story that has yet to find an ending.

Even so, a common theme continues to wind through it. When I asked people how they continue to stay positive, members echoed Michael Walker's thought: "It's the church. It's our backbone, and it keeps us going."

Much has been written about how WELS members have responded graciously and generously in assisting our brothers and sisters in rebuilding a church. As a church body we raised more than \$2 million and sent truckloads of everything from soap to quilts. Men and women from around the country gave up vacations to go to New Orleans, as one volunteer said, "just to do something."

The members of Crown of Life continue to be in awe of the outpouring. As Linda Hall put it, "It's so gratifying to know that so many people in the synod took part in this. Without their help we wouldn't be here. It continues to amaze and humble me." She goes on to say, "You definitely don't take for granted anymore that you will have a church every Sunday or that the people that you see each week will always be there. In the blink of an eye, lives can change. Yet, in the face of so much destruction, so much good has come out of it."

volunteers at the rededication.



MLC volunteers who helped after Hurricane Katrina came to see the newly rebuilt church.

BEGINNING?

Now what?

But now that the last brick has been laid and the last nail has been pounded in, do we pat ourselves on the back for a job well done and walk away? Some would say it is our duty as brothers and sisters in Christ to continue to work with Crown of Life to assist in its outreach efforts. But is that really what's best?

Sternhagen tends to think differently. "We don't have an elaborate plan, but we have a basic plan for outreach. Right now it's hard to do outreach because most people aren't moved back yet. Most times if people are back, they're only here for short periods of time to work on their house. When the time comes I strongly believe it would be better if we do the outreach ourselves. . . . There is a double benefit to doing it that way. Not only are people being reached, but it's our people reaching them."

Perhaps the bigger question then is what is next for us as a synod? We've seen how we can galvanize ourselves into raising the largest amount in synod history for the WELS Committee on Relief. We've spent countless hours assisting complete strangers. Where do we go from here? Do we just wait for the next disaster to happen, or do we use what we've seen and learned to do other amazing things?

For a small church on Morrison Road in New Orleans, the sign out front proudly announces service times and welcomes all who drive past. The parking lot, once full of RVs that housed volunteers, is now empty. The grass has grown back, and the flowerbeds are blooming. However, the work will continue. It may not be tangible or easily visible right away, but it will go on. When asked what Crown of Life still needed, Sternhagen replied, "Nothing. We don't want for anything. All we ask for are your prayers."

Because it's not the end, just a new beginning.

Abby Janssen is a member at St. John, Newburg, Wisconsin.

To watch the rededication service or see more pictures, go to www.welsrelief.net.



After the storm

During the summer and fall of 2006, Chris Driesbach, music director at Crown of Life, has been traveling around the country performing at WELS churches and telling the Crown of Life story in what has been called the "Thank

You Tour." Driesbach says that during his performances he plays music that he's written, but he also likes to teach the audiences gospel

pieces that are favorites at Crown of Life. "It's a way to reach across the miles and join hands and learn different music."

Driesbach says, "I begin my performance with a slideshow of the destruction in New Orleans. I have a picture of my pastor holding his Bible that sat under four feet of muddy sea water for two weeks. I tell people the story of that Bible and how our pastor worked to bring that book back and how he's preaching out of that Bible today because he's a determined guy. Then I let the pictures continue as I sing a song about my own experiences during Katrina." That song, aptly titled "New Orleans" describes how Driesbach fled the city and what he found once he came back.

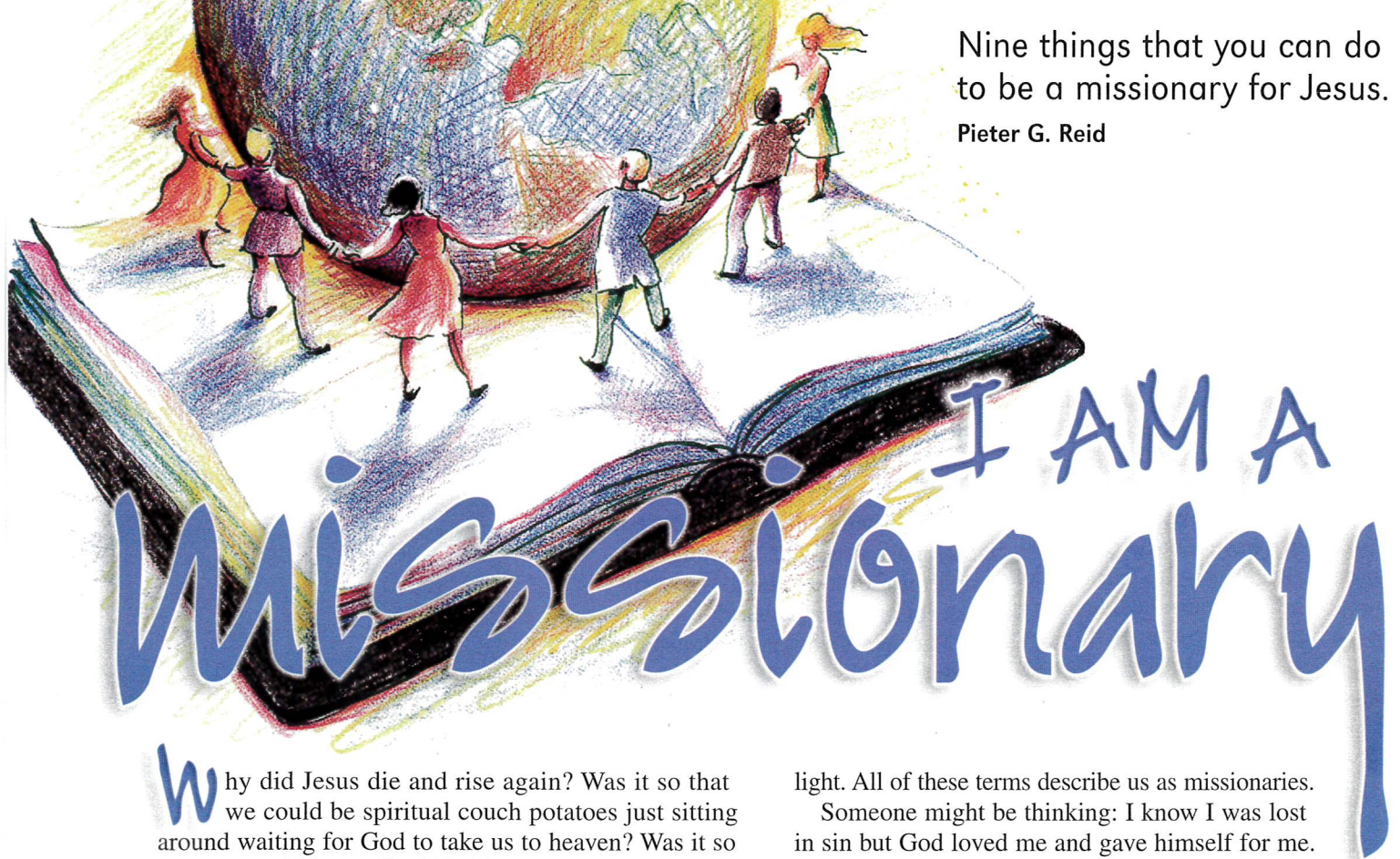
Driesbach has plans to continue visiting churches throughout the winter and spring, taking just a brief break for the holidays and to record another CD. Though he says that some songs are still hard to sing because of the emotion that gets brought up, his performances are "like a big love fest."

To learn more about Chris Driesbach's upcoming tour dates, visit www.lutheransonline.com/chrisdriesbach. You can also purchase his CD through Northwestern Publishing House at www.nph.net.

I AM A Christian =

Nine things that you can do
to be a missionary for Jesus.

Pieter G. Reid



Why did Jesus die and rise again? Was it so that we could be spiritual couch potatoes just sitting around waiting for God to take us to heaven? Was it so that we could have all of his blessings, hear about his love, be strengthened in our faith, and keep it all to ourselves? No! Rather, “Christ died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). We are not to be buckets that catch God’s blessings and selfishly keep it all to ourselves. We are to be channels of God’s amazing grace and love—and share it with others.

We now are to live as witnesses for the true God, as Christ’s ambassadors, and as priests who declare the praise of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful

light. All of these terms describe us as missionaries.

Someone might be thinking: I know I was lost in sin but God loved me and gave himself for me. I really do appreciate it and want to show my full love for him. Motivated and compelled by his love for me, I no longer want to live for myself but for Jesus who took my sins upon himself and died and rose for me. I understand that as a Christian I am a missionary. I know that Jesus gave the great command to go into all the world, and that is to be my first priority. I am a missionary, and the whole world is my mission field.

But that’s sort of overwhelming. Where do I begin? I’m just one person. What are some things I can actually do as a missionary for Jesus?

1. Think about the people you know—the people at work, your friends, neighbors, and family members. Which of these people do not have the certainty of salvation? These people are your mission field. You are already the person who is in the best position to reach them. How can they believe unless they hear? And how can they hear unless you tell them (Romans 10:14)? Write down their names and pray for each of them daily. Pray that they might believe in Jesus and be saved. Pray that you might be a Christian friend to them. And pray that God will give you the opportunity to share your faith.

Then when you get that chance, share your faith. You don't have to have all the answers. Just mention why your faith is so important to you or how thankful you are that you are certain you will go to heaven and you want them to have that certainty also.

Then give them an invitation, just as Philip did to his friend Nathaniel: "Come and see" (John 1:46). Invite them to your pastor's Bible information class, offer to pick them up, and attend the class with them. God's Word will strengthen your faith and that Word is the power of the Holy Spirit to create faith in your friend. It's so easy to do, but what a difference it will make in their life—now and for eternity!

For more tips on reaching out to your neighbor, go to the WELS Evangelism Web site at www.wels.net/jump/evangelism.

2. Ask if you can serve on your congregation's evangelism committee. Then ask your pastor for the name of your district evangelism coordinator. He has numerous suggestions for ways you can reach out in your community.

3. Attend the LWMS (Lutheran Women's Missionary Society) rally in your area or the national rally (men can attend too). Hear about the challenges faced and the souls being brought to faith. Learn what you can do. These rallies are so uplifting, and the enthusiasm is contagious. Learn more at www.lwms.org or by calling 414-321-6212.

