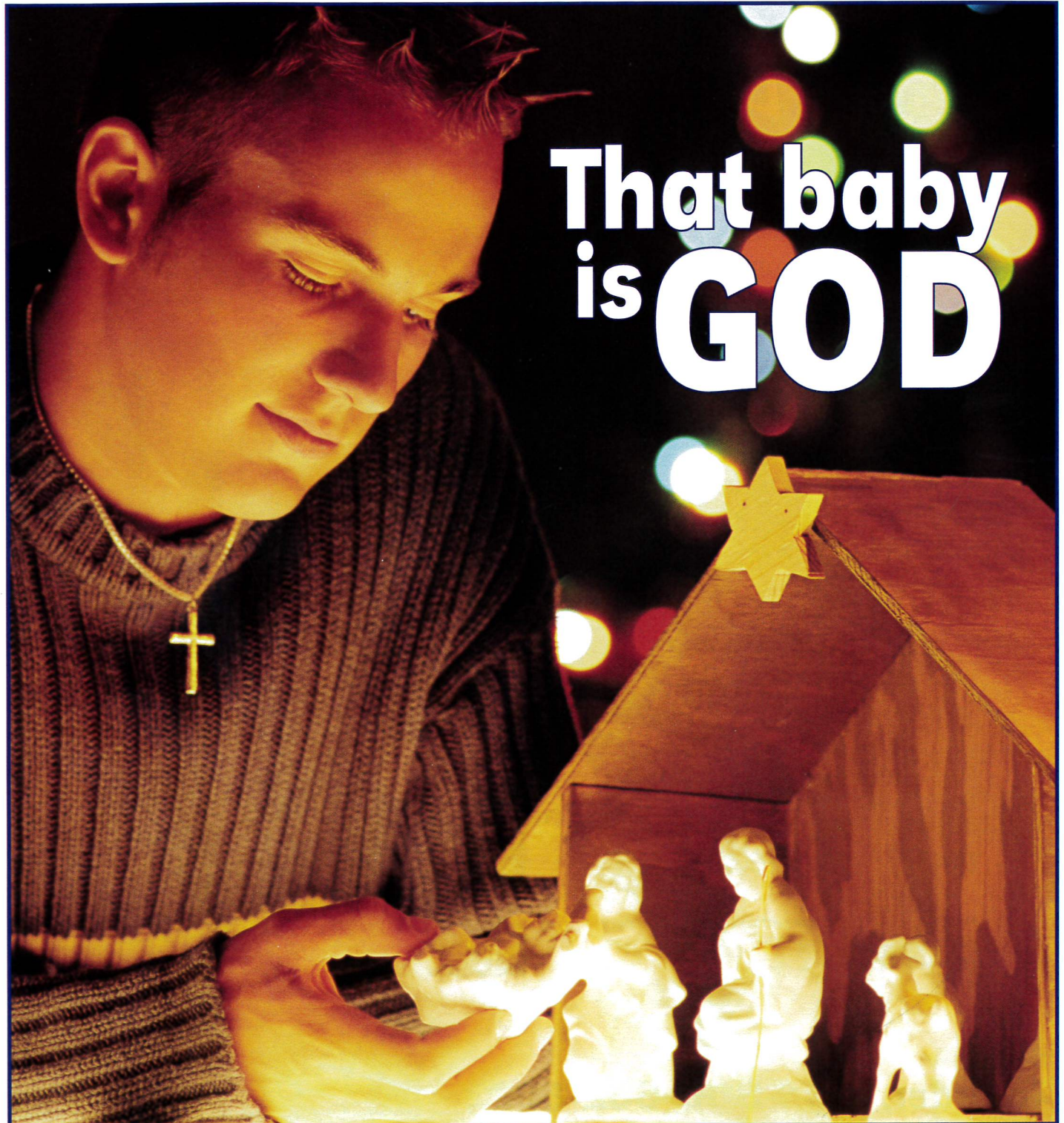


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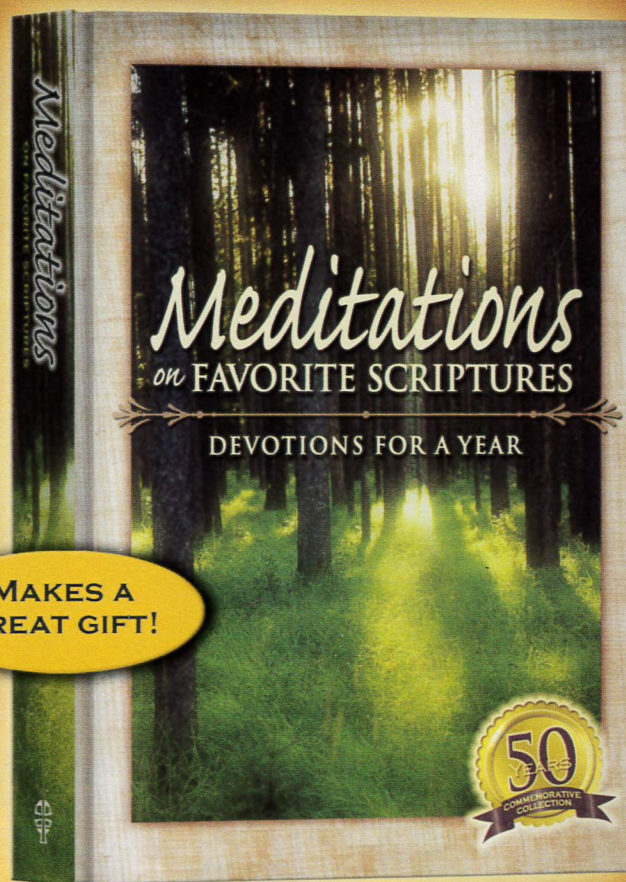
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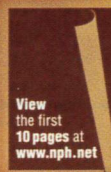
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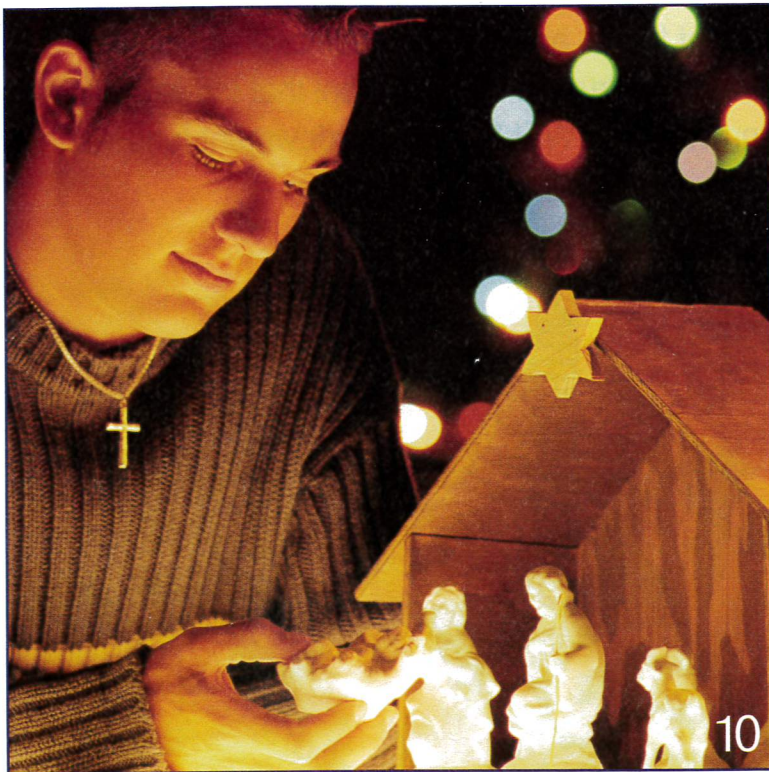
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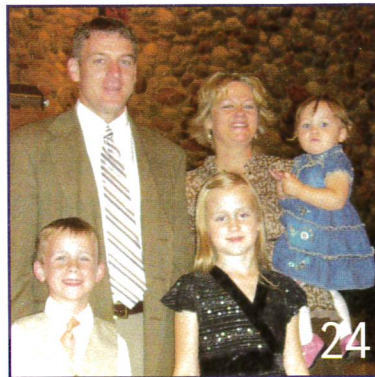
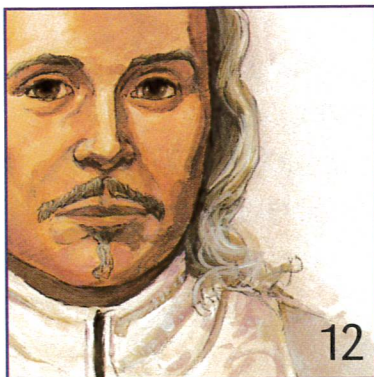


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“**God became man to do more than confound and amaze. Why did he come? To save us.**”



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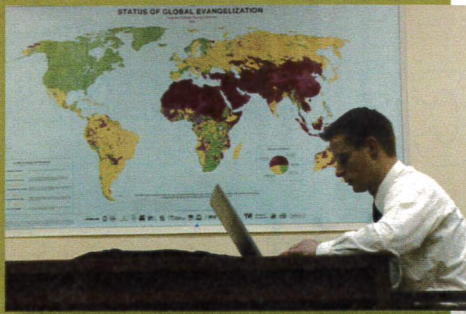


Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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

MANAGING EDITOR

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

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Alicia A. Neumann
alicia.neumann@sab.wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Laura C. Warmuth
laurachristine@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

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DECEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

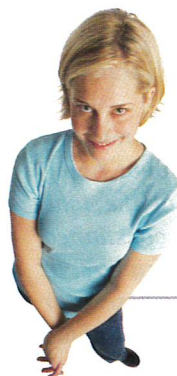
Good writing is hard work. To get the proper tone, to say the right things, and to fit all you want to say in a limited space (yes, the magazine does have word counts) takes a little sweat and a lot of time and patience.

Forward in Christ has 12 contributing editors who commit six years to writing columns for the magazine. In 2007, we also used articles from more than 60 guest writers—people who shared God's Word with you and expressed how their faith helped them in their daily lives. We thank all of our writers for their willingness to work with us to help you—our readers—grow in your faith. We offer a special thanks to three contributing editors—Prof. Richard Gurgel, Pastor Douglas Engelbrecht, and Pastor Philip Kieselhorst—who, with this issue, have completed their service to *Forward in Christ*.

This month, use these writers' words to prepare yourself for Christmas. Don't miss "The comfort of Christmas" (p. 10) and the other Christmas messages scattered throughout the magazine as well as the final articles in two long-running Bible studies.

We'll see you in 2008 with new series and new authors who proclaim the unchanging Word.

DEPARTMENTS



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I REMEMBER GRANDPA

After finishing reading the article “I remember Grandpa” [Aug.], I too have something to share. . . .

After informing our family of [my husband’s] death, the following e-mail was received from our grandson Aaron Holtz, serving in the USAF Special Forces, deployed to Iraq. The letter was titled “My letter about my grandpa.”

I can remember standing in my family’s living room and staring at a picture of my grandpa and grandma. In the picture you could see a twinkle in my grandpa’s eyes, the same twinkle you would see when he made a joke or laughed at a comedy show.

When his health failed, you could still see what he felt: the love for you in his eyes and a quick determination that has been there since I learned to know him as a small child.

That love and his determination made me look up to him so much. My grandfather was a hero to me. I can remember finding out my grandpa was diagnosed with leukemia and him taking it all in stride. . . . Through it all, his determination and love for his family kept him going. Through the obstacles in my life, I have always remembered that determination.

My grandfather gave me so much: his love, his faith in God—which strengthened my own—his wisdom, his comedic quip. But the one thing that I will always remember is his determination in everything he did. . . . I will always strive to put all my love and faith in God and my family, because it was what I saw my grandfather do.

Mrs. Richard Yecke
Quartz Hill, California

CATHOLIC TEACHING

Regarding Professor Brug’s article, “Do you belong to a church?”

[Sept.], I would add that Catholicism is Semi-Pelagian and teaches that man’s nature is merely “wounded” with original sin, but retains free will to correct its condition. They deny the imputed righteousness of Jesus that is the heart of biblical justification. The Eucharist continues to re-sacrifice Christ over and over, as they teach that salvation comes from Christ dying, not from his one sacrifice (Hebrews 10:14).

Don Gretel
Rochester, Michigan

CANON OF SCRIPTURE

In the September issue of *Forward in Christ*, Professor Richard Gurgel stated, “The canon of the Old Testament was firmly set before the time of Christ. Jesus confirms that they got it right.” I am not aware of any contemporary scholars whose work convincingly supports Gurgel’s claim.

Walter Klann
Surprise, Arizona

Prof. Richard Gurgel replies: That there were debates about the canon that surfaced in the Jewish community after the time of Christ (in particular, about which books should rightly be included in “the Writings”) is indeed a historical fact.

However, there is no concrete evidence that there was doubt being expressed in Palestine at the time of Christ about what constituted inspired Old Testament Scripture. In fact, a rather serious Jewish scholar of that time (Josephus) speaks of the threefold division of the books and includes in his list of books all the books we currently recognize in the Old Testament canon.

50 CENTS

Thank you for the words “an increase of about 50 cents per communicant” in “The law and gospel of giving” [Sept.]. Thank you for using a figure that more than 90 percent of the communicant members of our church

body can understand easily. Thank you for using a figure that half of our children should be able to understand easily. Why did Matthew record about 108 of the questions Jesus asked in his gospel? How many times did the psalmist record the words: “Give thanks to the Lord”? Would each of us be adequately thanking the Lord for giving us all the air we need to breathe by increasing our gifts to the Lord for the synodical budget by 50 cents a month? Would each of us be adequately thanking the Lord for keeping our hearts beating by increasing our offerings to the synodical budget by 50 cents per week? Would each of us be adequately thanking the Lord Jesus for taking all of the guilt of all of our sins on himself and innocently suffering and dying on the cross and winning for us full and free forgiveness and everlasting life in heaven by increasing our offerings for the work of our church body by 50 cents per day?

Lloyd Hohenstein
Watertown, Wisconsin

SACRIFICIAL GIVING

The September issue of FIC and others seem to come down heavy with articles written to psychologically attack me as a Christian, making me feel that I’m not giving enough to support the synod. Let me be one of a few who would dare ask, “Has the synod ever thought to apply some of its biblical passages to itself? If the synod could turn itself around and look into a mirror, what would it see?” . . .

Perhaps the synod hierarchy should take a long look at its priorities. Only this time include itself, which may prove to be the beginning of the solution to its problems.

John H. Sazy
White Lake, 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*.

Remembering Christmas

And Mary said: “. . . He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” Luke 1:46,54,55

Stephen H. Geiger

Dimmed lights and a children's Christmas cantata. A small paper bag of treats. Friends walking from church to our home. Little bodies squirming with excitement. A molded plastic Mary and Joseph and shepherd standing by our fireplace, holding silent vigil over the babe of Bethlehem. A box of chocolates passed around—take just one.

Memories of Christmases past may dance in your mind too. We all have celebrated Christmas. We celebrate Christmas every year. We cannot remember a time when there was no Christmas.

But there was such a time.

Our forefathers waited for the fulfillment of the promise

For many years the faithful in Israel waited for Christmas. They watched season after season pass, the promise of a coming king yet to find fulfillment. Many were young and grew old, not yet seeing the one who would sit on the throne of David forever. So many breathed their last, knowing nothing of the Messiah except God's guarantee that he would come.

Abraham died. David died. Isaiah died. Micah died. Forefather after forefather died, and still no Christmas.

But no one needed to be sad. God had not forgotten. The forefathers had promises. And God always remembers his promises, even if he must remember for millennia.

God never forgets his promises

Do we give God's memory less credit than we should? When hurt

strikes close to our hearts, do we wonder whether God forgot his promise to protect us with his powerful arm? When we have prayed for his will to be done, do we wonder whether God forgot his promise to work all for our best? When the world gives evidence of hostility toward Christ, do we wonder whether God forgot his promise to bring this age to an end and in his glorious return rescue his children for an eternity of joy?

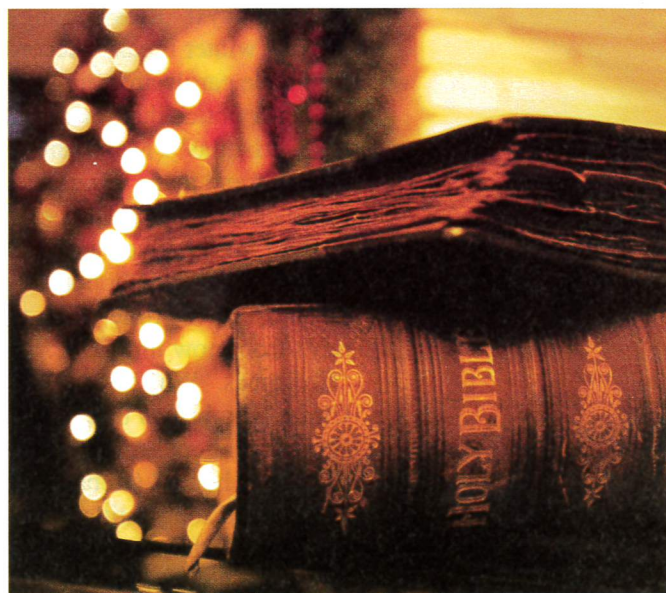
At times we wonder if God has forgotten. We doubt. We dare call into question his memory. We harbor uncertainty about the faithfulness of his love.

We can insult him. We unintentionally offend him. We can treat him as if he is the problem, when in reality it is we who are wrong. How just for him to treat us as our sins deserve.

Yet here is the one time God chooses not to remember. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25).

He accomplished this gracious forgetting by not forgetting Christmas.

An angel announced the moment: "Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (Luke 1:30,31). Mary understood that this was not just an incredible pregnancy. This



was the moment for which centuries had been waiting. This was the moment when God kept his word. This was the moment when God helped Israel—helped us—by remembering his promise to the forefathers.

This she proclaimed. She praised God for remembering.

The God who remembered Christmas is the God who remembers everything. He remembers every promise he has made to you. There may be a passage of time. You may even die before seeing every promise kept. But every promise God has made he will keep.

Christmas is a perfect time for you to remember that God remembered Christmas.

Contributing editor Stephen Geiger, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Risen Savior, Milwaukee.

Why do we still call it “Christmas”?

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

Cards say “Season’s Greetings!” and “Happy Holidays!” Kids coming home from college are on “winter break.” According to the songs, “Yuletide carols are being sung by a choir.” Did you ever notice that fewer references are made to “Christmas”? Merchants, the public school systems, and many of our friends and neighbors avoid calling it “Christmas.”

But I trust that you and I still do. Oh, sure, we use terms like “the holidays” and “winter break,” but most of the time when we talk about the days from now until Dec. 25 we use the term “Christmas.” Why? Because we know that it is Christ who brings true peace and Christ who brings real hope. And, therefore, he is “worthy of greater honor” (Hebrews 3:3).

In an old song entitled “Oh, I Just Go Nuts at Christmas,” there’s a line that says: “And over the racket Gabriel Heater is saying, ‘Peace on earth, everybody, and good will toward men’ and, just at that moment, someone slugs Uncle Ben.” It’s meant to be humorous, but it points out the fact that even though people talk a lot about peace on earth, there is nothing, no, not even the holidays, that brings the kind of lasting peace that Jesus brings.

The holiday can free you from a few hours of work, but it can’t free you from your sins. A beautifully decorated tree, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, and a trip home to see the family may give you a peaceful feeling inside, but that feeling can’t begin to compare with the peace that comes from knowing your sins are forgiven. It can’t last throughout the year, or throughout your life, like the peace you have with God through your forgiveness in Christ.

We still call it “Christmas” because it is Christ who brings real hope.

Yes, we still call it Christmas because we recognize that all the stuff that the world tries to sell as “peace on earth” is nothing without the peace of forgiveness we find in Christ.

We still call it Christmas because it is Christ who brings real hope. The writer to the Hebrews points out that with Moses, the best the people of Israel could hope for was a little prosperity in the Promised Land, a little respite from their hard labor, and a reprieve from death at the hand of the Egyptian taskmasters. But Jesus is worthy of greater honor, because, as the son of God, he offers eternal hope and eternal life.

That’s why we still call it Christmas. We recognize that a week off from school or a present under the tree can’t compare with the hope of eternal life in heaven that Christ offers us.

Without Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life in heaven that he offers, it is just X-mas, with “x” being the unknown quantity . . . a series of one shattered hope after another. “Walking in a Winter Wonderland” won’t change a diagnosis of terminal cancer. Our faith and our hope are in Christ!

The holiday season, winter break, Yuletide, X-mas—the world can call the time from now until Dec. 25 whatever it wants. We will still call it “Christmas” because, by the grace of God, it is clear to us that no one or nothing deserves more honor, more attention, and more devotion than Jesus Christ.

Have a blessed Christmas . . . emphasis on “Christ!”

Contributing editor Douglas Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Christian teachers

God established the public ministry to teach his people, and yet there are passages that suggest all Christians are teachers. What does it mean for laypeople to be teachers even though they aren't in public ministry?

The answer comes from a biblical understanding of the distinction between the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. While both are wonderful gifts God has given to his church, the visible church has struggled to keep these twin blessings in biblical balance.

The church can emphasize public ministry to the detriment of royal priesthood or emphasize royal priesthood to the detriment of public ministry. The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church would be an example of the former. The Quakers, who abolished the public ministry entirely, would be an example of the latter.

In a very real sense every Christian is a teacher of every other Christian. In our baptismal water we were all ordained priests of God, called to “declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness” (1 Peter 2:9). To use the terminology of Matthew 16:19 (as well as Luther’s Catechism), every Christian possesses the keys of the kingdom. Each of us is entrusted with speaking the Word that won our hearts to faith and keeps us in faith.

We see that as Paul addresses the entire Colossian congregation: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

As we quietly and humbly rebuke a straying brother or sister in Christ, and, most importantly, forgive the penitent, each of us carries out that teaching task. As we speak words of gospel encouragement to a discouraged Christian, we exercise our priesthood. As we share our faith with someone at work who asks us about the hope we have,

we serve as God-appointed teachers. In these and in a hundred other ways in daily life, God’s priests are teachers. In that sense, it is biblical to call us all teachers.

Yet, in another sense, we are not all teachers. We get a hint of that in these words from James: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).

Scripture knows a kind of teaching that is different from the teaching we all do as royal priests. This is teaching done by one royal priest called to teach as the representative of Christ and other royal priests.

This responsibility is at the heart of the public ministry. Even though not all tasks of the public ministry are done in “public,” the teaching we think of first for this work often happens in public—preaching a sermon, leading a Bible class, teaching a class in school. Here it is not our baptism that calls us to carry out such tasks but rather a call that comes through the believers who ask one person to perform the tasks of the public ministry among them. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions assert that no one should publicly teach without a call from others to do so.

The twin gifts of royal priesthood and public ministry are to be used in cooperation, not competition, with each other. When they carry out their callings in harmony, it produces a beautiful symphony of the gospel!

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.



The comfort of **CHRISTMAS**

Familiar sounds, sights, and smells make Christmas comfortable. Yet the reason for our celebration—the birth of God’s Son—is a mystery beyond our comfortable thinking.

Kenneth A. Cherney, Jr.

*T*he tree is trimmed and standing where it has every year. Some of the ornaments go back generations; some you made yourself when you were small and life was simple.

Music from the radio fills the room. Everybody knows the tunes; they hum along and, here and there, sing just a few words softly. There’s a nativity scene in its usual spot, and as the soprano commands, “SLEEP in HEA-venly pea-EACE,” your eyes settle on the little porcelain manger, whose occupant appears to be doing exactly that.

The chef is in the kitchen, working on a menu she knows by heart, supervising a staff of relatives that can’t be entirely trusted to get every lump out of the potatoes. Soon your family will pull up their chairs, place their napkins on their laps, and smile at one another over a mountain range of “comfort food.”

Christmas is a time for the traditional, the predictable, the familiar. More than any other holiday, Christmas is comfortable.

Until it occurs to you who it is in that manger. Then, Christmas becomes downright unnerving.

God comes to earth

Who is it? Isaiah says that the child born for us is none other than the “Mighty God, Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). If you think of it for even a moment, you’re over your head in a cold sea of imponderables that thousands of years later we still can’t get to the bottom of: *That baby is God.*

In that baby, God became man. For centuries, in his Word, the Creator took great pains to teach his people not to identify him with anything in his whole creation; that

sin was idolatry and the penalty was death. And now the Creator has gone and done it himself. He is a thing in his creation, a creature.

God becomes man without ceasing to be God. And not just “man”—a baby! Now the Infinite has a birthday. The Absolutely Independent has become utterly helpless. He Who Changes Not will turn into a toddler, then a boy, then a man. Divine Omnipresence has a hometown, and Divine Omniscience will go off to school and find out just how much he has to learn. He will set about learning it, and learn it well.

God becomes man—finite and dependent and changeable—without becoming one bit less infinite, independent, and unchangeable. There in the stable, God nurses at the breast of Mary, and in the words of an Eastern church father, “When he sucked her milk, he was also giving the drops of rain.” Another church father said, “The more I ponder this, the more I suffer.” In other words, the more I think about this, the bigger my headache gets.

But God became man to do more than confound and amaze. Why did he come? “To save us,” as every child knows. And save us Jesus did. But the way he came, and the way he saved us, teaches us what we never could have guessed about who he is.

God's way, not our way, saves us

St. Paul says that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). To save us from our “evil age,” Jesus rolled up his sleeves and plunged right into it. But that didn’t mean he had to play by the world’s rules; in fact, he steadfastly refused to do so.

To a world that worships power, Jesus came in weakness—to show the world how little he thinks of what it calls “power.” To a world that worships wealth, Jesus came in poverty—to show the world that it has no idea what “wealth” really is. The world runs on the simple calculus of the old Jordan Louis tune: “If You So Smart, How Come You Ain’t Rich?” Jesus scorned that logic as the satanic trap that it is.

To a world so impressed with notoriety and expertise, Jesus came as the carpenter’s son, the boy next door. To a world impressed with its own intelligence, Jesus proclaimed a message that the world calls “foolishness”—to show the world what its intelligence is really worth. In “the present evil age,” the lust for success makes the world go ‘round. And so Jesus embraced what anybody in his right mind would call failure: rejection by his own people, arrest, brutal abuse, a criminal’s death.

It’s true; Jesus reigns in glory now. He has all the real power and all the genuine wealth at his command. He is worshiped by angels and bathed in loving approval from his heavenly Father—approval which, unlike the adulation of this world, is actually worth something.

But all this is hidden from our eyes. It will be so until the Last Day, when this “evil age” is at an end. In the meantime, as the people of Jesus, we have a role in this present age that we can’t shirk. We are called to be—in this age—what Jesus was.

And we need to seek God’s forgiveness for the times we have refused, the times we have let this world, rather than God’s kingdom, call the tune. The truth is that at times we have swapped weapons with the world. We have called gain “loss” and loss “gain.” We have relied on intimidation and manipulation—what the world calls “power”—and tried to avoid being vulnerable. We have put our trust in the spectacular and the grandiose, overlooking the mustard seed, the little flock, the widow’s mite. We have clung with whitened knuckles to money and privilege—what the world calls “wealth”—and refused to become poor. We have longed to have this world measure our church by its standards and pronounce it “a success,” not realizing that if that happens—may God forbid!—that will be the death knell, the final nail in the coffin.

Ponder who it is in that manger, what he has done, and what he has made you.

So we pray: We seek your forgiveness, Lord, for the times we have tried to be your people and do it the world’s way: the times we have forgotten your manger, the times we have sidestepped the cross.

And we marvel that you came to rescue a people who you knew would be this way. We rejoice that you pull and drag from the burning building of this age a people who aren’t always sure they want to leave. Your incarnation awes us. Your humiliation astonishes us. But your love for us that is new every morning, your full and free forgiveness, your claim on us that will not let us go in spite of it all—that is more amazing still.