4. Contact WELS Kingdom Workers to see how you as a layperson could actively serve your Savior using your God-given gifts. They will be happy to have a presentation for your congregation and explain their services, volunteer opportunities, and ways their programs can be supported. Look online at www.welskingdomworkers.org, call 1-800-466-9357, or e-mail kingwork@wkw.wels.net.

5. Arrange for a world mission speaker in your congregation or find out when one will be in your area. Fill out the online form at

www.wels.net/jump/wmspeaker, call 1-800-466-9357, or e-mail wmspeaker@wels.net.

6. Support the work of the Lord in your home congregation through your offerings. Ask what percentage of your offerings to your home congregation is used to support the work of the national church body. These offerings enable the training of our future teachers, pastors, and missionaries; allow for necessary administration; and provide funds so WELS can send missionaries to other countries.

7. Consider being a Mission Partner. This program allows individuals and congregations to partner with a specific mission or ministry project through financial offerings, prayers, communications, and encouragement. The individual or congregation learns about a specific mission and directly supports it. Find out more at www.wels.net/jump/mission-partners, or contact the Ministry of Christian Giving at 1-800-827-5482.

8. Give directly to the synod to support larger projects. You can donate several different ways. You can make out a check to WELS and send it to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. (If you have a specific area that you want to support, designate in the memo line.) You can also give online at www.wels.net/jump/donations, or call the Ministry of Christian Giving at 1-800-827-5482.

9. Pray. Pray that God give our missionaries and their families the zeal and strength to serve him in our place. Pray that we as a church body financially support the mission work already taking place throughout the world and that our offerings enable more outreach to take place. Pray that God motivate each of us to gladly live as a missionary for him, using our life and our words to his glory and the salvation of other souls.

If you want a list of things to pray for, sign up to receive a monthly prayer calendar in your e-mail at www.wels.net/jump/prayer-calendar. You can also order a 2007 Prayer Calendar (386011) or 2007 Prayer Journal and Daily Planner (386010) from the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society. Shop online at www.nph.net/welsproducts. Search the online catalog by catalog item number. Or call Northwestern Publishing House at 1-800-662-6022, 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. CST.

May each of us live as a missionary, wherever God has placed us.

Pieter Reid, missionary-advisor to the Lutheran Church of Indonesia, lives in Wisconsin and travels to Indonesia almost every other month.

God warns us to avoid those who believe something other than the Bible's teachings. He doesn't want us to be infected and lost to his grace.

John A. Liebenow

The dynamics of everyday families often express activities and relationships in God's spiritual family: fathers love children, husbands love wives, caring parents discipline children, and rebellious kids are loved unconditionally. It's no surprise, then, that church fellowship finds a parallel in the dynamics of everyday families.

I'll bet you've seen the lesson without recognizing it. It happens when parents bring children to school with lice, pink eye, or even, the measles. And if you've seen it, you've probably seen everyday fellowship in action.

The most frequent motherly response at such moments is frustration. They seem to know intuitively that the community is no place for a contagious ailment. And though measles is easily controlled, moms know it can be dangerous. Measles can even be fatal if not taken seriously. So a mom's first thought is, "Why didn't they take this seriously? Why didn't they think of the other children?"

Instruction is a function of church fellowship

Motherly thinking causes us to ponder church fellowship. Genuine church fellowship is frustrated, injured, and ultimately destroyed by the disease of false teaching. The Holy Spirit teaches us that Christlike love delights in the truth and sees falsehood as an enemy of Christ's person and work. False belief is a serious spiritual disorder. So when confessing Christians comfortably bring falsehood into our midst, we rightly ask, "Why such an offensive, uncaring act? What are they thinking?"

As hard as it is to believe, some parents really are clueless about the threats that contagious illnesses bear. The answer to such inexperience is to patiently instruct them how to care for a child when illness presents a threat to others around them. Instruction, here, is the best medicine.

The same is true for naïve Christians. Sometimes Christians bring infectious falsehoods learned from some dear friend or from the way they were brought up. Or maybe they developed a misunderstanding from their own study. When we come across such a person, we need to begin the process of informing and instructing them regarding the truth of Scripture. It's the loving thing to do—for them and for our own family of faith.

If instruction doesn't help, avoid

Even when instruction is appropriate, moms are still pretty practical in dealing with contagious stuff like measles.

If illness threatens her family, a mom will typically not allow the contagious person into her family circle. If her infected neighbor invites her family over for supper, she'll have to decline. If the neighbors bring their contagious child to the front door to play, she'll have to turn down the offer. It's not that she hates her neighbor. It's not that she never wants to enjoy their company again. It's not that she thinks she's better than they are. But the simple principle stands: as long as somebody's contagious, they can't come into the house.

Like a family medical book, the Holy Scriptures define false teaching as a contagious and potentially life-threatening disease, even calling it gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17). In spite of contrary notions, God's people accept Scripture's diagnosis: false believing and acting makes people sick; weakens their appreciation of Christ; and, if left untreated, can kill the soul. The Spirit teaches us that false teaching is poison.

God's people properly respond like a vigilant mom. If my neighbor has spiritual measles, the Spirit says, "Take precautions." As long as the person is spiritually contagious, I'll need to prevent that infection from getting to my spiritual family. Along with my concern for my neighbor's spiritual health, I need to be concerned about the health of my loved ones. Whether my neighbor understands the seriousness or not, spiritual maturity demands that I act lovingly and responsibly. So, if he invites my family over for a spiritual dinner, I'll

My neighbor THE MEA

have to decline. If he wants our kids to worship together or participate, I'll have to turn down the offer. If he says, "Don't take my infection so seriously," the Spirit says, "You know better."

Let's remind ourselves again that the reason parents keep their children away from contagious neighbors is not because they hate them, or because they're better than them, or because they're arrogant or unloving. They keep their distance because they understand the seriousness of the disease and they know the advice of the experts. The same is true for God's people.

Not like the measles

There are two problems that make fellowship with the spiritually contagious difficult. First, measles runs its course in a certain time frame. After a number of days, infection fades, and fellowship is restored. We know from Scripture that this is not the case with false teaching. Falsehood is contagious as long as it's false, even though it comes in a seemingly harmless fashion. A mother's disposition toward measles, however, demonstrates the proper attitude: as long as the illness is contagious, we need to take precautions.

Second, we must admit that sometimes parents ignore the seriousness of the illness. Fevers, nausea, and head scratching don't always deter parents from engaging in the usual activities that day. All the warnings and education in the world won't change that.

Spiritually speaking, our neighbor may ignore the Divine Physician's diagnosis and directions. Our neigh-

bor's spiritual disposition may remain: "Let's worship together. Come over; we're having a Bible study tonight. Dinner is at six." So too, our neighbor may simply assert that the illness is no big deal; that we're the ones blowing it all out of proportion.

Taking precautions against spiritual poison

School moms provide a fabulous reply. Whether justification comes from a mere acquaintance or a dear friend, experienced moms know: lice is lice, flu is flu, pink eye is pink eye—and all the best intentions or contrary notions can't change the fact. Whether from confusion or conviction, rhetorical rationalizing cannot change the truth. So too, Jesus has taught us that false teaching is poison—be it little or a lot.

When a mom does take serious precautions by withdrawing from a contagious infection, her neighbor may get miffed. I've seen careless moms defending their choices even as the class is ushered off to have their heads checked by the school nurse. The better response would be to admit, apologize, and correct.

When we respond to false teaching Jesus' way, we shouldn't be surprised if the responses don't always go the way we had hoped. The best answer to false teaching is to admit the wrong

and change it—to conform to the faithful teaching of God's holy Word. Then, with the contagion removed, full and joyful fellowship can be restored as God intended it.

Church fellowship is a spiritual discipline that parallels even the most common practices in our everyday lives. The Scriptures are saturated with directives, admonitions, encouragements, and loving motivations to care for the well-being of souls—the souls of the healthy and the souls of the infected—because they're all souls for whom Christ died. To follow his diagnosis and prescription is to be healthy for time and eternity.

So, the next time someone challenges you about practicing faithful church fellowship, ask them what they would do if someone brought the measles into their living room. If they wouldn't let it into their homes, why would they let it into their souls?

John Liebenow is pastor at Cross of Glory, Washington, Michigan.

Find a related Bible study on fellowship after Jan. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net.



has SLES

WHATEVER

Getting in gear

My walk with Jesus parallels my first driving experience.

Anna Kanter

It was 3:30 P.M., and I was nervous. The day before I had received my temporary driver's permit, and this was going to be the first time I drove.

My mom and I got into the car. I adjusted the seat and the mirrors, buckled up, stepped on the brake, and turned on the car. I pushed the accelerator. The engine revved, but the car didn't move. "You have to put it into 'Drive' before you can go anywhere," said my mom. I put the car into drive, and this time when I pushed the gas the car moved forward.

As I lurched out of the driveway and onto the road my mom gave me tips. As we drove, my driving improved. I didn't lurch as much, and, thanks to those tips from my mom, I got better at driving.

As I was driving, I began to think of the huge responsibility that I was undertaking. What would I do when there wasn't someone telling me which way to turn and how to do things? My thoughts returned to my driving and not a second too soon. I had nearly run through a red light. "You always need to pay attention," said my mom. The incident startled me, and from then on, I didn't let my mind wander.

After about 20 minutes, it started to rain. When the rain got too heavy, I pulled over, and my mom drove us home.

My walk with Jesus parallels my first driving experience. Every day when I wake up, Jesus is there with me. He's ready to help me safely through my day. Just like when I didn't have the car in gear, if I want to go somewhere in my life and can't seem to get there, he tells me what to do so I can get moving. In the Bible, he gives me tips on how to remain faithful, to let my light of faith shine to those around me, and to stay out of harm's way.

God says in 2 Timothy that the Holy Scriptures are able to make me wise for salvation through faith. As I go through my life, my faith will mature, and I will

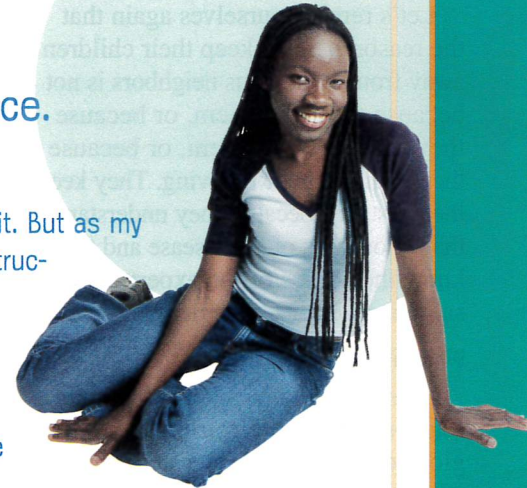
get better at sharing it. But as my driver's education instructor always told me, "You are never done learning everything you need to know." I also need to continue to study God's Word.