In your celebrations this year, as you listen to music and smell dinner cooking, think on these things. Enjoy Christmas the way just about everybody does, and you will probably feel comfortable.

But ponder who it is in that manger, what he has done, and what he has made you. Then you will be comforted.

Kenneth Cherney, Jr., a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Risen Savior, Milwaukee.

Paul Gerhardt wrote hymns of joy and comfort, but his life was filled with sorrow and trouble.

With this December, the 400th anniversary of Paul Gerhardt's birth comes to a close. During his lifetime he was well-known to Lutherans in Germany. In America, he is largely forgotten. But not his hymns! He was the finest Lutheran hymn-writer a century after Luther's death.

Gerhardt's hymns

Christian Worship includes 18 of his more than 120 hymns, which cover most seasons of the church year. They include expressions of daily Christian life, such as faith, cross and comfort, and evening prayer. Interested readers can find the roster of Gerhardt's hymns on page 938 of our hymnal.

Most of Gerhardt's hymns in *Christian Worship* are well-known and much loved. High on the list is "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded." Its final stanza often serves at the bed of a dying believer. "Once Again My Heart Rejoices" and "Awake, My Heart, with Gladness" reflect the central messages of the Christmas and Easter festivals. They proclaim law and gospel with clarity and purity. "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You" remains a beloved Advent hymn. "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" is the most consummate, or all-embracing, of our hymns for the season of Lent. Because of its unusual length in past hymnals, its last stanza was seldom reached in congregational singing. Lest its superb message be lost, the problem was resolved by making it a separate hymn (*Christian Worship* 219) with a new melody. Among the finest hymns at close of day is Gerhardt's "Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow." Many among us have committed its third stanza to memory as a child's bedtime prayer.

The word "joy" dominates Gerhardt's poetry, occurring about 300 times. Yet the entire course of his life was a litany of bereavement, affliction, privation,

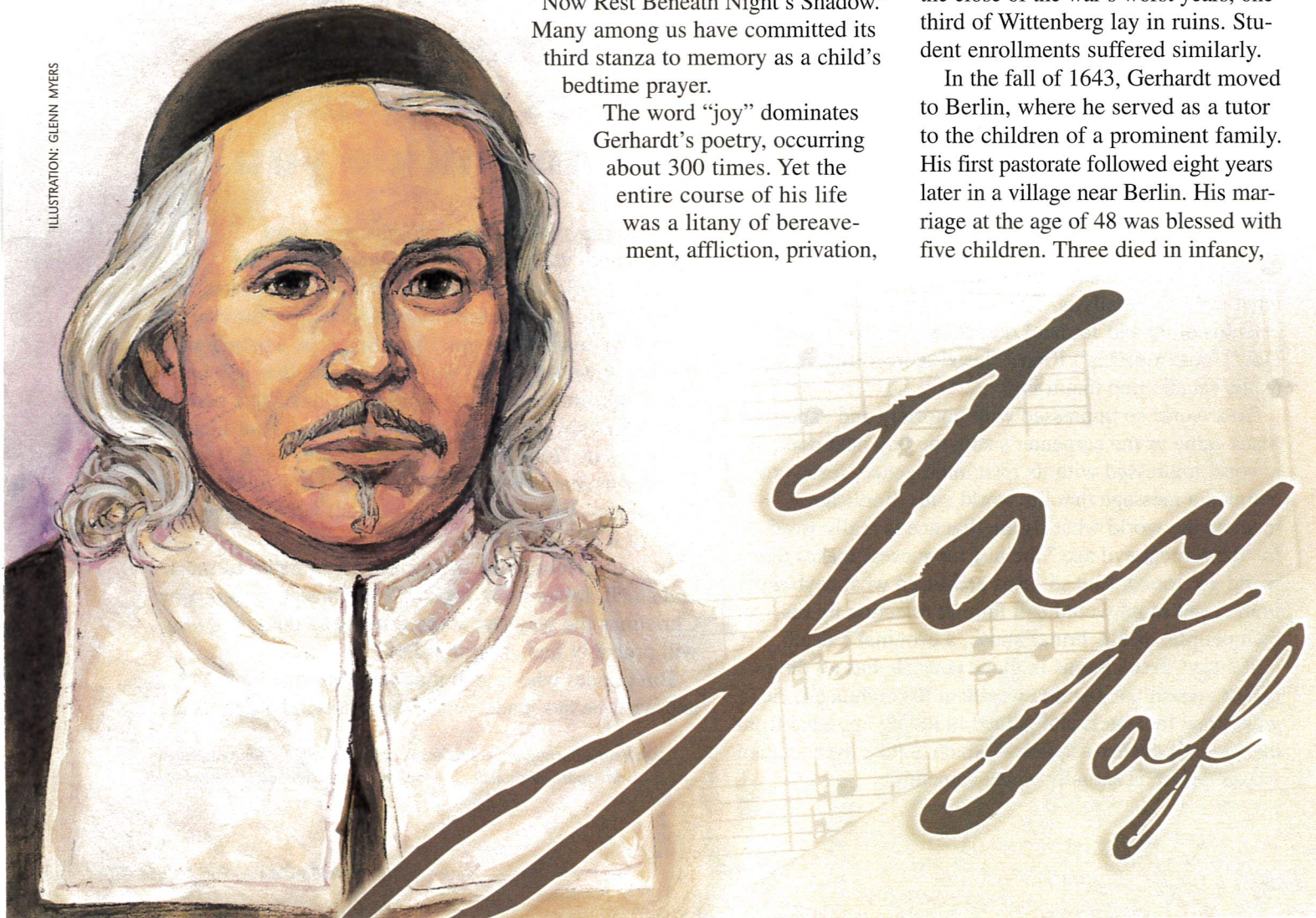
and the distressing outcome of his faithfulness to Lutheran teaching. His hymn, "Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me," emerges as all the more astonishing.

Gerhardt's difficult life

Gerhardt was born March 12, 1607, in a village near Wittenberg. When he was 12, his father died and, two years later, his mother. Just before his father's death, the Thirty Years' War, ostensibly between Protestants and Catholics, began to run its horrendous course of conflict, looting, arson, famine, and plague. It was Germany's worst distress in history. In a population of more than 20 million, about seven million died. During this time Gerhardt completed his education for the Lutheran ministry. His years at the University of Wittenberg stretched out to more than a dozen, chiefly because of war's ravages. At the close of the war's worst years, one-third of Wittenberg lay in ruins. Student enrollments suffered similarly.

In the fall of 1643, Gerhardt moved to Berlin, where he served as a tutor to the children of a prominent family. His first pastorate followed eight years later in a village near Berlin. His marriage at the age of 48 was blessed with five children. Three died in infancy,

ILLUSTRATION: GLENN MYERS



one in early youth. One son survived his father.

Gerhardt was next called to serve a large congregation in Berlin. At this post, his greatest spiritual trial came to a head. Desiring to put closure to the strife between the clergy serving three million Lutherans and the clergy of 15,000 followers of Calvin, the local duke decided to combine the two faiths into a single church. Gerhardt distinguished himself as a staunch champion of the Lutheran Confessions. When he refused to sign the duke's edict in 1666, he was ordered to leave Berlin. But under pressure from Lutheran pastors and laypeople as well as his wife, the duke rescinded his edict in the fall of 1668, the same year Gerhardt's wife died.

Gerhardt could now be called to serve a congregation of 1,200 souls at Luebben, a few miles from Berlin. This pastorate was entirely different from the happy one in Berlin. The Luebbeners made life miserable for him. The parsonage was far too small for Gerhardt's family. Even though there was no place for Gerhardt to study, the Luebbeners argued that if it was good enough for the previous pastor, it should be good enough for him. Finally, they consented to renovate and enlarge the residence, but it took months before it happened. They also made him promise not to flee if the plague broke out among them. Finally, they wanted

the assurance that he would not operate a brewery in competition with them and turn the parsonage into a tavern. They simply failed to appreciate what a fine pastor they had. With his usual integrity and faithfulness, he served this congregation for the last seven years of his life.

Though poverty and misfortune may lead to despair, loss of faith, and alienation to all religion, Gerhardt's afflictions and adversities did not dampen his faith and spirit. He remained a poet of joy and comfort. The world before him lay in constant sunshine. On May 27, 1676, Gerhardt died with this stanza from one of his hymns on his lips:

Death cannot destroy forever;
From our fears, cares, and tears
It will us deliver.

It will close life's mournful story,
Make a way that we may
Enter heavenly glory.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 523:5).

A life-size portrait of Gerhardt hangs in the church at Luebben where he was buried. Jesus told Peter that Satan desired to sift him as wheat. The tablet under Gerhardt's portrait has this message: "A theologian tested in the sieve of Satan."

Theodore Hartwig, a professor emeritus at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

BEFORE HIS DEATH, GERHARDT GAVE HIS SON THIS TESTAMENT

[I have] now arrived at the seventieth year of my life, joyful in the anticipation that God will shortly release me from this world to a life far better than I have experienced on earth. I thank him for the mercy and faithfulness he has shown me. Though I bequeath my son little of this world's goods, he does inherit a respected name of which he will never have to be ashamed.

Give your serious thought to the study of sacred theology at schools of pure doctrine, and beware of those who mingle truth with false teaching. Avoid evil associations and be faithful to the will and directives of your God. Pay undivided attention to the following:

1. Do no evil in the hope it will remain secret, for despite your best efforts, it will come to light.
2. In matters pertaining to your ministry, do not lose your temper, and, in the heat of anger, say nothing until you have quietly meditated on the Ten Commandments and Apostles' Creed.
3. Be ashamed of lusts of the flesh when you come of age, and then in the Lord marry with counsel from people of common sense.
4. Do good to others even if they are unable to repay you, for though people cannot, the Creator of heaven and earth has repaid you long before with the gift of his Son.
5. Flee greed as an offspring of hell. Be content with what you have acquired by honor and a good conscience. But should the dear Lord allot more to you, pray that he guard you against misuse of earthly goods.

In sum, pray diligently, study things honorable, live in peace, serve honestly, and be loyal to your faith and confession. Then you will die and leave this world in joy and bliss. *Amen.*

(Reduced and freely translated)

*in spite
Trials*

Theodore Hartwig

It's Christmas shopping season. Giving is part of our Christian life, but so is responsible management of our resources.

Jeffrey Davis

The **BILLS** WILL COME



The old self

From my income, I:
Spend on needs and lifestyle.
Do not worry about excess debt.
Use leftovers for gifts and savings.

The new self

From my income, I:
Give first to the Lord.
Spend on basic living obligations.
Be careful about debts I make.

Christmas is a time for gift giving. Many children of God love to give gifts as they imitate the greatest gift given to the entire world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Most view the Christmas season as a time to give and, in some cases, to lavish gifts upon their friends and relatives.

Yet how many times after Christmas do we receive our credit card statements or view the checkbook ledger only to realize that we spent much more than we intended? Then we realize that the added interest on the purchases increases what we spent. Often the credit card balances are already so high that we are unable to pay off the debt, and we end up only adding to our balance and going deeper into debt.

We can ignore the problem and simply pay the minimum on the credit card each month. But those credit card bills grow faster than we realize. Spending patterns often inflate the debt rather than control it or reduce it. Time and again our management of money is a challenge, and it can become a major struggle in our lives. Next Christmas the problem could be worse than this year. In the meantime we feel guilt, frustration, and embarrassment.

Is there anything we can do?

At times like this it is good to go back to basic stewardship principles. First, let's understand the source of all our resources. We are simply managers of all the things in this world. The rightful owner is God. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). And God enables us to produce wealth. "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17,18).

That's a start, but we still may have trouble managing what God has given us. While God has many reasons for giving people their resources, he expects that people use the resources to take care of some important needs.

He wants us to give a portion of our resources back to him, and he motivates us to do that by his priceless gift of a Savior. We'll celebrate his gift to us again this Christmas. In addition, God wants us to spend our resources on basic living expenses for ourselves and for the families he has entrusted to our care. God made us thoughtful creatures. We can set aside money for future needs, even plan for retirement. And he also gives us resources to spend on our recreation and vacations.

The civil war within

Practicing good Christian stewardship is not something that comes easily. We daily have a civil war going on in our hearts. It is a struggle between the old and new self.

Our sinful heart desires things that are different from what our faith wants. The old, sinful heart wants to forget that the source of all our resources is God. Inside we think that our possessions are ours to use totally as we want. Our old self is attracted to the pleasures of this world and the desires that satisfy the old self. How often have we caught ourselves wanting the latest new gadget, feeling that an upgrade model is needed, or even saying that we deserve a new purchase? The old self desires to spend, spend, and spend; it has no thought about the way God wants us to use our resources.

The new self created by the Holy Spirit when we came to faith is attracted to treasures in heaven. The new self desires to serve Jesus, treasures the gospel, and wants to spread it to others. Because Jesus came to earth to redeem us with his life and his death, that new self wants to do as God wills even in the way we use our financial resources. It seeks to spend in a way that honors God and that takes care not only of our needs but also the needs of our families. The new self has spending priorities. The priorities are God first, then family needs, and finally spending on wants and desires as long as it does not adversely affect the first two priorities.

But practicing good discipline is difficult because of the struggle that

daily occurs in the hearts of believers between the old and new self. The apostle Paul knows the struggle "to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires . . . and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22,24).

Sadly, we can understand the battle within. We can even understand the need for priorities and self-discipline in the way we spend our resources. But none of that will help us carry out God's will for the way we spend our money.

Go to Bethlehem for strength

So how do we better manage our resources during the gift-giving season? God gives us the power. Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and helps us battle the impulses of the sinful nature. God gave us all things because he loved us. That's grace! It is full forgiveness for our failures and covers our guilt. That lesson is again clear in the manger of Bethlehem. His love compels us to be better managers of all his resources. With his forgiveness we can resolve to do better.

Our sinful nature has a persistent power to create trouble in our lives, even financial trouble. By focusing on Jesus, we are able to better resist the pull of the old self and better honor God in all areas of our Christian life, including our spending.