When I asked myself what I would do when there was not someone in the car with me, the answer was simple. I would have to learn to make the right decision on my own. With God, he is always there next to me, telling me where to go and what to do. I don't have to rely on my own human reasoning to make decisions. God makes them for me. " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:11). Even when I may not know where I'm going in my earthly life, he already does, and he will get me there safely.

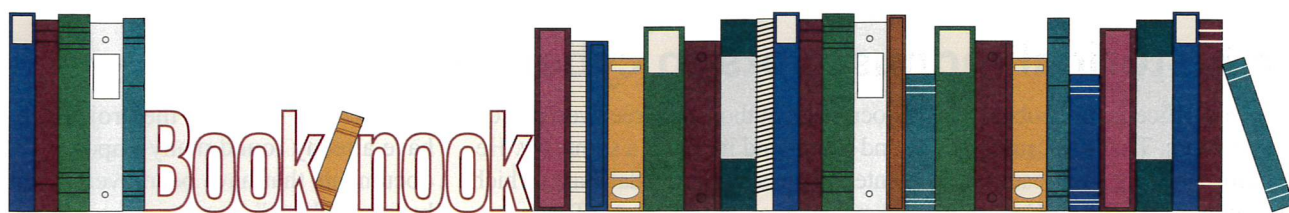
Sometimes I may turn away from God and try to go my own way. I might be thinking about other earthly things rather than focusing on him. When I do that, I put myself in danger. God uses troubles in my life to bring me back to him and keep me from straying.

On that afternoon when it rained, it was scary. I wasn't an experienced driver. I didn't even know how to turn on the windshield wipers. God has promised to be with me throughout my entire life. He blesses me every day. However, when I have problems and I don't know what to do, I can turn to Jesus, who buckles me into the passenger seat and drives me to safety. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Anna Kanter, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

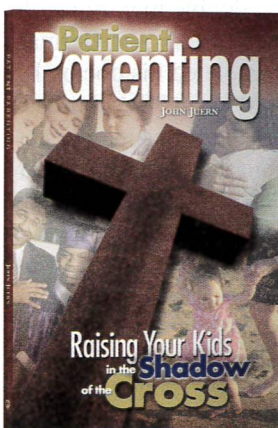


there with me.



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.

Patient parenting



\$12.99

It was a pleasure to read Dr. John Juern's *Patient Parenting: Raising Your Kids in the Shadow of the Cross*. This compilation of Dr. Juern's *Lutheran Parent* magazine articles reminds readers of the true motive for Christian parenting: love for the Savior. It was refreshing to read a parenting book so gospel-oriented. While Dr. Juern does not exclude the law (he gives helpful suggestions of consequences parents could use for sinful behavior), his overriding message is, as

the title suggests, Christ-centered.

This book seems appropriate for all parents, as it addresses a wide spectrum of childhood issues. The chapters cover special needs situations such as ADHD, stuttering, and depression, as well as Christian approaches to deal with anger, lying, and stress. The book's articles speak to a wide age-range as well, dealing with everything

from potty training to drugs. "Bullet point" crosses at the end of some chapters give helpful tips concerning that particular chapter's topic. The last chapter even includes a checklist for Christian parents.

I appreciated the positive attitude that permeated the book. There were good reminders such as, " 'Catching your child being good' and letting your child know you are pleased." (p. 61), as well as helpful passages, like Proverbs 16:21, "Pleasant words promote instruction" (p. 80). Chapter 11 seemed to carry an especially moving motive for parents: "Our children are wonderful earthly blessings from God. May our response to God's love be one of thankfulness that seeks to raise God-loving children."

While Dr. Juern does mention situations where professional help may be needed, the reader is always directed to God and his Word. Assorted Scripture references throughout are both reassuring and serve as an encouragement to embrace the privilege and blessing of Christian parenting.

Rebecca Koelpin
Calvary, Dallas, Texas

Untangling the Web



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

Do you want to learn more about the Bible?

Or maybe you want to introduce the Bible and its books to a new Christian. If you do, www.WhatAboutJesus.com has a resource for you. Its "Book by Book Look" helps new readers understand more about each book of the Bible and therefore

What About
Jesus?

more about God's Word. Information includes general facts and history, an outline of the content and main points, and a look at how specific books and their teachings are relevant in the world today.

READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

FEBRUARY 2007

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|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Matthew 4 | 16. Nah. 2, 3 |
| 2. Matt. 5:1-16 | 17. Habakkuk 1:1-2:5 |
| 3. Matt. 5:17-48 | 18. Hab. 2:6-20 |
| 4. Matt. 6:1-18 | 19. Hab. 3:1-15 |
| 5. Matt. 6:19-34 | 20. Hab. 3:16-19 |
| 6. Matt. 7:1-12 | 21. Obadiah |
| 7. Matt. 7:13-29 | 22. Matthew 8:1-22 |
| 8. Jonah 1, 2 | 23. Matt. 8:23-9:8 |
| 9. Jon. 3, 4 | 24. Matt. 9:9-34 |
| 10. Joel 1:1-2:17 | 25. Matt. 9:35-10:23 |
| 11. Joel 2:18-3:21 | 26. Matt. 10:24-42 |
| 12. Zephaniah 1 | 27. Matt. 11:1-24 |
| 13. Zeph. 2:1-3:7 | 28. Matt. 11:25-12:21 |
| 14. Zeph. 3:8-20 | |
| 15. Nahum 1 | |

From historical manuscripts to cyberspace

Daniel Gehrt's office is, undoubtedly, nothing like yours. That's because you will find him working in a research library . . . in a castle . . . in Germany.

Gehrt, a graduate of Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., is cataloging Reformation manuscripts at the Gotha Research Library, which is part of the newly re-founded University of Erfurt. "It is one of the largest collections of its kind in Germany," he says, "containing an estimated 10,000 individual letters and documents." The library was founded in the 1640s and, because of its collection, is considered a major center for Lutheran research.

Gehrt's task is to "systematically describe the content of over 300 bundles of manuscripts," he says. He notes all the pertinent information—type of

document, author, title, receiver, place, and date—and includes a summary. He enters the results into a database, which is available on the Internet. "This project will make numerous letters and documents pertaining to theological and church history easily accessible to researchers worldwide," he says.

These documents include writings from Martin Luther, whose "scrawled and hard-to-read" handwriting Gehrt can immediately identify. "Some of the earliest attempts at editing Luther's letters were carried out here," he says. As a result, the library "now possesses one-fourth of Luther's existing correspondence, primarily as copies, but also numerous autographs."

For him, though, the most exciting aspect comes when he makes new

discoveries. "Through the project we have already found many important documents that have been overlooked by researchers," he says.

Gehrt trained well for his project. He received his master's degree at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, with a double major in early modern European history and German literature. He completed his doctoral dissertation in 2006 on "the confessional politics of the Ernestine princes in Thuringia from the death of Martin Luther 1546 till the Book of Concord 1580," he says. These were the princes who supported Luther and his reforms.

While Gehrt, considered to be one of the foremost experts on this subject, is often found reading 450-year-old manuscripts, what he does is important for Lutherans today. Too often, people forget their connection to the past. Learning the beginning of Lutheranism, he says, can provide an anchor for your confessional identity.

By working in his office in a castle, Gehrt is helping us keep a closer tie to that anchor, to help us know where we've been, so we can know where we're going.

If you are interested in Gehrt's research (and are fluent in German), visit the Web site at <http://hans.uni-erfurt.de/hans/index.htm>.

Linda R. Buxa



At a conference in Gotha, Germany, Daniel Gehrt (far right) presented some of the manuscripts he works with daily. Gehrt is leading a project to catalog these documents and make them available over the Internet.

Spreading God's Word in India

WELS President Karl Gurgel traveled to India Nov. 6-27, 2006. While there, he taught at the seminary where nearly 40 students are training for the ministry. Says Gurgel, "It was a sheer joy teaching the students. They were very eager to learn." These well-trained pastors now serve in congregations all over the country, helping the young church in India build a solid foundation.

Gurgel also visited mission homes for orphaned children, a part of WELS' ministry in India. "Although India has extreme poverty, the children were cared for, both physically and spiritu-

ally," says Gurgel. "The children recited the catechism for us and seemed genuinely happy—even though they had virtually nothing."

Even though 80 percent of India's population practices Hinduism, more people are embracing Christianity. "There are unlimited possibilities for gospel work in India," says Gurgel. "Many people are already involved in ministry efforts. Hundreds—even thousands—are being served by us there."



President Gurgel and the seminary students in India. WELS has three friendly counselors serving full time in India. Visiting professors teach in India two or three times a year.



LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith. May they inspire you to let your light shine even brighter. If you have an example to share, send it to us at

2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Providing relief

How often have each of us been moved by stories of disaster and heartache? More often than not our sympathy drifts to the floor with the daily newspaper or fades away with the news anchor's "good-night." But when Jacob Zeitler read an article in his fourth-grade *Weekly Reader* about a man and a dog who had lost their home in a tornado, his desire to help others led to a large feat for a 10-year-old boy.

"Who would help me and my family if we lost our home?" Jacob asked himself after reading the article. But he didn't let the thought stop there. He set a goal to help families that had been affected by storms. He would work and give the money he earned to families that needed it.