The new self adopts goals that better control the desires of the old self. God's priorities are the priorities of the new self—God first, family needs second, and then our wants. It's a struggle. But a trip to the stable helps us. When we see God's greatest gift to us we can understand what Paul was telling us. He wrote, "Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1,2).

Jeffrey Davis is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.



Connected to JESUS

John A. Braun

The usher makes his way down the aisle to direct communicants to the altar. One by one they leave their seats and walk forward to receive the Sacrament. They have examined themselves, prayed, and prepared themselves to receive the Lord's body and blood. They do what believers have done throughout the centuries, what Paul directed the Corinthians to do: "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Corinthians 11:28,29).

The walk forward is quiet because each one knows the miracle at the altar is for them—Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine, given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Each communicant takes bread and eats. Each one takes a sip of wine and drinks. Separately they receive the forgiveness of Jesus completed on Calvary when he said, "It is finished"—a solitary encounter with the Lord Jesus.

We are connected to Jesus individually and personally in the Lord's Supper. But we are also connected to each other.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Jesus intended the Supper for his disciples until the end of time—until he comes again in glory. Believers need the assurance his body and blood gives throughout every age, as long as the world endures.

Faith prepares us

This Supper is not just a memorial meal for everyone to join in. Scripture makes that clear when it speaks of "proclaiming the Lord's death," receiv-

ing the Sacrament "in an unworthy manner," and eating and drinking "without recognizing the body of the Lord" and instead of forgiveness receiving "judgment" (1 Corinthians 11:26-29). A person must know what the Sacrament is all about. This sacrament is different than Baptism. Baptism initiates faith and is the entry point for most believers, including children. But this sacrament is for believers who know and who have been instructed.

The apostle Paul also reminded Christians to examine themselves before coming to the Lord's Table.

This sacrament is not meant for those who cannot “examine” themselves. Those coming to the altar must be able to reflect on who they are and what they are about to do. Children and those with certain diminished mental abilities should not attend. Simply, communicants must be able to examine themselves lest they do something they don’t know and understand—lest they receive the Sacrament “without recognizing the body of the Lord.”

How is this done? Luther said that only faith makes us ready to receive the Sacrament. His question was “Who then, is properly prepared to receive this Sacrament?” His answer was the answer of the Scriptures: “. . . he is properly prepared who has faith in these words ‘Given’ and ‘poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.’” (The Reception of Holy Communion, Luther’s Small Catechism).

The Lord’s Supper together

On the Sundays we wait for the usher to direct us forward, we are not alone. Thousands of believers have come to the Lord’s Table. Christians speaking different languages and dressed the way their culture directed receive the same assurance of forgiveness. All of them have come to confess their faith in the completed work of Jesus. They proclaim the Lord’s death and what it means to them.

Jesus intended his Supper to be celebrated together with other Christians. He instituted it in the upper room with his disciples. Of course, the Sacrament is carried to shut-ins, the sick, and those who have special needs. But most often we celebrate the Lord’s Supper together with others.

When believers come together at the Lord’s Table, they are not only connected to Jesus but also to each other. The apostle wrote it so clearly, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians

10:17). Coming together confesses that we all believe what the death of Jesus means and that we are all connected to each other in our faith in the Lord’s forgiveness. From one point of view, receiving the Sacrament together confesses the close tie we have because we believe the same truths. From another point of view, the Sacrament is closed to those who do not share our faith.

Receiving the Sacrament together confesses the close tie we have because we believe the same truths.

It’s no wonder that one principle Lutherans have believed for centuries is that Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants. How can we participate with those who believe that the Sacrament is a sacrifice for sin offered by the priest? Did not Jesus say, “It is finished”? How can we receive the Sacrament with those who believe that the bread and wine are only symbols and not the body and blood of Christ? Did not Jesus say, “This is my body . . . This is my blood” (Mark 14:22-24)?

When I wait to come to the Lord’s Table, I often think of this wonderful connection with other believers. I am connected to all of them by the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament. The father who comes forward early so his wife can manage the children. The mother who comes later. The young high school student. The grandma who depends on her cane. Together we share a common faith in what the Lord’s body and blood has done for us—given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

But I also think beyond the walls of the church where I worship. I am connected with all my brothers and sisters in WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We all share a common faith in Jesus, and we confess it when we come forward together at his table. We show the Lord’s death, and we confess our faith in what Jesus has done for us. These truths are precious and important. We do not want to imply that they are unimportant by allowing those who do not share them to come to the Sacrament in our churches. We confess we are “one loaf.”

I even think of a special connection that transcends time. I am connected with Jesus as surely as Peter, John, and the other disciples were on that first Maundy Thursday. Thousands came to faith after Pentecost. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). I am connected to them too. I’m connected through the Supper with the millions of Christians who have come to the Lord’s Table to receive his body and blood over the entire history of the New Testament church. And I am connected to the loved ones I have known who are now departed and with the Lord Jesus.

The connection depends on the power of Jesus; I depend on his power to keep me as his dear child and heir of heaven, just as he kept those who have gone before me faithful through the Sacrament and the Word. The Sacrament connects me to Jesus; it is his power to keep me through life’s ups and downs. By the power of the Holy Spirit in Word and sacrament, I remain a disciple until I join all the saints above.

John A. Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ

Read more about Holy Communion in Lord’s Supper: The Lamb’s High Feast, an NPH publication written by Arnold Koelpin. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Dec. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

WHATEVER

It was only one lie

Should I lie and take the easy way out, or should I tell the truth and take my punishment?

I thought hard as I recalled everything that had happened, every detail. She had asked me a simple question, and I wanted to give a good, believable answer.

Why had I lied? I thought of the events and what I could have said differently. I could paint another lie to cover up the first one, but how long would this lie stay up? Would it crack and be scraped away with the truth? Should I lie and take the easy way out, or should I tell the truth and take my punishment now? What should I do? It was only one lie.

It had been another late night. I was in my sister's car, waiting for her to drive me home. I was nervous as I talked to my mom on the phone. I could have told her, "Mom, she's in with her boyfriend right now. I told her not to stop and see him, but she went anyway." But I didn't want my sister to be angry with me. And I didn't want to hear the fight that would come after we got home. What could I do to make everyone happy?

After assuring my mother we were on our way, I called my sister, who was still in the house. I said she had better hurry up or we would both be in trouble. "Fine!" she said, and hung up. I knew that it would be a while before she came out, ruining my story. Why did this always have to happen?

I called my mom back. "Mom," I said, "we have to go get gas; we might be a few minutes late."

"Okay," she said. "Just drive safe and don't speed." She sounded mad. If my mom and dad didn't believe me then I would be in trouble and so would my sister.

I called my sister again and yelled into the phone, "You had better hurry up!" Couldn't there be an easier way?

Twenty minutes passed before she came out. She smelled of smoke and was in a foul mood. "We're going to be late, and Mom and Dad are going to be really mad,"

I said. She gave me an angry look and stomped on the accelerator. God, I know Mom said not to speed, but please keep us safe.

"I don't like lying for you," I said in a tone that I knew she hated. "Then don't do it!" she replied hotly.

We made it home much later than I promised. As we walked in the door my mother said, "What took you so long?" I could see the look in her eye. She didn't believe my story.

What should I say? Should I lie or should I tell the truth? I felt a desperate need to escape. If I wouldn't have lied, I wouldn't feel this way. I felt as if I might cry. I didn't know what to do. I looked from my mom to my sister and then I thought, "What would Jesus want me to do?"

I looked at my mom and said, "Mom, I'm sorry, but I lied. We weren't getting gas. We were at her boyfriend's house. We shouldn't have lied, I'm sorry."

She looked at me and said, "I'm glad you told me. Now if you wouldn't have lied, I wouldn't have to ground you. But since you came clean it will be for only half of the time."

After having a talk with my parents and sister I headed for bed. "God," I prayed, "thank you for helping me do what was right. Thank you for showing me and my sister the right path. Amen."

Due to the personal nature of this article, the author has asked to be kept anonymous.



Jesus do?

Obituaries

Markus Otto Koepsell 1920-2007

Markus Koepsell was born Aug. 20, 1920, in Coleman, Wis. He died Sept. 13, 2007, in Rhinelander, Wis.

A 1945 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. John's, Bay City, Mich.; Bethel, Prentice/Zion, Ogema/Holy Trinity, Tripoli, Wis.; Trinity, Grafton/St. Mark's, Sutton, Neb.; St. Paul, Remus/Zion, Mt. Pleasant, Mich.; St. John, Gladwin, Mich.; St. Katherine, Menominee (ELS)/St. John, Colfax, Wis.; St. John's, Pardeeville, Wis; and St. Paul, Crandon/Christ, Hiles, Wis.

He is preceded in death by a brother. He is survived by his wife, Ardis; two sons; and two daughters.

Ellen J. Schmeling 1941-2007

Ellen Schmeling (nee Albrecht) was born Feb. 11, 1941, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died Sept. 6, 2007, in Scroggins, Texas.

A 1963 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. John, Red Wing, Minn.; St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.; Emanuel, St. Paul, Minn.; Calvary, Dallas, Texas; and Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.

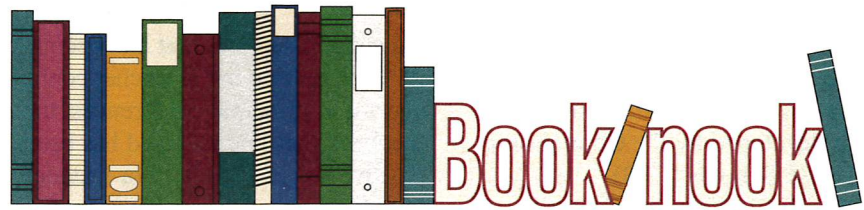
She is survived by her husband, Dan; two daughters; one son; and seven grandchildren.

Adalbert F. W. Schultz 1914-2007

Adalbert Schultz was born Aug. 15, 1914, in Neillsville, Wis. He died Sept. 22, 2007, in Howards Grove, Wis.

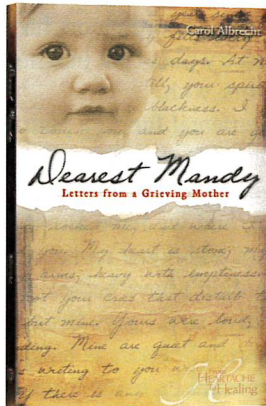
He served at Chandler/Coolidge/Casa Grande, Ariz.; Canyon Day/Cedar Creek, Ariz.; St. Paul, Monroe, Mich.; St. Paul, Hale/Our Savior, Glennie, Mich.; Woodlawn, West Allis, Wis.; and Zion, Kiel (Louis Corners), Wis.

He is preceded in death by one infant son, three grandchildren, one great grandchild, one brother, and four sisters. He is survived by his wife, Helen; two sons; five daughters; 22 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren; two brothers; three sisters; four sisters-in-law; two brothers-in-law; and many nieces and nephews.



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.

God is in control



\$13.99

Dearest Mandy is a wonderful story of how God won't let us forget he's in control of everything in our lives, and how he can use a tragedy to bring us closer to him. As I was reading the book, I couldn't help but think of my own children. What would I do if something truly horrible happened to them?

One time I lost my oldest son—just temporarily. We were at our local home improvement store, getting some supplies. We walked down an aisle, assuming our seven-year-old followed us . . . but he didn't. We looked up and down the aisles and quickly realized we didn't know where he was. We found employees to help us look and block all of the exits, and after 10 minutes (a short time that seemed like an eternity), we found

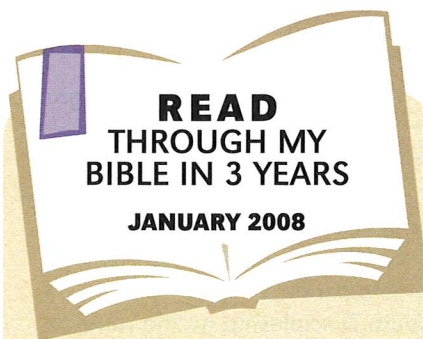
him wandering around the appliance section. He was fine, just having fun poking around, unaware of the horror his father and I were experiencing.

We only "lost" our son for mere minutes. Yet during that time the most horrific scenarios went through our heads. Was he hurt? Did someone take him? Would we ever see him again? When we found him, he was reprimanded and hugged and kissed like he'd never been before.

In *Dearest Mandy*, the main character, Carrie, struggles through a truly horrible event—the death of her infant daughter. To help her cope with her loss, she writes her deceased daughter daily letters. These letters explore her pain, her anger, and her faith. When the letters begin, Carrie is angry at God for taking her daughter away from her. After all, how could the Lord think her daughter's death was a good thing? The Lord, however, placed people and situations in her life that reminded her God's plans are far greater than she could understand.

The author, Carol Albrecht, writes this book so poignantly that I found myself forgetting this was a fictional piece. The book is easy to read, moving, and spiritually uplifting.

Mandi Kohlmetz, *Divine Peace*, Milwaukee



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|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Revelation 3:1-6 | 17. Rev. 14:1-5 |
| 2. Rev. 3:7-13 | 18. Rev. 14:6-13 |
| 3. Rev. 3:14-22 | 19. Rev. 14:14-20 |
| 4. Rev. 4 | 20. Rev. 15 |
| 5. Rev. 5 | 21. Rev. 16 |
| 6. Rev. 6 | 22. Rev. 17 |
| 7. Rev. 7 | 23. Rev. 18:1-20 |
| 8. Rev. 8 | 24. Rev. 18:21-19:10 |
| 9. Rev. 9 | 25. Rev. 19:11-21 |
| 10. Rev. 10 | 26. Rev. 20:1-10 |
| 11. Rev. 11:1-14 | 27. Rev. 20:11-15 |
| 12. Rev. 11:15-19 | 28. Rev. 21:1-8 |
| 13. Rev. 12:1-9 | 29. Rev. 21:9-21 |
| 14. Rev. 12:10-13:1 | 30. Rev. 21:22-22:5 |
| 15. Rev. 13:2-10 | 31. Rev. 22:6-21 |
| 16. Rev. 13:11-18 | |

Funding plan working to strengthen Lutheran schools

Approximately 30 percent of WELS parish schools are now participating in the new supplemental funding program developed by the Commission on Parish Schools (CPS).