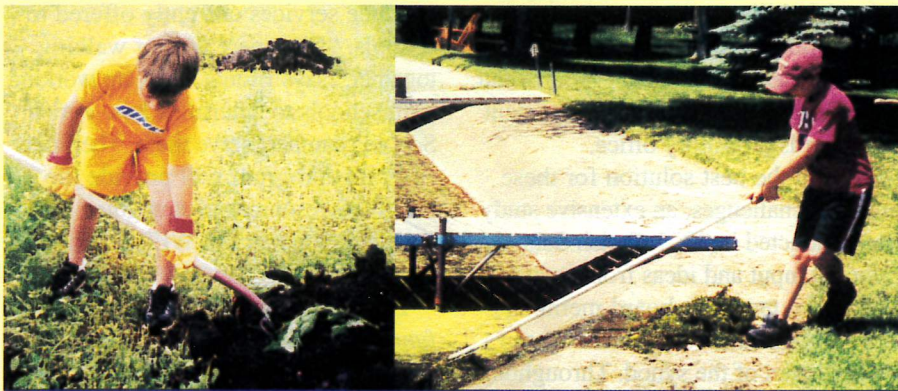
Jacob's teachers, Darrell and Helen Dobberpuhl, suggested that Jacob donate the money he raised to Crown of Life, New Orleans, La. As he thought about this, he and his family read the article in April's *Forward In Christ* about the congregation's losses from Hurricane Katrina. Even though Jacob's family lives a thousand miles away

from New Orleans (in Cecil, Wis.; they are members at Divine Savior, Shawano, Wis.), he wanted to help the congregation. He saw a television clip with Pastor Sternhagen from New Orleans and found out that his pastor's wife was Sternhagen's sister. "There was so much that pointed to Crown of Life that Jacob just got excited about helping them," his mom says.

And so Jacob worked. He walked a dog and cut lawns. He says, "Some of the work was hard, like putting mulch around trees and pulling weeds from the lake. That was smelly and hot to work in the sun." His younger sisters (eight and five) even caught his enthusiasm and helped him rake weeds, water flowers, and stack wood.

Jacob raised \$250, and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans matched it dollar for dollar, giving Crown of Life a check for \$500. "Perhaps this can encourage others that it is not the quantity that matters," Jacob's mom reflects, "but the use of your time and talents to help others, just as God has instructed us to do."

Read about Crown of Life's rededication on p. 12.



Ten-year-old Jacob Zeitler did odd jobs to raise money to help Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., with hurricane relief.

WELS news briefs

These updates are from the offices of the synod administration building at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Commission on Adult Discipleship 414-256-3278; cad@sab.wels.net

The Commission on Adult Discipleship sponsored **marriage enrichment weekends** in 15 different locations throughout the United States in 2006. More than 400 couples participated in a combination of large group activities and activities just for couples that led them through biblical and practical principles for enjoying God's gift of marriage. Adult Discipleship will conduct additional National Marriage Enrichment and Get-Away Weekends during 2007. The first one will be held Feb. 2-4 at the Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake, Wis. Learn more at www.welsmarriage retreat.org or by calling 414-256-3278.

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. Actual registration for the rally will be done exclusively online at www.welsyouthrally.net beginning Jan. 2. Contact Youth Leaders can pre-registering the group first (Jan. 2-14), and individual group members can register afterward (Jan. 16-31).

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Our kindergarten year began with the New Testament stories in *Christ-Light*. We covered Jesus teaching his disciples and the first miracle. I overheard Rachel say to another student, "I did not know Jesus did all those things. I only knew he loved me." I told Rachel she knows the most important thing!

*Nan Traucht
St. Paul Park, Minnesota*

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

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

Reflecting on God and his Word

“‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

These words from Zechariah 4:6 are among those most dear to Pastor Jonathan Schroeder. Serving Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga. (a metro Atlanta congregation), Schroeder has certainly seen the power of the Holy Spirit at work since he was first assigned as a mission explorer of the South Atlantic District in 1999. “This sounds simplistic,” Schroeder says, “but my favorite part of ministry is telling people about their Savior. That’s what I love about outreach calls and preaching, about planning worship and visiting the sick, about teaching Bible classes and counseling.”

Schroeder met his wife, Jenny, on his very first day on the Northwestern College campus. They have been married for 11 years. “Jenny is my touchstone and sounding board, my encourager and helper. We serve together well because we balance each other’s strengths and weaknesses.”

Throughout their years in Georgia, the Schroeders have seen both their family (they have three children) and church grow. “We started with a very small exploratory group, but God blessed us,” Schroeder reflects. “The path took us through all the stages of a new church: mission status, land purchase, constructing a facility. Now we are continuing to expand our work as we grow as a congregation. Most recently, we started a preschool that is now at capacity with 45 children.”

Growing up in Bay City, Mich., in a family of six, Schroeder recalls that he

wanted to be a pastor from an early age. “My father (Pastor Keith Schroeder) inspired me to enter public ministry,” he shares. “His selfless service and unswerving dedication to the Word of God made a great impression on me. It told of the great privilege and responsibility of gospel ministry.”

On a recent hike in the Rocky Mountains, the Schroeders paused to admire the scene. “As we sat in total silence,” Schroeder shares, “we had the feeling that this is what the world looked like when the Bible said, ‘And God saw that it was good.’” In his new role writing interactive Bible studies for *Forward In Christ*, Schroeder hopes to lead readers to so reflect on and dig deeply into God’s Word.

Read Schroeder’s first interactive Bible study on p. 35.

WELS Parish Schools: Walking a new path together

The Commission on Parish Schools has developed a new supplemental funding plan to be implemented in July 2007. Enrollment-based contributions from WELS schools will generate much-needed funds to support the work of the commission. “This really is an opportunity for all of our schools to work together to ensure that the school system as a whole can continue to be strong,” says Jim Brandt, administrator for Parish Schools.

Although contributions are not mandatory, participating schools will receive discounts on subscription-based services and help the commission provide high-quality resources, training, and personal assistance to WELS schools across the country.

The need for supplemental funding began in 2003 when significant budget cuts affected every area of WELS ministry. Financial restrictions forced Parish Schools to reduce and even eliminate vital resources

offered to WELS schools—schools that were already experiencing a decade-long decline in enrollment.

Despite a steep reduction in services, Parish Schools continued to exhaust its small budget. Remaining dollars were dedicated to national office operations, leaving no funds for ministry programs. If additional cutbacks occurred, Parish Schools’ ability to support the \$100-million dollar school system would be compromised as the commission would be reduced to a personnel management and records repository office.

To find the best solution for these financial challenges, an extensive study was conducted in 2005. Parish Schools gathered input and ideas from pastors, principals, teachers, board members, and early childhood directors from every district of the synod. Throughout these sessions, one common theme emerged: the work of Parish Schools is critical for the health of WELS schools. Eventually, an enrollment-based con-

tribution plan was proposed and presented to the district conventions in June 2006.

In the plan, the commission asks schools to increase student fees by \$5 per student for two consecutive years. The increase will enable schools to contribute to Parish Schools, helping the commission restore vital resources and enhance services currently offered to schools. “It’s a new way of walking together,” says Brandt. “We are working with schools to determine how Parish Schools can best serve them. The funds from this program will provide the necessary resources to strengthen and extend the ministry of WELS schools into the future.”

Learn more about the supplemental funding plan at www.wels.net/jump/parishschools or contact Parish Schools at 414-256-3221.

Reaching out in Pakistan and Nepal — Obituaries

Nearly a year has passed since a Bible correspondence program was established in the Muslim country of Pakistan and a Scripture Learning program in the Hindu country of Nepal. Because no full-time missionaries are stationed in these countries, the Board for World Missions uses this alternate mission method to share the message of salvation with many blood-bought souls in these countries.

Pastor Dan Koelpin, administrator of the Board for World Missions, says, "Alternate strategies are the only ways we can operate in countries that are considered to be 'less accessible' to traditional forms of resident Western missionaries. . . . Literature study programs give us a cost-effective way to reach out to a wider circle of people than we ever thought possible."

In October 2006, Pastor Paul Hartman, director of Multi-Language Publications, and Pastor Harold Essmann, coordinator for mission outreach in Pakistan and Nepal, visited these countries to see how these programs were doing. They found two flourishing Bible study programs being conducted.

In Pakistan more than 4,000 persons have studied or are studying *Jesus the Christ*, the first guided self-study book that was provided for the program. More than a thousand other copies of books in the Bible Teachings series have been given to the students in the Bible Correspondence program in Pakistan.

Essmann says, "The response to the Bible Correspondence courses has been beyond expectations and has been blessed by God. A young lady in Pakistan writes, 'We are three children waiting to receive these Bible correspondence courses. We saw this course in the hand of some relatives. We asked our father to help us in this matter. He was motivated to complete this course also.'"

The same blessing is noted in the country of Nepal. Today nearly 1,000 individuals have received the first booklet in the Scripture Learning Program. This booklet is entitled *The Promise*. In addition, beyond the first booklet, nearly 600 copies of other books in the Bible Teachings series have been distributed for people to study.

In Nepal a worker training program is also in place. In a recently conducted workshop 45 church worship leaders and other congregational workers attended 10 days of worker training courses. Thirty-two of these leaders participated in all of the sessions. Led by Hartman and Essmann, these church workers studied the doctrine of law and gospel as well as the Gospel of Mark. They learned, through teaching and practice, how to teach a Bible class. Also the church leaders learned the basics about biblical worship.

It is hoped that, when funds are made available, another training session can be held early in 2007.

Eleanor D. Rodr 1918-2006

Eleanor Rodr (nee Farrell) was born April 7, 1918, and died Sept. 6, 2006.

She served at Palos, Palos Heights, Ill.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Joseph. She is survived by one daughter, one grandchild, two great-grandchildren, and four sisters.

Margaret I. Muhleka 1923-2006

Margaret Muhleka (nee Lau) was born Aug. 28, 1923, in Watertown, S.D. She died Nov. 23, 2006, in Omaha, Neb.

She taught at schools in Glencoe, Minn., and Baraboo, Wis.; at Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.; and at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Bill, and her daughter, Tessie. She is survived by two sons and two daughters.

Correction:

Gerhardt P. Kionka served Hope, Hartford, Mich., not St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich., as was reported in the December obituaries. The congregation that he served in Maitland, Florida, was King of Kings.



Pastor Harold Essmann (far right) stands with the participants in the worker training workshop held in Nepal. Church worship group leaders support themselves by working as farmers or teachers. They also receive support from the members of their worship groups in Nepal.

DEFINING RELIGION

Gospel: 1) The good news that God sent his Son Jesus to take away the sins of the world. 2) One of the first four books of the New Testament that recount the words, life, suffering, death, and resurrection of our Savior. 3) Sometimes used in a broad sense to include all the teachings of the Bible.

Strengthening, equipping, and encouraging God's people—

Providing support to congregations during a million-dollar budget reduction has been a challenge for WELS Parish Services over the past five years. However, by utilizing alternative sources of funding—including the generous gifts and donations from individuals and congregations—Parish Services has been able to fund important outreach efforts and continue providing vital resources to congregations.