The plan utilizes enrollment-based contributions from WELS schools to generate much-needed funds to support the work of the commission. Although contributions are not mandatory, participating schools receive discounts on subscription-based services.

"It's working, but it's catching on kind of slow," says Jim Brandt, administrator for WELS Parish Schools. "Last year when we surveyed the schools, 200 out of 500 sites responded, and 83 percent indicated that they were going to contribute. So for us to be at 30 percent, we're a little behind the curve."

Even though the numbers were lower than projected, contributions so far have allowed CPS to start rebuild-

ing support services that had been lost.

"As I've been out at teacher conferences and principal conferences, the feedback that I've received has been positive," says Brandt. "For instance, this year we had a very positive meeting with our 12 district coordinators because they were all energized to go back to their district and carry out ministry." In the past, the coordinators had put together ministry plans but had no real dollars to work with.

But the supplemental funding plan is changing all that. "[Through the plan], we avoided having to cut any personnel in our office, and we have about \$40,000-50,000 of additional money for ministry that we didn't have before. So that's a real positive step," says Brandt.

Right now, Parish Schools is using those funds to rebuild its teacher mentoring program and ongoing formative evaluation program for teachers. Parish

Schools is also focusing on strengthening schools through the accreditation process. "Our focus right now is shifting away from the value-added services that we've been putting in during recent years," says Brandt. "We're really getting back into the heart and core of what the Commission on Parish Schools has been all about: supporting and strengthening our schools through programs specifically designed to help principals and teachers improve instruction."

Brandt says that although participating schools are receiving discounts on services, their contributions have larger implications. "If schools contribute, they are helping to ensure that vital support services are there for all WELS schools into the future. Essentially, their contributions are about promoting and protecting the future of a very important form of ministry in our church body."

Interactivity key in Web site for teens

WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship is probably best known for its youth rallies. In July 2007, 1,500 teens attended the rally in Dallas, Texas. The previous rally in 2005 attracted more than 2,300 teens. One of the hallmarks of these rallies is the interaction that takes place between WELS teens from across North America.

Yet youth rallies aren't the only way that Youth Discipleship is encouraging WELS teens to interact. As part of the September 2007 redesign of its Web site for teens, www.livingbold.net, interactivity with users was priority number one.

Youth Discipleship's administrator, Dr. Joel Nelson, describes LivingBold's redesigned site as "an online education, support, and networking place, accessible to teens 24/7, highly interactive, and in tune with teens' use of the Internet."

What can you find on LivingBold?

- A Q&A with questions from teens and responses from pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and counselors.

- A daily e-devotion for teens.
- A discussion board.
- A spotlight on a WELS youth group.
- Bible studies and articles for teens.
- A gallery showcasing art, writing, music, and videos created by teens.
- Games and videos.
- Scheduled chats on teen topics.

Another important step taken by Youth Discipleship on the road to improved interaction with teens is the creation of a profile on the popular Web site www.myspace.com. "The purpose of the MySpace presence was to go to where teens are known to be found and bring LivingBold content to them," says Jeremy Bakken, Youth Discipleship assistant. "Prior to MySpace, Youth Discipleship's avenue for bringing LivingBold to teens was solely via pastors or youth leaders. By creating a MySpace profile, we are able to make use of its networking system as another means to make people, both WELS and non-WELS, more aware of



LivingBold and bring its content to them."

It's the content of LivingBold that sets the site apart from many other sites that teens visit. As Nelson explains, "LivingBold is a place for teens to learn more about Jesus, exercise their faith, express their honest opinions, ask questions, interact with others, and obtain spiritual counsel and guidance. In today's world, and in today's WELS world, all of those things are extremely important."

Nicole Balza

A new home for Calvary Academy

Six families arrived on a 40-acre campus in a remote country location outside of Mulberry, Fla., on Oct. 3. Each family was there to help their son or daughter settle in at their new school home—Calvary Academy-Florida.

Since 1997 more than 140 students from 18 states have benefited from Calvary's program in South Milwaukee. "While the location has changed, the mission is still the same—to give hope for hurting families," Principal Carl Weisheim says. "It is Calvary's purpose to provide Christ-centered assistance to families who have children that are displaying behavioral problems." At Calvary's new campus, the school will continue to provide highly structured Christian character training.

The decision to move Calvary Academy was prompted by the State of Wisconsin not allowing the school to stay open year-round. "We were

recognized as a residential school and had to close for 60 consecutive days," Weisheim explains.

This meant that Calvary had to stop enrolling students in the middle of March, even though they desired to accept children whenever necessary—at any point in the year. "We turned away many families that needed our help," Weisheim says. "We tried to get the state to change the law with no success, so the search for a state that would permit us to be open 12 months of the year began." The Lord led them to Florida and a new campus where he had even more blessings in store for them.

Calvary Academy-Florida is located about 30 miles west of Tampa. In the 1960s and '70s it was a Baptist Bible camp. After that it was used to shelter runaways and court-appointed children for short stays. "The land came with dorms, kitchen, commons,

rooms to hold classes, and an administration building," Weisheim says.

While the three students and 16 faculty and staff members who relocated from Calvary's South Milwaukee site have to adjust to the warm weather and new surroundings, they are already enjoying the blessings of the new country campus. In South Milwaukee, students lived in two off-site boarding houses. Now with the dormitory in Florida, "having our children on campus is the greatest pleasure," says Bob Wasser, president of Calvary Academy Ministries Foundation and chief financial officer of Calvary Academy Ministries. "We had no outdoor property at the old campus. Now we will be able to have many activities on our own land."

Calvary Academy's financial and development offices are now located in the South Milwaukee campus. The two boarding homes are being sold. For now, "the first floor of the Milwaukee campus is rented out to a special education group working with teens who have fallen behind in the public school system," Wasser explains. "Calvary will wait until the Florida campus is operating to its capacity and then seek to establish a Christian day program in the Milwaukee area."

As of the first day of school, Oct. 4, Calvary Academy-Florida had seven students enrolled and three more in the enrollment process. Wasser shares that they hope to bring Calvary student enrollment and ministry up to 40 or more.

All those involved with this special ministry place this goal and the future of Calvary students in the Lord's care because "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

For more information, call Calvary Academy-Florida at 863-428-2071 or visit www.calvaryacademy.net.



Counselor Benjamin Kohls (left back), Teacher Valerie Zubke (center), and Teacher David Zabel (right back) with the students at Calvary Academy-Florida. Says Zabel, "We are standing in front of the banner that is the whole focus of Calvary Academy—using the Word to help children in trouble."

Ad Hoc Commission to examine issues, develop solutions

Joel Voss, pastor at Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, and eight other WELS men from around the country will be tackling some weighty issues as part of their service on a newly-appointed Ad Hoc Commission.

The commission, authorized by the 2007 synod convention to analyze the way the synod works and to propose comprehensive, long-term strategies to help the synod carry out its mission, will be exploring matters related to finances, structure, direction, and short- and long-range planning.

“Our goal would be to take a look at why our synod is in the situation it has been in the last few years, to analyze those things, and to help Pres. [Mark] Schroeder propose solutions or to immediately enact some solutions where he has the authority to do so,” says Voss, who was elected as commission chairman by the synod in convention.

In October, Voss and Schroeder selected the men who would help them in this task. They are

- Pastor John Braun, Watertown, Wis.;
- Pastor Jon Buchholz, Phoenix, Ariz.;
- Mr. James Drexler, Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.;
- Mr. Mark Neumann, Nashotah, Wis.;
- Pastor Jon Schroeder, Sharpsburg, Ga.;
- Teacher Greg Thiesfeldt, Federal Way, Wash.;
- Mr. Danny Wehmeyer, New Smyrna Beach, Fla.; and
- Teacher Eric Ziel, Ixonia, Wis.

Two men—Mr. Ron Hillmann, a Synodical Council laymember, and Pastor Vilas Glaeske, South Central District president—will serve as advisory members.

According to Voss these men were chosen in part because of their geographic distribution, their analytical skills, and their varied involvement with synod activities.

Buchholz, pastor at Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz., has been involved in some way with Parish Services, Home Missions, World Missions, and the District Praesidium.

“I think it is an honor to be asked to serve in this way,” says Buchholz, “and I really value the input and feedback from anyone who wants to share insights or ideas as far as . . . the things that we should be looking at.”

Buchholz stressed the importance of the convention’s decision to appoint this commission: “Appointing a commission to really examine our program of work as a synod and to look at how we’re carrying out our mission by evaluating our faithfulness on a number of different levels just speaks volumes to the convention’s commitment to striving for excellence and raising the bar on everything that we do together in the work of the Lord.”

To carry out this analysis, the commission will be talking to various areas of ministry, examining documents presented to the 2007 convention, and listening to Pres. Schroeder and his ideas.

“I think this commission will help Pres. Schroeder with priorities,” says Voss. “Tough times call for tough decisions. If we had all the funds in the world, I’d do it [the way it has been done] too. But the reality is that we don’t, and everyone is striving for that same amount of pie in the synod finances.”

He continues, “This is to help [Pres. Schroeder] discover the problems, listen to what he may already see as the problems, listen to what he thinks the solutions are, and offer what we think the solutions are.”

The commission is planning on presenting a report of its initial findings and recommendations to the 2008 district conventions next June. It will make its final report to the 2009 synod convention.

In the end, Buchholz stresses what he believes is the ultimate goal of the commission: “I think that you can examine externals such as structure and methodology and things like that, but really it comes down to our commitment to bringing Word and sacrament to people and . . . putting that in front of people in the best and most active way that we possibly can.”

The commission held its first meeting in November. Comments can be shared with the commission by contacting Pastor Joel Voss, revjrvoss@aol.com or 937-434-9876.

Independent congregation joins WELS

St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio, officially joined WELS at the Michigan district convention this summer. After St. Paul was received into membership, a delegate commented, “St. Paul has now become the newest and the oldest congregation in the Wisconsin Synod at the same time.”

St. Paul is the oldest Lutheran congregation in Columbus. It was officially

organized in 1821 and was a member of the old Ohio Synod. It broke ties in 1964 with the American Lutheran Church for doctrinal reasons.

Although the congregation did not join WELS, it established fellowship with WELS as an independent congregation. “This made it possible for the congregation to call teachers for its school and pastors who were com-

mitted to confessional Lutheranism,” says Gary Pieper, pastor at St. Paul.

The congregation began supporting WELS through mission offerings, and used *Meditations, Forward in Christ*, and other materials produced by Northwestern Publishing House. Three members of the congregation became WELS pastors, and a trust was established by the congregation

Christian Worship: Supplement will provide variety

At the National Conference of Worship, Music, and the Arts, July 28-31, 2008, *Christian Worship: Supplement* will be introduced. This publication will complement the 1993 hymnal, *Christian Worship: a Lutheran Hymnal*.

"Halfway [through its expected lifespan] would be the time to produce some publication that keeps up with new materials that are out and new things that have been appearing in worship since the publication of the hymnal," says Dr. Kermit Moldenhauer, professor at Martin Luther College and chairman of the supplement committee. "This seems like the right time."

The more than 200-page supplement will include 86 new hymns, two liturgies, 24 psalm settings, seven devotions, an expanded lectionary, and more.

The hymns, chosen from more than 800 possibilities, embrace a wide assortment of styles, including folk tunes and ethnic variety. "The late 20th century was a gigantic explosion of solid, wonderful hymnody and texts and songs in different styles," says Bryan Gerlach, administrator for the Commission on Worship.

Additional materials to support the supplement include:

- An accompaniment edition that includes the services, psalms, and hymns; alternate settings; instrumental descants; notes on the hymns; and MIDI files for those who use electronic means to accompany services.
- A guitar edition with chords for accompanying hymns.

- An electronic pew edition to use in preparing worship folders.

"The supplement will definitely give people a broader musical palette to choose from," says Gerlach. "The electronic files [in the accompaniment edition] will provide all sorts of variations in accompaniment from descants to alternate harmonizations to rhythm instrument suggestions. All of these things are upping the ante of creativity and musical engagement."

To introduce congregations to the supplement, the Commission on Worship is producing a two-CD set of some hymns from the supplement that will be mailed to all congregations in the spring of 2008. The CD will include "a wide variety of instrumentation and mood, impact and energy," says Gerlach.

Though many congregations have expressed interest, "this book is not being published with the assumption that every congregation will buy it," says Gerlach. "This book is being published for those who would like to enrich their worship."

He continues, "As much as it is good to have variety and different things and fresh things, there is still something neat about being able to worship with your eyes closed. We want to strike a balance between that comfort and familiarity and some good resources that are solidly Lutheran, with excellent texts that proclaim the gospel with depth and substance. This book helps us do that."



Christian Worship: Supplement committee members are (left to right) Pastor Mark Bitter, Prof. Keith Wessel, Pastor Steven Lange, Pastor Michael Schultz, Pastor Peter Prange, Dr. Kermit Moldenhauer, Pastor John Koelpin, Pastor Bryan Gerlach, Pastor Jon Zabell, Grace Hennig, Teacher James Bakken, and Teacher Ruth Mattek.

to provide \$50,000-\$60,000 a year to support students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

During this time the congregation continued to study the Scriptures. Bible classes studied the inerrancy of Scripture, fellowship, close communion, and the role of men and women in the church.

On Feb. 18, 1996, after a vigorous

Bible study, the congregation approved a new constitution that established both doctrinal unity and doctrinal practice with WELS.

After several years of open forums, discussions, and instruction on walking together, Pieper suggested that the congregation revisit the idea of joining WELS. "It made no sense to be simply walking next to WELS

when we could be walking with WELS," says Pieper.

He continues, "At a time when many churches are becoming more liberal and ecumenical in their teaching and practice, it is refreshing to see a congregation moving away from its liberal ties to walk together with a confessional Lutheran church body."

WELS news briefs

Board for World Missions 414-256-3233; bwm@sab.wels.net

Two new booklets—*God Creates our World* and *Broken Hearted Father*—have been published in the Bible Teachings Series, thanks to a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The series now contains 17 volumes. The booklets were developed by WELS Prison Ministry and adapted for world mission and cross-cultural outreach by Multi-Language Publications. “It’s an exciting program that in the prison ministry form is reaching out to 46,000 prisoners and in the Bible Teachings Series form is reaching out (in translation) to more than 20,000 correspondents in Nepal, Pakistan, and Latin America,” says Paul Hartman, coordinator of Multi-Language Publications.

Board for Ministerial Education 414-256-3236; bme@sab.wels.net

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, has developed a new alumni group, WLS Alumni. The executive committee includes Pastor Daniel Balge ('85), president; Pastor Earle Treptow ('93), vice president; Pastor Carl Ziemer ('73), secretary; and Pastor Aaron Christie ('97), treasurer.

One hundred forty men attended the first annual meeting in September. At the meeting, the group adopted a constitution and approved, in principal, a proposal to offer monetary support for student aid and continuing education for seminary professors and graduates. The group also directed its officers to explore writing a book celebrating the seminary’s history, to be published in conjunction with the seminary’s sesquicentennial in 2013.

Technology Office 414-256-3250; martin.spriggs@sab.wels.net

Two special services were streamed live at <http://streams.wels.net>:

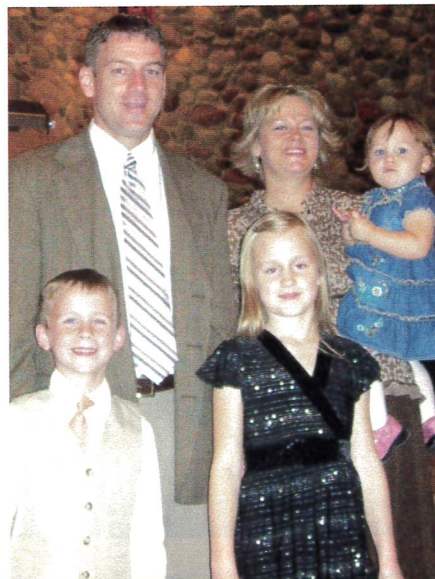
- A Spanish Reformation service,

held at Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis., on Oct. 31.

- An anniversary service celebrating 50 years of God’s blessings on WELS mission work in Japan, held at Nozomi (Hope) Lutheran Church, Tsuchiura City, Ibaraki, Japan, on Nov. 3.

“Technology today is no different than at the time of the Reformation when we saw how God used the fairly recent advent of the printing press to broaden the reach of his Word,” says Martin Spriggs, WELS’ chief technology officer. “We are seeing the same thing today with Internet video streaming—another broad channel through which God allows the gospel to reach eyes and ears all over the world!”

Commission on Special Ministries 414-256-3240; csm@sab.wels.net



In October, Josh Martin was commissioned as the new civilian chaplain for Europe. Martin is stationed in Spiesheim, Germany, to serve troops and families overseas. In addition to his work in Europe, Martin may also make periodic trips to the Middle East to supplement other WELS chaplain visits there. Martin replaces Pastor Michael Schroeder who served in Europe for five years. Pictured are Josh Martin; wife, Katie; and their children (left to right) Lucas, Allison, and Madelyn.

Communication Services Commission/Northwestern Publishing House 414-256-3210; fic@sab.wels.net

As of Jan. 1, 2008, the annual subscription rate for *Forward in Christ* will go up to \$16 in the United States, \$16.96 in Canada, and \$48.40 in other countries. The price increase is a reaction to new postal rates, which rose 15 percent. For bulk subscription rates, go to www.nph.net/periodicals.

Commission on Evangelism 414-256-3287; coe@sab.wels.net

In October, Daily Devotions, a free service provided by **WhatAboutJesus.com** in which subscribers receive brief devotions during the week directly to their e-mail, went over the 10,000-subscriber mark. “Even though our devotions are aimed for those who may not know much about Christ, this mark reminds us of the hunger for daily doses of God’s Word with real-life applications in simple-to-understand terminology,” says Pastor Ken Fisher, project coordinator.

In September, **WhatAboutJesus.com**, a service provided by the Commission on Evangelism, also began offering these daily devotions as podcasts at <http://streams.wels.net>.

Commission on Youth Discipleship 414-256-3224; cyd@sab.wels.net

Three teens were chosen to be on the 2009 International Teen Rally Committee: Nicole Livigne (Shepherd of the Palms, Jupiter, Fla.), Carlton “CJ” Fischer (Petra, Sauk Rapids, Minn.), and Tatum Gormley-Nettles (Green Valley, Henderson, Nev.). Julie Schoenrock (Emanuel, New London, Wis.) will serve as an alternate member. These teens will help plan the 2009 rally.

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

District news

Western Wisconsin

Taylor Schneider and Tyler Guenterberg, students at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., traveled to Hampton, Ga., this summer through WELS Kingdom Workers. Their mission work included door-to-door canvassing, distributing door hangers, and inviting community members to Sunday services at Hope Lutheran. "Everyone was super nice and we learned that everyone needs to hear God's Word," says Guenterberg. "It was great because we got to watch students from Martin Luther College share their faith and it made it easier for us to talk about our own faith."

Northern Wisconsin

Sixteen members of **St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.,** spent hundreds of hours sewing 15 quilts that were used during the church's annual Living Nativity, Nov. 30-Dec. 2. "We collected fabric remnants from church members and spent many enjoyable hours together cutting, sewing squares and assembling the quilts," says Ruth Plummer, organizer of the quilt project. Each year more than 60 volunteers participate in the Living Nativity, which includes live animals, music, and refreshments. "It is a beautiful event," says Plummer. "It gets the message of Christ's birth and promise of salvation to the general public."

These pastors are the reports for the districts featured this month: MN—Jeff Bovee; NW—Joel Lillo; WW—Brett Brauer.

Minnesota



More than 500 people attended a "neighborhood picnic," hosted by Zion, Springfield, Mo., on Sept. 22. The day included food, music, crafts and face painting for kids, square dancing, and even live llamas. Kim Parten, a member at Zion, says the outreach event was a huge success for their 92-member congregation. "We were blessed by the Lord beyond our wildest dreams!" she says. "The weather was perfect, the event was well-organized and ran flawlessly . . . The event brought our membership closer together and has energized many about evangelism. We have close to 50 names to follow up on, and we have had visitors attend because of the event. It truly was a thrilling day!"

DEFINING RELIGION

Advent wreath—The origins of the Advent wreath reach back to pre-Christian times in Northern Europe. As the winter solstice approached, people placed candles on evergreen wreaths in anticipation of the return of longer daylight hours. Christians adapted this custom to the Advent season and the anticipation of the celebration of Christmas. By the dawn of the Reformation the Advent wreath as we know it today was in use.

Advent wreaths are formed from the branches of various types of evergreens. The evergreen branches symbolize eternal life. Four candles adorn the wreath. Three purple or blue candles representing hope, peace, and love are lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays, respectively, of Advent. On the third Sunday the rose candle,

symbolizing joy, is lit. Some Advent wreaths have a fifth candle in the middle. This white candle, representing the birth of Jesus and the announcement of the angels, is lit on Christmas Day. The lighting of each candle expresses the longing, joy, and thankfulness of God's people as we commemorate our Savior's first coming and our anticipation of his second coming to judge the world and to take us to heaven.

John M. Brenner



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Biedenbender, Thomas, to Zion, Mission/St. John, Witten, S.D.

Gabb, Steven P., to Gethsemane, Los Angeles, Calif.

Scheele, Martin J., to Christ, Keystone Heights, Fla.

Schultz, Kevin K., to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.

Seifert, Donald A., to retirement

Vinton, Larry D., to retirement

Westenberg, Douglas M., to St. Peter, Marshfield, Wis.

Zietlow, Peter D., to Emmanuel, Montello, Wis.

Clarification: Pastor Mark Eckert's call to the WELS Lutheran Campus Ministry, East Lansing, Mich., that was reported in the November issue is in addition to his current call at Calvary, Eaton Rapids, Mich.

COLLOQUY NOTICES

Norman A. Schell, Omaha, Neb., formerly a pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in WELS pastoral ministry. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to Pastor Joel Frank, President, Nebraska District-WELS, Box 222, Plymouth NE 68424; 402-656-3176; nedpwels@diodecom.net.

Dr. Paul Johnston, Norman, Okla., formerly a pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in WELS pastoral ministry. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to Pastor Vilas Glaeske, President, South Central District-WELS, 565 W El Dorado Dr, Scroggins Texas 75480; 903-860-7411; welscdp@hotmail.com.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

Thank you for supporting the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lock box, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. The last business day of each month is the reporting cutoff date for CMO deposit. For the deposit to be included in reported receipts for the month, CMO must be received in the synod's bank lock box on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lock box up to and including Jan. 9, 2008, will be credited as 2007 CMO. Be sure that the remittance is accompanied by the coupon and is clearly labeled as "December" offerings. Thank you for your assistance.

Todd Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

ANNIVERSARIES

Muskego, Wis.—St. Paul (150). Dec. 1, 6 P.M.; Dec. 2, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; Dec. 3, 7 P.M. Vince Kirchoff, 414-327-1619.

Green Bay, Wis.—St. Paul (125). Dec. 9. Organ concert worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; brunch between services. April 13, 2008. School anniversary worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; potluck lunch to follow. June 22, 2008. Confirmation reunion service, 10 A.M.; luncheon to follow. RSVP requested. Nov. 2, 2008. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; luncheon to follow. RSVP requested. Carla Hoffmann, 920-435-8468; stpaul@new.rr.com.

Fond du Lac, Wis.—St. Peter (150). Sept. 28, 2008. Ralph Leisten, 920-921-6987.

COMING EVENTS

WELS National Brass Festival—Jan. 12-13, 2008. Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis. Concert, Jan. 13, 2008, 3 P.M. Register by Dec. 15. Patricia Backhaus, 414-643-5116, cornetpat@aol.com.

To Rejoice is a Choice women's retreat—Feb. 9, 2008. Hoenecke Hall, St. Lucas School, Kewaskum, Wis. Lynn Garvey, 262-626-4749.

Mexico Mission Partners donor trip—Feb. 16-25, 2008. Tour includes worship at three churches and the seminary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mexico). Sightseeing includes the Cholula pyramid, several cathedrals, and the El Redentor statue of Christ in Torreon. Registration deadline, Jan. 4, 2008. Pastor Dennis Kleist, 920-740-5899; dennis.kleist@sab.wels.net. Sponsored by WELS Ministry of Christian Giving.

CEO Men's Rally—March 7-8, 2008. Brian Lampe, brianandracey@tds.net. Web site, www.stpaulmuskego.org.

Lutheran Pioneer and Lutheran Girl Pioneer International Conventions—March 7-8, 2008. Cranberry Inn Lodge, Tomah, Wis. Lutheran Girl Pioneers, 608-781-5232, lgp@charterinternet.net. Lutheran Pioneers, 888-214-8225, lpoffice@tds.net.

Martin Luther College choir tour 2008:

- March 8—6 P.M., Grace, Glendale, Ariz.
- March 9—10:30 A.M., Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz.; 4 P.M., Christ, Prescott Valley, Ariz.
- March 10—6:30 P.M., Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.
- March 11—11 A.M., Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.; 7 P.M., Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.
- March 12—7 P.M., Christ Our Redeemer, El Paso, Tex.
- March 14—7 P.M., Torreón mission, Torreón, Mexico
- March 15—Mini-concert, Saragosa Sur (Torreón mission), Mexico; 7 P.M., Monterrey, Mexico
- March 16—7 P.M., Our Savior, San Antonio, Tex.
- March 17—7 P.M., Holy Word, Austin, Tex.

- March 18—7 P.M., Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Tex.

- March 19—7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.

- March 30—3 P.M., St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

Christian Woman Today Retreat—April 4-6, 2008. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Theme: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

Today's Christian Woman Retreat—April 11-13, 2008. Radisson Hotel, Kalamazoo, Mich. Theme: "Keep me, keep me as the apple of your eye." Web site, www.tcwr.org.

WELS National Handbell Festival—April 12-13, 2008. Host, Emanuel, New London, Wis. Site, New London High School, New London, Wis. Concert, 2 P.M., April 13. Web site, www.welsbells.com.

Lutheran Pioneer and Lutheran Girl Pioneer International Pinocar Derbies—April 19, 2008. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Lutheran Girl Pioneers, 608-781-5232, lgp@charterinternet.net. Lutheran Pioneers, 888-214-8225, lpoffice@tds.net.

MLC, DMLC, and NWC Reunion Weekend—July 25-27, 2008. Site, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Celebrating five-year incremental class reunion (2003, 1998 and all previous classes ending in three or eight). Steve Balza, 507-217-1731; balzasj@mlc-wels.edu. Web site: www.mlc-wels.edu/home/alumni.

NAMES WANTED

McAllen/Harlingen/Brownsville/South Padre Island, Tex.—Joel Sauer, 956-968-5228; pastorsauer@abswels.net.

Brattleboro, Vt., and Keene, N.H.—Dan or Pam Meihak, meihaks@hughes.net.

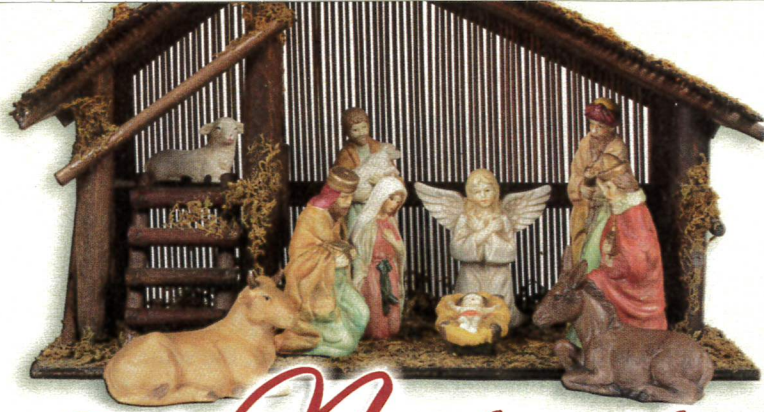
Butte, Mont.—Justin Cloute, 406-543-8222; cloutejr@hotmail.com.