Seven different groups in Parish Services provide resources, training, and personal assistance to congregations and called workers. These services include providing congregations with evangelism tools, such as www.whataboutjesus.com; developing worship publications and workshops; and serving youth through Sunday school, youth rallies, and other programs. Parish Services also supports WELS schools; gives individualized

counsel and help to congregations; ministers to institutionalized persons; and serves different adult groups, such as singles, families, and seniors.

“A shift has occurred in the past four to five years,” says Bruce Becker, administrator for Parish Services. “In response to the declining synod budget, we have found different ways of funding our ministry.” Special Ministries, for example, partnered with the North Atlantic Mission Board to create a new civilian chaplain position to enhance its ministry to the military. This call has been accepted by Pastor Paul Ziemer, who will serve military personnel here in the United States but also minister to troops stationed in the Middle East and other areas of conflict.

Another commission, Parish Schools, developed a new supplemental funding program to strengthen Lutheran schools across the country (see page 22).

With funds generated by per-student contributions, Parish Schools is able to restore suspended programs and expand services offered to schools, such as accreditation. “The number of schools seeking accreditation is really growing,” says Becker. “Schools want to be recognized for academic excellence on a national level.” By utilizing these and other services, schools are able to highlight strong academics as part of their Christ-centered education.

Likewise, the Commission on Worship, together with Northwestern Publishing House, is expanding resources offered to congregations. Currently they are working on a supplement to *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. Designed to make worship more meaningful, flexible, and satisfying, the supplement will include a variety of new worship material, including 80 to 90 songs, new service settings, an expanded lectionary, and more. This

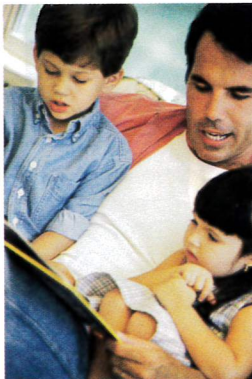
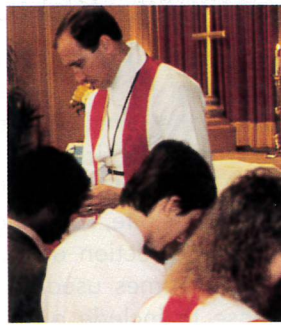
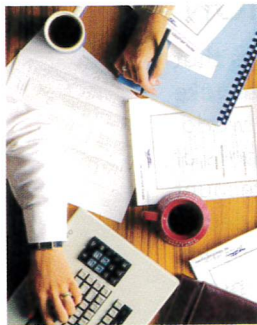
supplement will be first featured at the national worship conference, July 28-31, 2008, in St. Peter, Minn.

By broadening and diversifying funding sources, Parish Services is able to continue to strengthen, equip, and encourage God's people to proclaim peace through Jesus. “We are dedicated to providing quality

ministry resources and personal assistance to congregations,” says Becker. “Despite a reduction in synod budget funding, Parish Services will continue to support WELS congregations and directly proclaim the gospel.”

For more information about these six commissions and Parish Assistance, visit www.wels.net/bps.

WELS PARISH SERVICES



PARISH SCHOOLS, EVANGELISM, SPECIAL MINISTRIES, PARISH ASSISTANCE, WORSHIP, YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP, AND ADULT DISCIPLESHIP

District news

Dakota-Montana

Mae Begalka was honored in 2006 when she retired as church organist from Mt. Calvary, Estelline, S.D. She served 69 years in this position and has played more than 20,000 hymns over that time.

Minnesota

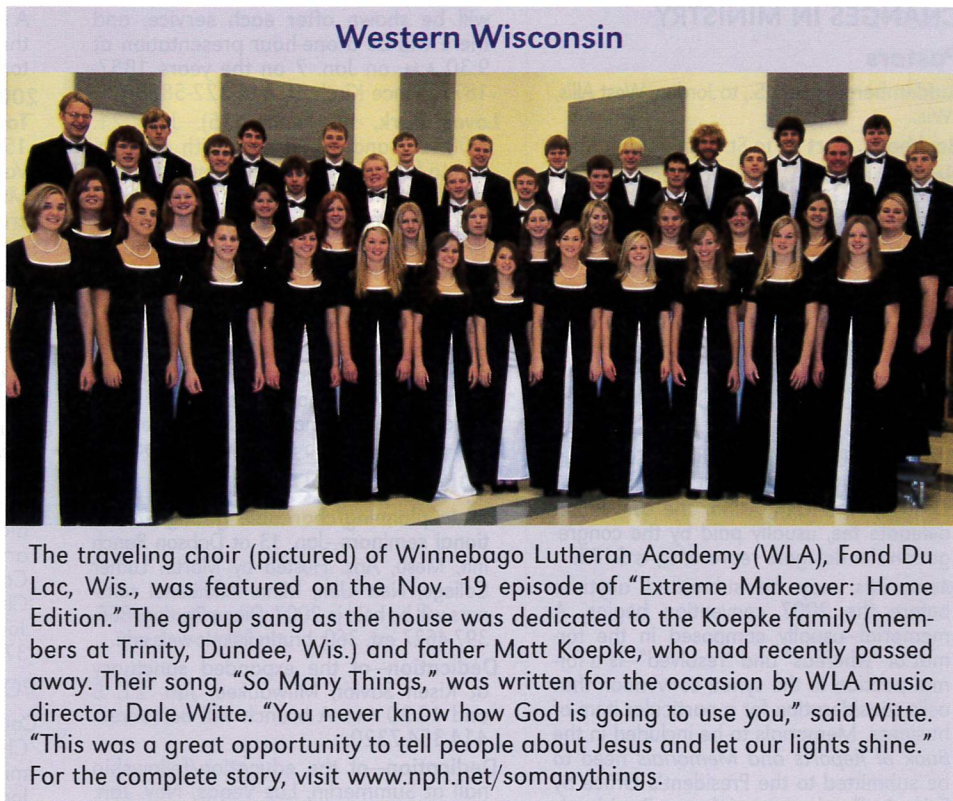
Michelle Bachmann, a member of Salem, Stillwater, Minn., was elected as a member of the United States House of Representatives in November 2006.

Happy anniversary!

NE—Living Savior, Littleton, Colo., celebrated its 10th anniversary on Nov. 19, 2006, with a special service and meal.

SC—Three pastors celebrated their 40th anniversary in the ministry during the summer of 2006: **Stephen Valleskey**, Abiding Word, Houston, Texas; **Myrl Wagenknecht**, Immanuel, Fort Worth, Texas; and **Roger Zehms**, Risen Savior, Austin, Texas.

SEW—On Nov. 5, 2006, St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis., thanked God for the 50 years of service of **Pastor Paul**



The traveling choir (pictured) of Winnebago Lutheran Academy (WLA), Fond Du Lac, Wis., was featured on the Nov. 19 episode of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." The group sang as the house was dedicated to the Koepke family (members at Trinity, Dundee, Wis.) and father Matt Koepke, who had recently passed away. Their song, "So Many Things," was written for the occasion by WLA music director Dale Witte. "You never know how God is going to use you," said Witte. "This was a great opportunity to tell people about Jesus and let our lights shine." For the complete story, visit www.nph.net/somanythings.

Eckert. Eckert has served continuously at St. Jacobi since 1959. He continues to serve half-time at St. Jacobi.

MN—Jeff Bovee; NE—Tim Kemnitz; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: D-M—Wayne Rouse;

World news

Voters in the November 2006 elections weigh in on life and family issues—Many states included questions on issues relating to life and family on their ballots in the November elections. Here is an overview of some of the decisions:

Ban on same-sex marriage: Eight states (Colorado, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin) approved bans on same-sex marriage. This means marriage will be defined in their state constitutions as a union between a man and woman. Arizona became the first state to reject such a ban. Similar amendments had passed previously in all 20 states that considered them. At this time only Massachusetts allows gay couples to marry.

Stem cell research: Missouri voters narrowly approved a ballot measure guaranteeing that all federally-approved stem cell research be allowed in the state. Pro-life advocates opposed the stem cell initiative because it allows a cloning procedure that destroys human life at its earliest stages.

Abortion ban: Voters in South Dakota defeated a ballot measure that would have banned nearly all abortions in that state. The ban was a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. The measure was rejected by a 55-45 margin.

[*LifeWire*, Nov. 8, 2006]

Religious Freedom Watch List released—The State Department has

sent Congress its list of countries that are the worst violators of religious freedom. Seven countries "of particular concern" from the 2005 list returned in 2006: Burma, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

Uzbekistan was added to the list this year. Vietnam, which had been on the list for the past two years, was dropped. According to officials, problems in Vietnam still need to be addressed, but they aren't on the same scale as they were in the past.

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

Aufdemberge, Mark S., to Jordan, West Allis, Wis.
Backhaus, Curt S., to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.
Gast, Kenneth A., to retirement
Wagenknecht, Myrl F., to retirement

Teachers

Schulmeister, Nathan F., to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.
Winkler, Nancy J., to St. Peter's, Plymouth, Mich.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 59th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 30-Aug. 3 at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. The convention delegate fee, usually paid by the congregation the delegate represents, is \$175.

Memorials may be submitted anytime before the 2007 convention begins. A memorial—usually composed in the format of “whereas” and “resolved”—is a formal petition to the synod convention that asks consideration for a particular item of business. Memorials to be included in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* need to be submitted to the President's Office by Feb. 1. Send memorials to President's Office, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; carla.martin@sab.wels.net.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

There will be vacancies in several WELS boards and commissions as of July 1. The Synodical Council is seeking names of individuals to serve on these boards and commissions:

- WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.
- WELS Investment Funds, Inc.
- Pension Commission
- VEBA Commission

All pastors, professors, male teachers, congregations, and voting members of congregations are invited to nominate qualified individuals. Position descriptions can be found at www.wels.net/jumpword/scnoms.

Nominations should be sent by Jan. 15 to Roger Crawford, Human Resources Director, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; roger.crawford@sab.wels.net. Or you can fill out the online form at www.wels.net/jump/nomform. The list of candidates will be published at www.wels.net/jump/nomalert in early February. At its Feb. 23-24 meeting, the Synodical Council will elect the board and commission members from the slate of candidates who have consented to serve.

ANNIVERSARIES

Muskego, Wis.—St. Paul (150). Jan. 6, 6 P.M.; Jan. 7, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; Jan. 8, 7 P.M. A brief video about the history of St. Paul

will be shown after each service, and there will be a one-hour presentation at 9:30 A.M. on Jan. 7 on the years 1857-1877. Vince Kirchoff, 414-322-5869.

Loves Park, Ill.—Peace (35). Jan. 21. 8:00 A.M. and 10:30 A.M., with a luncheon to follow. Former members of Peace should contact Sandy Fehlhaber 815-282-6937; fehlhaber@insightbb.com.

Springville, N.Y.—Our Savior (25). Feb. 4, 10 A.M. A meal will follow the service. Marcie Denzien, 716-592-8903.

West St. Paul, Minn.—St. Croix Lutheran High School (50). Aug. 10-12. All alumni and friends are invited to register for golf, cycle ride, open house, Patriotic Tribute, banquet dinner/dance, and Sunday service. 651-455-1521; Web site, www.sclhs.org.

COMING EVENTS

Estate planning/charitable gifting educational seminars—Jan. 13 at Dobson Ranch Inn, Mesa, Ariz. Hosted by Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Additional seminars will be held in 2007. Diane Brutlag, 866-397-4627 ext. 360; brutladl@mlc-wels.edu.

Dedication—of the expanded sanctuary at Risen Savior, Milwaukee. Jan. 21, 8 and 10:30 A.M. A brunch will be served. 414-354-7320.

Dedication—of the education/fellowship hall at Summerlin, Las Vegas, Nev. Jan. 21, 9:30 A.M. Meal and tours to follow. 702-254-8431.

Upcoming choir tours—The Prep Singers of Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and the Reach the World choir will be touring soon. Check out their schedules at www.wels.net/jump/bulletinboard, under “Concerts.”

Pathways to Christ Retreat—LaSure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. March 16-18. Paula Nimmer, 920-233-1069; Web site, www.martinlutheroshkosh.com

Mexico Mission Partners donor trip—March 17-26. Includes worship at three churches and the seminary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Mexico. Sightseeing includes the Cholula pyramid, several cathedrals, and the El Redentor statue in Torreon. \$1,190 dbl. room (sgl + \$300). Sponsored by WELS Ministry of Christian Giving. Registration deadline, Feb. 1. Pastor Dennis Kleist, 920-740-5899; dennis.kleist@sab.wels.net.

Christian Woman Today Retreat—March 23-25. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

WELS Regional Handbell Festivals—

- April 21-22. Host, St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.; D.C.; site, Everst Junior High School, Schofield, Wis.
- April 21-22. Host, Peace, Hartford, Wis.; site, Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.
- April 14-15. Host, Salem, Loretto, Minn.; site, West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.

A concert will be held at 2 P.M., on each of the respective Sundays. Kim Pilz, kim@tomah.com or visit www.welsbells.com.

2007 Grand Alaska Escorted Land Tour—sponsored by Camp Phillip. June 15-24. Ten-day tour featuring Anchorage, Valdez, Fairbanks, Denali National Park, Mt. McKinley, Alaska railroad, and glacier cruise. Marcus Buch, 920-478-2937.

WELS Summer Band Camp—for grades 6-9. June 24-29. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. Housing is available. Rich Mannisto, 414-525-9232; rmannisto@aol.com.

National WELS Women's Leadership Conference—July 7. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/womensministry.

S.E.E. TOUR 2007—Oct. 17-28. Travel through western Turkey and Greece along the route of Paul's third missionary journey from Ephesus to Athens and Corinth. Sponsored by Woodlawn Men's Club, West Allis, Wis. Hosted by Pastor Joel Gerlach and Gene Schultz. 414-774-3711; eschultz20@wi.rr.com.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Counseling positions—Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc., through its ministry of Christian Family Counseling, is looking to hire Licensed Psychologists, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Licensed Clinical Social Workers with specific area(s) of specialty for its offices located in Eau Claire, Onalaska, West Allis, West Bend, Fond du Lac, and Appleton, Wis. Applicants must be an active WELS member and have advanced training or possess at least one of the following areas of specialization: school psychology; traumatology; certified employee assistance professional; chemical dependency counseling; addictionology; marriage, family, and child therapy; sex therapy, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, or distance counseling. Mary Schoultz, human resource director; PO Box 245039, Milwaukee WI 53224-9539; 888-685-9522; mschoultz@wlcfs.org.

NAMES WANTED

People moving to or vacationing in Bella Vista, Ark.—Neil Hansen, 479-855-7853; neil.hansen@cox.net.

Soldiers and families at Fort Drum, N.Y., or Binghamton, N.Y. region—Jeremiah Gumm, 315-622-2843.

Students and other WELS members living in the greater Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C., area—Rob Guenther, 919-847-0579.

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/jump/bulletinboard.

Picture this



Pastor James Buske, director of Lighthouse Youth Center in Milwaukee, writes: "I found this picture when putting together a presentation for WELS Kingdom Workers. Lighthouse Youth Center is an inner city outreach facility that opened its doors on April 28, 2006. This picture was taken on the second night Lighthouse was open. As of Sept. 2 (28 open nights), 2006, all 13 of these youth have attended a worship service at Redemption Lutheran Church! Only one of these 13 was churched. Three of these 13 have been baptized, and all of these youth members are active in Redemption's Sunday school program! God is blessing this new outreach facility!"

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.

POTLUCK POLL

Singing hymns, an important part of our Christian worship, is a wonderful way for us to praise our God. These hymns, through the combination of the tune and the text, also tend to work their way into our hearts.

What is your favorite hymn and why? Send in your answer by Feb. 10 to *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. We'll print the results in the April issue.

"My heart, which is so full to overflowing, has often been solaced and refreshed by music when sick and weary."

—Martin Luther

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord."

—Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:19

DID YOU KNOW?

"The Christmas Song" was the most performed holiday song on the radio in the last five years, according to the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers.

In the list of the "Top 25 most performed holiday songs," only one song—"Little Drummer Boy"—was a religious Christmas carol.

The top 10 songs were:

1. "The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)," Nat "King" Cole
2. "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," The Pretenders
3. "Winter Wonderland," Eurythmics
4. "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," Bruce Springsteen
5. "White Christmas," Bing Crosby
6. "Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!," Andy Williams
7. "Jingle Bell Rock," Bobby Helms
8. "Little Drummer Boy," the Harry Simeone Chorale & Orchestra
9. "Sleigh Ride," The Ronettes
10. "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer," Gene Autry



Seeking PERMISSION

A man who had lost his wife wonders about pursuing new relationships.

Frederick A. Kogler

A few weeks ago I was invited to lunch by a dear friend of mine. We'll call him Jonathan.

I've known him as a brother in Christ for many years—more than 20 as his pastor and now several more as a friend. I was shocked when I settled into the booth with him at our favorite restaurant. He'd lost a considerable amount of weight, tinted his hair, wore a really snappy sports shirt and tie, and had a new pair of frameless glasses perched lightly on his nose! "Wow!" I thought. "This isn't the guy I saw a few months back! Something's going on here." But I get ahead of myself.

"Cherish her . . . as long as you both shall live"

When we'd get together in the past, we'd gab a lot about everything—sometimes about the church, often about a point of doctrine, mostly about the importance of music in the life of the church and its members. You see, Jonathan is an accomplished musician and had occupied a prominent position in a world-renowned orchestra up to the time of his "redirection." At a little over the age of 75, however, he decided to make room for the younger crowd and do some of the traveling that he and his beloved wife had been putting off for a long time.

The Lord had other plans for Jonathan, however, because exactly eight months from the day of his retirement his wife of more than 50 years had a massive heart attack and died. Needless to say, Jonathan was stunned and shaken in his faith. But the Lord was faithful and carried him through the early days of his sorrow and then further sustained him as he adjusted to the routines of being a widower in our modern society.

I continued to see Jonathan, have lunch with him, and talk to him over the phone from time to time. I could feel the change taking place in his life after his wife died. It was like a dark cloud began to gather and grow.

His mood was more pensive and brooding, he questioned several things said by our new pastor, and he almost always found fault with the hymn selections and the "unacceptable" organ playing that was being done to undergird the congregational singing at church.

Having lost my first wife through cancer, I could relate to Jonathan's sorrow and the days of his bereavement. It was simply not good for him to be alone! His loneliness was changing him. It was beginning to consume him, and the devil was exploiting his weakness to the point of causing Jonathan to question his faith in the Lord.

Every time I could, I pumped him full of Bible passages. When we had lunch, I'd quote the Word. When I sent him a thank-you note for the concert tickets he sent, I'd jot down a reference. When he and I would be walking out of church together after a particularly avant-garde PowerPoint sermon, I'd wink at him and quote a Bible passage.

A new relationship on the horizon

I hadn't seen Jonathan for several months, even though he had been calling and asking me to go to lunch with him. Finally our schedules meshed, and we got together. The amazing thing, however, wasn't how he'd gone through a metamorphosis and looked like a much younger man on the prowl. It was the substance of our conversation. His request sort of knocked my socks off! Even before I ordered my onion soup and turkey sandwich, he asked: "Pastor, explain to me how it's going to be between me and my wife in heaven?"

Like the explosive beginning to a piece by the full orchestra, the maestro had waved his baton. I almost started to giggle! My mind buzzed, "If he doesn't have a girlfriend, he's sure thinking about it . . ." "You rascal, what have you been up to? What's her name? This is going to be good!"

Instead of blurting out my thoughts, I stammered: "Well, Jonathan, what did Jesus say when he discussed the very same subject?"

Before we had completed our discussion of Luke 20:34-36, the waitress had returned for our order three times. She finally got our attention by asking: "Are you two going to order or are you just going to sit there and talk all day?"

We ordered and then talked some more. Before we had finished, two hours was gone, and we had hardly touched our food. But one thing became clear: Jonathan was asking for permission to turn his attention away from the constant contemplation of his deceased wife and to begin thinking in terms of developing a relationship with another lady friend. As he put it, "I'd like to go to concerts with someone, have dinner once in a while in a nice restaurant, and talk to someone other than you and my sons from time to time."

I couldn't resist, so I said, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' (Genesis 2:18)." Then with a twinkle in my eye, I teased: "I suppose this means I won't get any more free lunches or concert tickets?"

He fired right back, "Oh, don't worry, Pastor, I get them in blocks of four, and we can always sit at a table for four instead of this miserable booth for two."

God be praised for companionship as one of his wonderful gifts for us on this side of eternity. If any might wonder if it's okay to start over, I say: "Go for it, and God bless!"