Akron/Hartsville/Canton, Ohio—Mike or Sharon Webb, Webb2bs@neo.rr.com.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

English professors—Wisconsin Lutheran College, a Bible-based liberal arts college affiliated with WELS, is seeking candidates to teach English. Areas of expertise in descending order of importance would be composition, non-Western literature, and modern British literature. Membership in either WELS or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is necessary for employment. Doctorate preferred. Send letter of interest, three letters of recommendation, and current Curriculum Vitae to Dr. Martin Moldenhauer in care of WLC, 8800 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sab.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. View an updated bulletin board at www.wels.net/jump/bulletinboard and a calendar at www.wels.net/jump/calendar.



Christmas QUIZ

The Nativity

Among the oxen (like an ox I'm slow)
 I see a glory in the stable grow
 Which, with the ox's dullness might at length
 Give me an ox's strength.
 Among the asses (stubborn I as they)
 I see my Saviour where I looked for hay;
 So may my beast like folly learn at least
 The patience of a beast.
 Among the sheep (I like a sheep have strayed)
 I watch the manger where my Lord is laid;
 Oh that my baa-ing nature would win thence
 Some woolly innocence!

—C. S. Lewis

Picture this



Josh Paustian, a junior staff member at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis., free-falls into the arms of other high school volunteers. The trust fall is just one element of Camp Phillip's ropes course. The high ropes course challenges individuals and enhances confidence in one's own God-given abilities. The low ropes course challenges younger individuals to develop persistence and to resist frustration while attempting to reach a desired goal. Each element encourages communication and illustrates the importance of teamwork. For more information, go to www.campphillip.com.

1. Who prophesied to Mary that Christ was "destined to cause the falling and rising of many" and that a sword would pierce her own soul also?
 - a. Anna
 - b. Simeon
 - c. Elizabeth
 - d. Gabriel
2. From what direction did the magi come?
 - a. North
 - b. South
 - c. East
 - d. West
3. Where was Christ when the magi came to visit him?
 - a. In a house
 - b. In the temple
 - c. In the manger
 - d. In the womb
4. Whose prophecy was fulfilled when Herod had all boys in Bethlehem two years old and under killed?
 - a. Isaiah
 - b. Jeremiah
 - c. Ezekiel
 - d. Malachi
5. When was Christ circumcised?
 - a. At birth
 - b. He wasn't
 - c. At 13 years old
 - d. At eight days old

Answers

1. b. Simeon. (See Luke 2:25-35.)
2. c. East. (See Matthew 2:1,2.)
3. a. In a house. The Magi did not visit Christ until he was a young child and came to him in a house. (See Matthew 2:11.)
4. b. Jeremiah. (See Matthew 2:17,18 and Jeremiah 31:15.)
5. d. At eight days old. Isaac was the first to be circumcised at eight days old, which became the customary time for circumcision.

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.

Tensions build. Schedules become impossible. In addition to confirmation classes, you want your children to gain multi-life experiences—soccer, swimming, golf, tennis, football, basketball, music lessons of all types, gymnastics, dance, drama, and—you name it. Maybe more than children can or want to do? You rush to meet the schedules. You rarely eat or pray together. There is no time to enjoy each other during the week. Frustrations mount. Tempers flare. Feelings are hurt. Poor choices are made. Life turns into chaos.

Suddenly everything seems to collapse. Assignments not done; falling grades; a call to see the principal; mixing with the wrong crowd; shoplifting; maybe even drug involvement. Youthful innocence turns into a huge headache for you as a parent as well as for your child.

Help!

You may feel that you have failed. You are not sure where to go or what to do. Your guilt makes it difficult to be with others. You think the collapse is all your fault, but you are not quite ready to admit it. You forget the picture God gives using parental language, “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13). At this moment you and your child stand in need of that special comfort from God.

Times of parental growth and pitfalls go with you throughout life. Even after the children are gone and you experience empty-nest syndrome, they return to your mind. But then you find more opportunity for reflection, for prayer, and for crafting helpfulness to maturing family members. You find opportunities to be a dinnertime parent and grandparent in ways that rarely passed through your mind in former times of frantic busyness.

God gives nourishment and strength through his Word. He forgives you and gives you strength. In difficult times, concentrate on the beauty and comfort of being connected to Jesus. In him, you and your children are held no mat-

ter how disastrous the day may seem. In Jesus all things hold together. Things hold together because Jesus forgives much, even your parental guilt.

Being a parent is a calling into which God has placed you. You might wish that the difficult days would just pass and that a new day would suddenly come. But in difficult days you resolve to pass through the troubled waters with your child. Jesus is with you, the same Jesus who held up a little child as an example of trusting faith. Let your connection with Jesus shine as you talk with your child, with the principal, with Christian friends who want to support you.

Held!

You are a Christian because you are held by Christ. He guides you and gives you courage to do the right thing. This

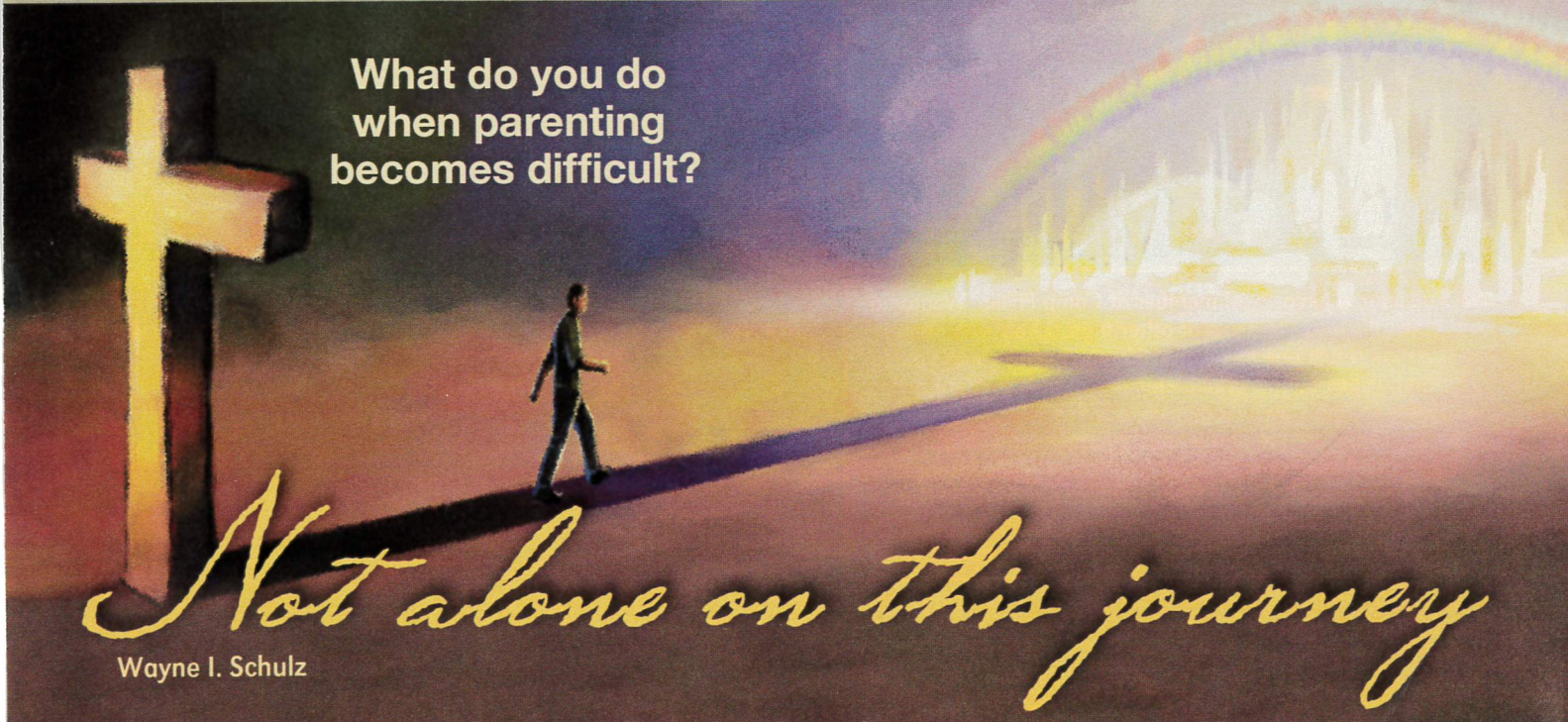
In Jesus, you and your children are held no matter how disastrous the day may seem.

makes you strong—strong enough to hold tightly to Jesus and your child, strong enough to show that love will not fail. God’s love will help you re-examine your household’s schedule. It will cause you to establish new priorities in life. That love will guide your child to see the ray of hope and help that you offer and supply. It will cause you to shine like a star in the universe (Philippians 2:15) as you hold out the Word of Life even—and especially—in tough situations.

Wayne Schulz, a mission counselor, is a member at Eastside, Madison, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a six-part series on challenges we face and how fellow Christians can help. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net, and search by the author’s first and last name.

ILLUSTRATION: GOODSALT



**What do you do
when parenting
becomes difficult?**

Not alone on this journey

Wayne I. Schulz

Yvonne Janosek:

Train a child

Raising her children in Africa meant challenges and opportunities for Yvonne Janosek.

Rachel Hartman

“Mom, look at her,” Kirsten said, referring to the actress on TV. “She’s so beautiful. She’s so beautiful in the face . . .”

Sitting down next to her daughter, Yvonne began to talk about the woman on television. Together they discussed what it meant to be beautiful. Yvonne called attention to the woman’s life, which was no model of Christian behavior. They talked about how physical appearance is not the most important feature people have. “If they are not behaving as a Christian on the outside,” Yvonne pointed out, “they can do a lot of damage.”

“We must have had this conversation seven times,” Yvonne recalls. Why was this discussion so important? Why did Yvonne take the time to sit down again and again with her daughter? She was simply following the Lord’s command. He asks us to train our children in the way they should go.

Finding the blessings

This training can be done wherever we might be. For the Janoseks, this meant raising a family in Africa. Missionary John Janosek was called to Northern Rhodesia, present-day Zambia, in 1964. The family moved to Malawi in 1966. They spent a total of 40 years in Africa.

The Janoseks arrived in Africa with a 14-month-old daughter. They were blessed with four more daughters who consider Africa home, and understandably so: the Janoseks lived in the same house for 38 years.

Africa is often associated with the word “challenges.” However, Yvonne

notes that in many ways raising a family there actually presented fewer challenges. Most of their children did not have access to television or magazines. Peer pressure was less of an issue. When troubles arose, the children relied on their parents as a support base.

There were advantages in school, too. The children attended the British schools, which required students to work hard. There was less pressure to be part of an in-crowd, and there were no geeks or nerds. “You were either a worker or a slacker in school,” adds Yvonne, who taught for more than 30 years in the school system her children attended.

Turning problems into opportunities

When incidents like the pretty face on television came up, the Janoseks looked for ways to discuss Christian values. “Many times what seems like a problem can be an opportunity,” observes Yvonne. “It’s a chance to sit down and talk to your children.”

The children did not receive classes about God’s Word at the British school. It was “the parents’ responsibility to teach religion,” says Yvonne. So the Janoseks, together with the other missionary families, held Bible classes in their homes. At times, the girls would leave the class discouraged because they had so much homework. Other times, the older girls went out with their father into the villages where they had a chance to witness firsthand what their father did.



(Left to right) John Janosek, Susan Nitz, Yvonne Janosek, and Paul Nitz in 2007. Paul and Susan Nitz currently serve in Malawi, Africa.

As they grew, the children became a mission force. At school, they were known as Christians. Four of the children learned to play the organ.

Today, the Janoseks are back in the United States. Their children are spread across the country, and one of their girls lives in Antigua. Yvonne says, “I have well-educated daughters, for which I am thankful. But my greatest earthly blessing is that they are in church on Sunday.”

The Lord asks us to train our children; he also gives us opportunities to do so, regardless of where we are. As we do so, the Holy Spirit blesses our efforts and works faith in the hearts of family members. Through his grace, we are able to share our knowledge of the one thing needful in this life.

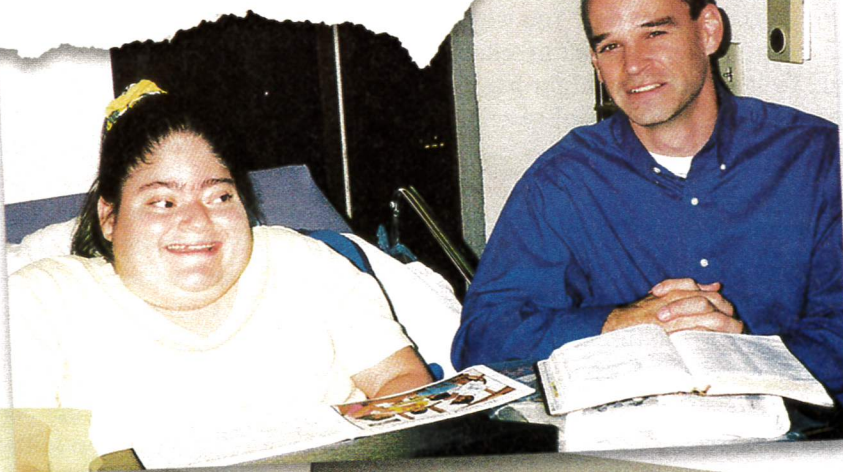
Rachel Hartman and her husband, Missionary Michael Hartman, are serving in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico.

Next: Marlys Reid: On Christ the solid rock I stand

These words remind a family to rely on God as they care for children with special needs.

With God All Things Are Possible

Alicia A. Neumann



It's early morning, and most of the houses in Muskego, Wis., are still dark and quiet; but inside one house the hum of oxygen machines and medical pumps can be heard. Just down the hall, a clock reads 4:30 A.M. The alarm sounds, signaling the start of another busy day for Ginger and Richard Braam. As they get ready for the challenges that lie ahead, Ginger reads the handwriting on a small, faded piece of notebook paper taped to her bathroom mirror: "Ginge, with God all things are possible. Love, Richard." For the past 22 years these words have served as a daily reminder for her: God is in charge. Rely on him and trust in his plan.