Fred Kogler, a retired pastor, is a member at Crown of Life, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

COLOR

me loved

Children are all different. Sometimes the differences include the shading of their skin. Childlike faith responds, "Well that's just the way God made us."

Heidi Luchterhand

I'll call him "Matt."

As dinner guests, my family and I relaxed around Matt's kitchen table, enjoying delicious food and Christian fellowship. We'd given thanks, then dug into both our food and our conversation with equal appreciation.

For a time.

The change was subtle, but minutes into dinner I was glancing anxiously at my husband and forcing food down my throat instead of swallowing it. Had I heard Matt correctly? He'd been grumbling about his handyman's laziness. Had he actually implied that the man's race was responsible for his poor work ethic?

My husband looked as confused as I felt; we'd obviously heard the same words and were both equally lost. Neither one of us was comfortable admitting that Matt was speaking like a racist. We were more comfortable assuming a gross misunderstanding on our part.

By the time Matt's wife offered seconds, however, my husband and I were both sick to our stomachs. Matt hadn't just been speaking like a racist; Matt was a racist. During the course of our meal together, his opinions on various ethnicities had become progressively cruder and more ignorant. The final blow came when Matt started insulting African-Americans—and therefore, our son.

A time to speak up

Our beautiful, adopted, infant son who could claim several African ancestors. And who sat happily gurgling at Matt's kitchen table—light-skinned enough to fool a racist into grinning goofily back at him.

Admittedly, my husband and I should have spoken up immediately, but we had lacked the courage to correct Matt. We'd been raised to respect our elders—correcting Matt even in Christian love felt awkward. The fact that Matt was also a minister only increased our discomfort.

**While our family
may be more
colorful than
some, we're still
just a typical
American family.**

But God had blessed us with our precious son and with that blessing came responsibilities—regardless of our own comfort. In the end, God loosened our tongues and made us both better parents and better Christians for speaking his truth in love.

Matt and his wife grew both quiet and distant after we expressed our con-

cerns. They didn't become defensive verbally, but their body language told us that we'd worn out our welcome. After that night, our social interactions became strained and our conversations stiffly polite. I'd like to think that God used our words to cleanse away their bigotry, but our lives took separate paths before we witnessed any softening in their attitude.

Curiosity, laughter, and discrimination

Since our meal with Matt and his wife over a decade ago, we've adopted three more children of various ethnicities—and faced racial discrimination both inside of the church and out of it. We've learned to distinguish between a look of natural curiosity and one of blatant disapproval. We have learned to conduct ourselves unapologetically and to bulldoze over quiet recrimination. We've learned to educate our children on their differences without letting those differences define their lives.

None of which we could do without God's help.

He's blessed my husband with first one church to serve and then with a second one. And he filled both congregations with acceptance. He's protected my children by giving them a loving school environment. He's improved our earthly lives by surrounding our family with friends of all skin colors.

What God hasn't done is grant us an easy existence.

Sometimes situations are steeped in genuine humor rather than malice. I've already found myself explaining that although my husband is a minister, he's not one of the few African-American WELS ministers. And while that assumption would seem natural if all our children shared an African heritage, it has always struck us as funny considering that one of our daughters is a porcelain-skinned Latina.

Even funnier is that many people assume she's Chinese because she's an adopted girl with light skin, black hair, and brown eyes—and because they can't see past her unexpected pigmentation to her distinctive Latina features.

Other times the questions and comments sprout from basic ignorance. Just for the record, our children do not prefer fried chicken and tacos over hot dogs, pizza, or macaroni and cheese. Nor are they genetically predisposed to learn their ancestors' native tongues any more than we were to learn our grandparents' German.

My husband and I don't find any of the above mentioned scenarios insulting or repugnant; neither do we lump all the people involved into a racist category. When people of color—be they children or adults—are introduced into a primarily white populace, questions and misunderstandings can be a natural side effect. Although racism might color some interactions, the stronger element is usually simple curiosity from people who may never have had the opportunity to interact with someone of another race.

But then there are the "Matts" who still plague our world.

Our children have been called names I won't print here. They've been talked about behind their backs with an emphasis on their color. Comments are made to them about their various ethnicities—comments they don't understand. Yet.

Sadly, our children are losing their sweet innocence as they age and mature.

And, unfortunately, Matt and his

wife helped us realize right from the start that even our own faith isn't necessarily a bastion of emotional shelter for our children. Ironically, racial discrimination itself isn't a sin that discriminates. Even good-natured and good-hearted Lutherans can struggle with the sin of racism.

Fearfully and wonderfully made

My husband and I have chosen to combat the ugliness of bigotry by living a God-pleasing life, by cherishing his blessing of children—and by quietly demonstrating that while our family may be more colorful than some, we're still just a typical American family with a minivan, a mortgage, and children who manage to be both blessings and challenges.

As children are prone to do, ours deal with our rainbow-hued family in their own way. Among themselves, they only discuss pigmentation in conjunction with selecting the correct sunblock from the medicine cabinet or the beach bag. And when questioned about their ethnicities or our family, they usually just shrug and point out the obvious, "That's the way God made us."

David praised God with similar words. "I will praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14). Although our children's words aren't as eloquent as David's, they're equally beautiful and meaningful. Because of sin, we're forced to live in a world tainted by racism. But because of God's love, we're free to celebrate our children as his wonderful creations and to praise him for the family that he designed.

God didn't grant me and my husband the family we'd expected to raise. Instead—in his infinite wisdom and perfect love—he blessed us with children far more beautiful and precious than we deserve.

Heidi Luchterhand is a member at Deer Valley, Phoenix, Arizona.



New Year's reflection

Reflections and resolutions are popular as we end one year and begin another. What do we see in the mirror as we reflect on the past year? From an earthly point of view, was it a good year? It might have been if we were healthy. We would consider it a success if we were employed, were blessed with a child or grandchild, or graduated from college or got married. Any number of things, upon reflection, could add up to a good year.

But there's more to a good year than these outward things, isn't there? What about our spiritual life? Did we, as Peter urges, "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18)? Since this kind of growth comes only through the study of God's Word, what about church and Bible class attendance last year? Were there daily Bible readings and prayer? If these items were part of our last New Year's resolutions, how well did we carry out our resolve?

Synodically, as we reflect on the past, we are completing four years of an emphasis on North American Outreach. Each of the years had a slightly different theme. First it was "Every Church a Mission." Next came "Every Soul's a Treasure" followed by "Every Member a Missionary." And now, completing the emphasis, the theme is "Every Life For Christ." All four themes were to emphasize how we "Proclaim Peace Through Jesus."

Even as we make New Year's resolutions personally, we can do the same as members of WELS. "Every Life For Christ" can be such a resolution. God helping us, we can make our entire life a thank offering to our gracious God.

Luther concludes his Small Catechism with a Table of Duties. It contains something for everyone: husbands, wives, parents, children, citizens, employees, employers, young people, widows, pas-

sors. Just in case we thought he had left someone out, he has a word for all.

What is Luther's point? There isn't any place or position in life where God's Word doesn't offer some guidance. God provides practical illustrations of how, in daily life, Christians use the Ten Commandments to live thankfully for Christ. Our daily lives are tied to our spiritual life in Christ. Every waking moment, in whatever situation the Lord places us, gives us another opportunity to live for him.

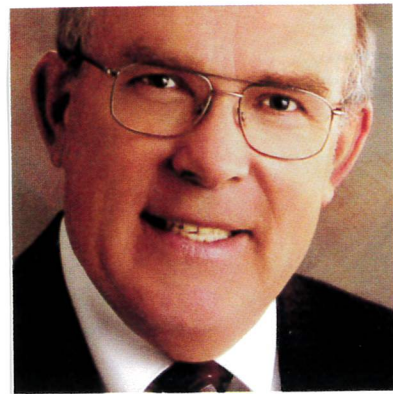
Peter summarizes the purpose of "Every Life For Christ" in these inspired words in 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are . . . a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

As we reflect on our lives at the end of this year, or any year, there's a lot of darkness. Black thoughts, words blackening the reputation of others, deeds that sought the cover of darkness. Not much light there!

But that's what makes the Savior's rescue so amazing. He knew what we were. He felt the pain of it; he suffered innocently because of it. And when his cry, "It is finished," rang out on that dark Good Friday, it was the dawning of a new day. Forgiveness had been won, an eternal future secured. Here was the light!

As we reflect on the light out of darkness to which we've been called, with the Spirit's help, there can be only one resolve. "Every Life For Christ!"

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in ceaseless praise."
(*Christian Worship* 469:1)



Carl R. Gump

Two violent people lost on the same island. One finds redemption. The other seeks revenge. Both had plenty of reasons to be angry. Anna-Lucia had been shot by a criminal. Eko lost his little brother. But Anna-Lucia could not get rid of her anger. Even after getting her revenge, she remained violently angry with everyone she met. Eko, on the other hand, assumed responsibility for his brother's death and found redemption in the cross he pulled off his little brother's neck.

Now read Acts 7:54-60.

Seeking revenge

Jaw clenched . . . eyes barely open in a squint . . . we are not very good at disguising our emotions, especially when we are angry with someone. As Stephen spoke before Jesus' enemies in the Sanhedrin, the intense hatred they felt for Jesus became evident once again. Stephen reminded them how they "betrayed and murdered [the Righteous One]" (v. 52). "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him" (v. 54).

They had carefully plotted their revenge on Jesus when they crucified him. But their anger only increased with Stephen's words. When Stephen announced, "Look . . . I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (v. 56), they lost control. "They covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him" (v. 57,58).

Are you lost in anger? Are you gnashing your teeth over something that happened in the past? Are you secretly plotting revenge? You will never find peace and satisfaction. The Sanhedrin demonstrates the futility of trying to alleviate your anger by seeking revenge.

SINCE STEPHEN HAD REDEMPTION BY THE LORD'S MERCY, HE HAD NO NEED FOR REVENGE.

Finding redemption

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'" (v. 59).

While Jesus' name ignited the Sanhedrin into a furious rage, it brought calm to Stephen. Unlike the Sanhedrin, Stephen assumed responsibility for his sins and sought redemption. The Holy Spirit had worked a miracle in his heart. Stephen knew that Jesus died and rose from the dead to secure redemption for his soul. He knew Jesus would receive his spirit in mercy. At death, this brought Stephen peace.

"Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep" (v. 60).

Why didn't Stephen fight back? Why didn't he throw stones at the crowd? He couldn't get all of them, but he could at least hurt one or two, especially that smug snob Saul standing by the coats with a satisfied grin on his face!

Since Stephen had redemption by the Lord's mercy, he had no need for revenge. His Lord had not come to earth to seek revenge on Stephen or sinners like him, but to redeem them. Stephen had redemption. Now he wanted to forgive his enemies in the same way Jesus forgave him. He wanted even his enemies to know the peace granted to sinners by Jesus. (Keep in mind how God would answer Stephen's final prayer later by forgiving Saul.)

Are you lost in anger? Seeking revenge will never alleviate your anger. Holding on to redemption from the Lord Jesus by faith is the only way to experience a spirit of peace. Make Stephen's final words your daily prayer. Pray for God to receive your spirit in mercy. Then go and forgive your enemy; don't seek revenge.

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

Next month: Lost in regret

LOST IN ANGER

FINDING REDEMPTION FROM THE LORD
JESUS IS THE ONLY
WAY TO EXPERIENCE
A SPIRIT OF PEACE.

PHILIP L. KIESELHORST

Forward? Forward . . .

We all know what “forward” means. At least we think we do. You put one foot in front of another, and you walk forward. You put your car in “Drive,” and you go forward. Before you do that, sometimes you have to put the car in “Reverse,” back up, change gears, and then move forward.

Our society—our world—is stuck in forward. It must have progress. Things must get better. Cars are sold with ads that suggest a company is “Moving Forward.” Our goal is to go forward—personally and professionally. We want to make progress toward some goal: retirement, paying off the mortgage, getting a better job, making sure the kids get an education, or even getting through a particularly difficult day. Tomorrow, we tell ourselves, must be better. Even this magazine shouts “Forward.”

Perhaps it all started when we were young. Our games promote winning and getting better. The pieces we move on the board game of Monopoly move in the same direction. You get ahead by passing “Go” and collecting your \$200—which these days isn’t much. Moving backward puts you behind everyone else. One card directs you to “Go back three spaces.” Another commands, “Go directly to jail.” Those aren’t forward movements.

Even churches and church bodies want to move forward. We want to grow, build a new addition, increase our stewardship, educate children, prepare future called workers, or keep our church from closing because of lack of funds. Binding ourselves together we stretch forward to our goals.

What happens when we don’t seem to be moving forward? That appears to be the case with WELS and with many of our congregations. Most of the challenges come with dollar signs attached. Congregations weekly confront shortages. WELS faces similar challenges.

We are making some progress in our stewardship, but it’s not enough to prevent significant changes. Congregational leaders anguish over what to do next. Our synodical challenges are not small either. Our educational system is threatened, we’ve called world missionaries home, and we have difficulty opening new mission fields in our own country.

Aren’t we moving forward any more? I’m moving forward to my eternal goal of heaven. Each year brings me closer to home. All believers are moving in one direction: forward to glory. God can take me home tomorrow, but he’s left me here to share the message of Jesus with the world. He wants his message to move forward and touch more and more people. I can’t do it alone, and I’m not alone. I know some fantastic, energetic, and forward-thinking believers. Thank God for all of them, including the ones I don’t know personally. We share the task that Jesus himself gave us.

But we have a couple of questions to answer while we’re still here. Do we want to share the gospel? Are we serious about training pastors, teachers, and staff ministers for the future so that another generation will share Jesus? Do we want to train our children and grandchildren to be disciples of Jesus? Of course we do. We say so. But do we have the will to do it—to pay for it?

No one likes to hear bad news. One gentleman wrote and said that if he heard about giving again he would simply close his wallet. Well, if you think this is bad news, then shoot the messenger. I’m the target. But the challenge stands before us all. Will we go forward or go back three or more spaces? Together in Christ we can move forward. Make it your resolution for the new year.



John A. Braun

Jacob was a man who struggled. He wrestled with God's promises and God's plans for his life. He wrestled with God's protection and God's provision. Then, one evening by the Jabbok River, Jacob did what no one had: he literally wrestled with God. At the end of the wrestling match, God gave him a new name that encompassed his whole life of struggle. He called him "Israel," the one who struggles with God. This is his story.

Lesson 1—Wrestling with God: Hard Promises

When the infomercial running at 3 A.M. promises to fix your golf slice with a magic 7-wood or solve your health problems with the world's greatest juicer, you don't trust it. On the other hand, if an old friend makes you a promise that's hard to believe, it's your relationship with him that lets you trust that promise. But what happens if that promise isn't kept right away? What happens if his promises make no sense?

God promised Abraham that the Savior of the world would come from his family. God passed that promise down to Abraham's son, Isaac. But Isaac waited for God to make good on that promise . . . and waited . . . and waited.

Read Genesis 25:21-26

²¹Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²²The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD .

²³The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

²⁴When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

1. Look back to Genesis 17:15-22. God made some very specific promises about Isaac. What are some implications about his family that Isaac could have drawn from those promises?
2. What made Rebekah's infertility not just an emotional struggle, but also a spiritual struggle for Isaac?
3. How long were they waiting for children? (v. 20,26)
4. If God intended to bind his promises to a family and their children, you might think that he would pick a family that was relatively fertile. Instead, he promised the birth of the Savior to a family that has a two-generation challenge of infertility. What does this teach us about God and the way he works?
5. Look at verse 22. What do you think Rebekah was experiencing? What made this particularly troubling for her?
6. What three pieces of information did the LORD give her?
7. What's surprising about God telling her that the older will serve the younger?
8. What would make the promise a difficult one for Isaac to trust in and to follow?
9. Can you think of other times that God did the same thing and gave the blessing to the younger?
10. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Why did God choose the second-born, the weak, the foolish things of this world? What does that teach us about God and about us?

Both Isaac and Rebekah wrestled with the hard promises of God in the same way: they talked to God and listened to what he said. They found out that this old friend was trustworthy—even when the promises were hard.

What is a promise that God seems to be slow in keeping in your life? Write it down. This week, do what Isaac and Rebekah did. Speak to God; listen to God. He's a friend you can trust, no matter how hard the promises are.

Contributing editor Jonathan Schroeder is pastor at Faith, Sharpsburg, Georgia.

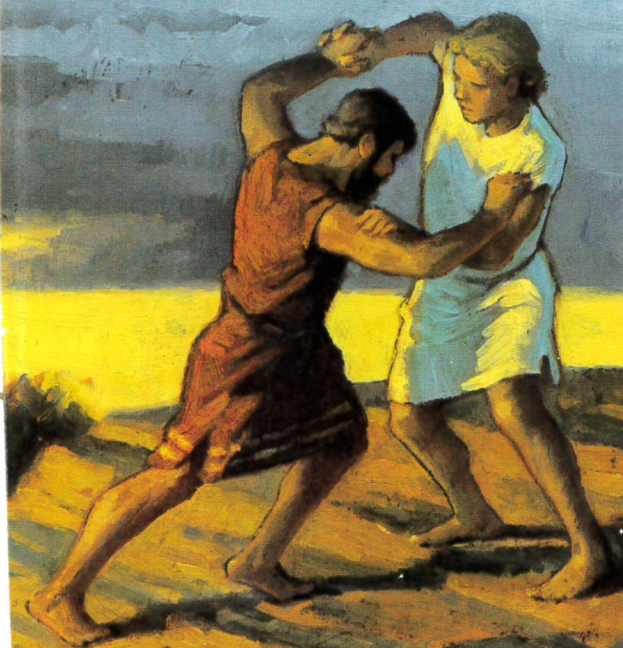
This is the first article in a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online after Jan. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net.

ILLUSTRATION: JOHNSON AND FANCHER

WRESTLING WITH GOD:

HARD PROMISES

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder



CLASSES OF 1956



A reunion brings reconnections and appreciation for God's many blessings.

Jan Mosher

This was it! 2006! The year we would celebrate the 50th-year reunion of our graduation from Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. Both my husband and I were in that class, so it was with shared enthusiasm that we looked forward to the big event.

Of course the usual things passed through my mind. Women especially want to look good, and I was no exception. But that isn't an easy task when one has 68 years of life stamped on one's face and body. Shedding a few pounds and coloring my hair seemed like good options, but in the end I bought some new clothes that I hoped would cover the flaws and accentuate the positive. I simply smiled and admitted that my hair was definitely "lighter" than it had been 50 years ago.

The big weekend arrived. I remembered how the 50-year honorees had looked at our graduation—ancient. But as we gathered that day I marveled at how wonderful my classmates looked, how alive and vital they were. As the weekend played out, my admiration for them and their spouses increased. In a country that idolizes youthfulness, I was among a group of people with graying hair, rounded bodies, and arthritic limbs, who were still energetic and productive.

Here, too, were people who had been marked by the experiences of life: the joys of marriage, children, education, work, and personal fulfillment, and the incredible sadness of loss, illness, and pain. Who would have known that one of us would lose her only two children in a terrible drowning accident? Who could have prepared any from our class for the war against cancer that one of us had to fight for the past 12 years? Who would have been able to point out the care-free 18-year-old who would have to comfort a depressed spouse for the greater part of a marriage? How could we have guessed that the cheerleader would have to struggle with a husband whose brain was ravaged by Alzheimer's disease? None of us had expected the rigors of a sinful world. Yet it seemed we all had been made kinder, gentler, and more loving for having survived. It could only have been because, as we matured, we learned to put ourselves into the hands of our loving God.

During the years at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, the Holy Spirit reinforced the work he had begun in us at baptism. As shallow-faithed teenagers in 1956, we did not always recognize his work. But how deeply we had learned to drink from the well of God's promises by 2006. While I

sat in the twice-daily chapel services and dutifully learned my memory work for religion classes, I never dreamed of the rich nourishment I was being fed. What do 18-year-olds with "All About Me Syndrome" know about boundless blessings from God until they have touched the face of their child, been carried by faith through seemingly hopeless crises, and felt the peace and joy of a close relationship with Jesus? I wonder how many of us thought we could actually go it alone until a sometimes not-so-gentle nudge from God brought us back to his side.

It wasn't easy to say good-bye when the reunion ended. Over the 50 years, six of our classmates have entered eternal life as have several spouses of classmates. But our farewells were those of Christian believers who live lives of purpose and find joy in the sure hope of an eternal reunion.

Perhaps some of my classmates and I could have benefited from a face lift or a tummy tuck, but to tell you the truth I was so busy basking in the pleasure of their company that I never even noticed.

Jan Mosher is a member at Memorial, Williamston, Michigan.