Getting five special-needs children ready for the day is quite a production at the Braam household. Respiratory equipment, heart monitors, feeding tubes, overhead lifts, and specialty medications are just some of the things that can be found in their seven-bedroom home. "In the morning, it's a mad rush to get everyone up," says Ginger. "We get some of the kids ready for school, some ready for therapy, and some have medical appointments. Everybody's on their own schedule."

Almost all of the kids—Josh, 28; Jennifer, 17; Linda, 15; Brenden, 10; and Eric, 6—were adopted as infants. In addition to emotional, physical, and mental disabilities, the children



Top left: Jennifer has catechism class with John Borgwardt, pastor at Living Word, Waukesha, Wis. Since Jenny can't go out, Borgwardt comes to the home for one-on-one instruction. Jenny will be confirmed next spring.

Bottom left: The Braam family gets together for a family picture. Ginger (back far right) and Richard (back middle) have five birth children, five adopted children, and nine grandchildren—and they are in the process of adopting another boy.

also have severe medical conditions including profound cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and hyperactivity. "All of our children have had a rough start," says Ginger, "but they've improved. The doctors are amazed when we go [in for checkups]. They're amazed at what the love of a family can do."

How did their family get to be so big? Ginger says, "It kind of evolved. It was God's plan for us, because it took a whole lot of things to move us in this direction." The Braams started out as a blended family—Richard had two sons, Ginger had a daughter, and they had two children together. "We had always talked about having more children, and the possibility of adopting, but we didn't really pursue that," says Ginger.

It wasn't until Richard switched jobs that the idea resurfaced. He started working in group homes, and soon he and Ginger were involved with several of the activities for disabled adults. Eventually the Braams applied to become an adult family home. "After doing that for about four or five years, we were told there was an infant who had extreme medical problems that needed a foster care home," says Ginger. The Braams took the little boy in and have been caring for children with special needs ever since. "I counted once—more than 40 children and adults have come to us through respite care, foster care, or adoption."

By mid-morning nurses are bustling about, helping the kids with their daily routines. "We have a lot of people coming into our home to serve the children," says Ginger. Vendors come weekly to drop off supplies and fill oxygen tanks. Physical and occupational therapists arrive periodically to work with the children. Nurses are in and out. "Sometimes it's

almost like we're running a miniature hospital," says Ginger. "But I try to look at it as an opportunity to [witness]. Maybe that's why God brings so many challenges into our lives—maybe he wants that person, whom ever we're working with, to come to know Jesus."

Eric, their youngest son, goes to public school every day and does his fair share of witnessing there. "Eric has every Christian videotape memorized," shares Ginger. "Although he is hyperactive and has trouble focusing, he can sing his little heart out! He goes to school and he sings all of his Jesus songs there. One day he stood up and told his classmates, 'All of you have to believe in Jesus!'"

She continues, "God has certainly used him as a witness. . . . He's singing God's praises and all those people are hearing it. I think that's just really something special, like topping on a cake. So it's not always what we can do for these children; a lot of it is what they can do for us."

As the afternoon settles in, volunteers start dropping by to take the kids for walks, read books to them, chat, or play games. "It is really a great time when people visit and we can have Christian fellowship in the process," says Ginger. "It's also good for the children to have some sense of community because many of our kids are homebound and don't get out except for medical appointments." This also gives Richard and Ginger some down time so they can take care of errands and household tasks.

Even with volunteers and helpers, however, providing round-the-clock care can take its toll. "There have been times when I felt alone and overwhelmed; but I just took one day at a time and relied on God," says Ginger. "God is the answer. I talk

to God all day long—I can't imagine going through a day without him! Jesus is my very best friend."

The Braams work to instill that thought in their children, too. "The most important thing we can give these children is God's Word, and he will take care of the rest."

Ginger and Richard are amazed at how God has worked to bring them to this point in their lives. "God just moved us forward and edged us along, and this is where we ended up," shares Ginger. "We feel really blessed to have this opportunity. My mother always looks at me and says, 'I can't believe you do this.' I used to be the most finicky child. I couldn't even change a diaper or stand the sight of someone drooling. Now I live with it. What's the explanation of that? It's God! He changes you and molds you into what he wants you to be."

Although their caregiving situation is unique, the Braams say they are just like other families. "We meet the same challenges that everyone else meets out there," says Ginger. "It seems like a lot of people say we have a gift, or put us up on a pedestal for doing this every day. But we're in life just like everybody else. We're in the trenches. We have our day-to-day battles; some are spiritual and some are physical. . . . but somehow God sees us through."

Ginger says caring for others—especially those that can't care for themselves—has truly been a blessing. "You change your lifestyle and learn what sacrifice and commitment are. You learn to appreciate what Jesus did for you. He did an awful lot more than what we could ever do for these children." By caring for others, she says, we get to sample a small piece of what Jesus did for us.

Alicia Neumann is the assistant editor for Forward in Christ.



Mark Schweden

Keeping the cross in Christmas

It's that time of the year when the bumper stickers will be encouraging us to "Keep Christ in Christmas." There is good reason for those reminders. Christians have long sensed that the celebration of the birth of Jesus has been the object of an attempted hijacking. Those who have little use for the Christ Child for 11 months of the year seem all too eager to use the celebration of his birth to hawk the latest electronic gadget and to pad their sales figures. Those whose thoughts and hearts are usually far from Jesus in June use his birth as a reason to party and celebrate excessively in December.

Even God's people, filled with the best of intentions to make their celebration of Christmas spiritual, often find themselves caught up in the hectic pace or sentimentality of the holidays.

And so it is, after we've allowed our attention to be diverted and distracted, that we sometimes sigh and say, "It just doesn't *seem* like Christmas this year."

Perhaps the best antidote for that annual struggle is to remember something very important: Christmas is not just the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child. It is not only the stirring message of the angels. It is not merely the simple faith and joy of the shepherds or the quiet trust of Mary and Joseph. It's so much more than that.

The story of Christmas is something that cannot be fully understood and appreciated unless it is also the story of the cross. That little child was born for one reason and one reason alone. His birth was not the end of the story; it was only the beginning. His birth was the first step on a journey that would end on another hill outside Jerusalem—a hill on which that child's mother would see him not nestled in a manger, but nailed in agony to a cross. The baby of Bethlehem came to this world to die. For your sins. For my sins. For the sins of the world.

If you want your celebration of Christmas to be especially meaningful this year, begin your celebration with humble repentance. Remember not just that he came, but why he came. Whenever you think of that stable, bathed in the light of glory of the Lord on that first Christmas, see the shadow of a distant cross looming over that stable. A cross where that Christ Child would demonstrate his amazing love for us—a love that moved him not only to be born for us, but to die for us.

Remembering that, you and I will have every reason to celebrate and be filled with the kind of joy that doesn't disappear with the decorations.

LESSONS FROM THE CREED

Charles F. Degner

"From there he will come to judge the living and the dead."

I have read only the first book in the "Left Behind" series. It was captivating and terrifying and misleading. Because it reads like an action novel, it is easier to read than the Bible. I fear that uninformed Christians will be captivated by the story and swallow the false doctrine.

What will happen on the last day

There will be no thousand-year reign of Christ after he comes again. We are in the thousand-year reign of Christ *right now*. The Bible uses the picture of a thousand years (Revelation 20) to describe how believers will reign with Jesus from the time he ascended into heaven until that day he comes in glory.

Paul gives us the blow-by-blow description of the Last Day: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud

command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the

dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Will people be left behind? Yes, they will. Believers will be caught up to heaven. The unbelievers will be left behind to face God's judgment. This

WE ARE IN THE THOUSAND-YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST RIGHT NOW.

is not a secret "rapture" followed by a reign of terror and then the millennium. When you hear the trumpet sound, you will know that Jesus has come to judge the living and the dead.

You will not be afraid on that day! Jesus told his disciples, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Unbelievers will be terrified on that day. Believers will know that Jesus has come to take them to heaven.

We need to be prepared

The Bible uses lots of pictures to describe judg-

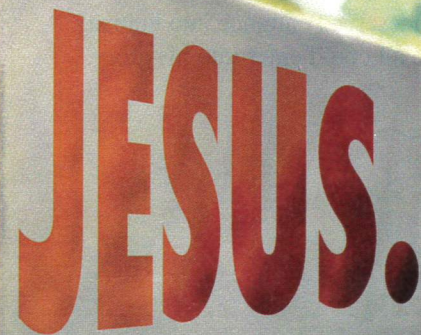
ment day. In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), Jesus compares his coming to a wedding celebration that waits for the bridegroom. The story teaches us to be ready for that day and to have the lamp of faith burning in our hearts. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), judgment day is compared to a day when we must give an account of our lives. In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46), the shepherd separates the sheep and the goats, just as Jesus will separate the believers from the unbelievers on the Last Day.

Each of these stories emphasizes the same point. "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:44). He will come as a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43), and no one can say what day or hour that he will come again (Matthew 24:36). So be ready all the time!

And you are ready, if you are trusting in Jesus as your Savior with a Spirit-given faith that is nurtured in Word and sacrament. With such a faith, we pray, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at Saint Peter, Saint Peter, Minnesota.

This is the last article in a 10-part series on the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net, and search by the author's first and last name.



JESUS.



John A. Brann

Looking beyond

Parents and grandparents—perhaps grandparents especially—come to church very early to get a seat up front on Christmas. They want to be as close as possible for the children’s service. The best seat in church means that you can see better and see everything.

I suppose the shepherds were no different on that first Christmas Eve. They came to see Jesus. The angels told them where to look. Although they didn’t have to fight the crowds, I imagine them timidly inching forward to get as close as possible to the manger. They wanted to see this special child.

They saw a baby, swaddled in strips of cloth. If it had not been for the angelic announcement in the dead of night, it might have been simply a common sight—perhaps a little unusual. After all, this mother gave birth in a place for animals. It makes for an interesting story.

You’ve heard other stories of unusual births. The mother who gives birth on the freeway or on a bus. Families tell and retell those stories. We have one too. Our daughter couldn’t wait. Mom was rushed to the hospital by ambulance and arrived nine minutes before she delivered. It’s not as dramatic as many other stories, but we tell and retell the story. It’s become part of our family history.

The birth in Bethlehem has become part of the history of the Christian family throughout the centuries. It will be retold again this year and next. The birth of Jesus is a special event, and some houses have nativity sets outside that light up at night. Others have them inside on the table or under the tree to celebrate the birth of all births.

But Christmas invites us to look beyond the manger or the nativity set. In this little, helpless child in Bethlehem, God comes to earth. He is mighty God. But who could tell by looking at him? Could the shepherds? I don’t think so. They were told he was “Christ, the Lord.” Did the angels use the special name for Jehovah when they called Jesus “Lord”? I like to think so. But if you looked just with your eyes, he was a baby with an unusual story to tell about his birth.

The problem has been that the world continues to see him only that way. Many of his contemporaries didn’t see Jesus any other way. He ate, slept, walked, and talked like everyone else. When he became a threat, he had to be eliminated and killed.

Yet, on many occasions, Jesus demonstrated that he was not just what they saw. The centurion knew it. The fishermen who let down their nets in the Sea of Galilee noticed that this man was not just what they saw. Peter confessed, “You are the Son of God.”

The great marvel of his birth is that God came to be like us—a human, one of us. The world still doesn’t get it. They will retell the unusual story of his birth and not see beyond—not see that this child is God come to earth. He did not come just to be like us but to rescue us from our sick world and our own aging and decaying flesh.

That’s important because when I look in the mirror, I can look beyond the grey—and the wrinkles too. What I see is not what I will be because of that unusual birth in Bethlehem. Look beyond and see God’s wonderful undeserved entrance into human history so we all could enter into his glory.

ears earlier, Jacob fled from his brother, his family, and his home. Alone, afraid, and at the onset of years of adversity, Jacob had nothing with him but his staff. That is until God gave him something to take with him: a promise. Years later, God brought Jacob full circle—back to the place of the promise—and spoke once more to this man who wrestled with God.

Review Genesis 28:10-22 and then Genesis 35:1-5.

1. In chapter 28, God promised to be with Jacob, to bless him, and to bring him back to the land. What did Jacob promise?
2. What were some ways that God kept his promises? (See Genesis 30:43; 32:9-12; 32:22-29; 33:4.)
3. Why didn't Jacob keep his promise to God? What hints do you see in verse 35:2 and in chapter 34?
4. Evaluate the relationship between Jacob's personal faith and his role as spiritual leader of his household.
5. Explain: The faith of a Christian runs like a roller coaster—some days weak, others strong.
6. After years of fear and frustration, Jacob is now living a good life. Explain: The greatest challenge of our faith comes in times of prosperity, not times of adversity.
7. Look at 35:2-5. Jacob prepared his family to meet God by preaching law and gospel. Where do you see each?
8. Who are the people in your life that God uses to preach law and gospel to you? Who are the people to whom God wants you to preach law and gospel?

Read Genesis 35:6-15.

1. Look at verses 9,10. God had changed Jacob's name to Israel after their wrestling bout in Genesis 32. Why would God repeat the name change here?
2. When did God make a "name-changing promise" to you?

3. What are some ways that you or your church can help people remember their baptism, their place of the promise?
4. Look at the command God gave Jacob in verse 11. Does it sound familiar? Look up Genesis 1:28 and 9:1,7. What was God's point? (Hint: It's not just to have lots of kids.)
5. Compare God's promise to Jacob in verses 11,12 with the promise he made him years earlier in Genesis 28:13-15. How did God expand it?
6. Why would parts of that promise still be hard for Jacob to believe?
7. Which promises of God are hardest for you to believe?
8. How did God assure Jacob and us that he can keep his promises?
9. In this chapter, it seems like when good times came, Jacob started to take God for granted. So God brought him back to the place of the promise. How does God do that for you?

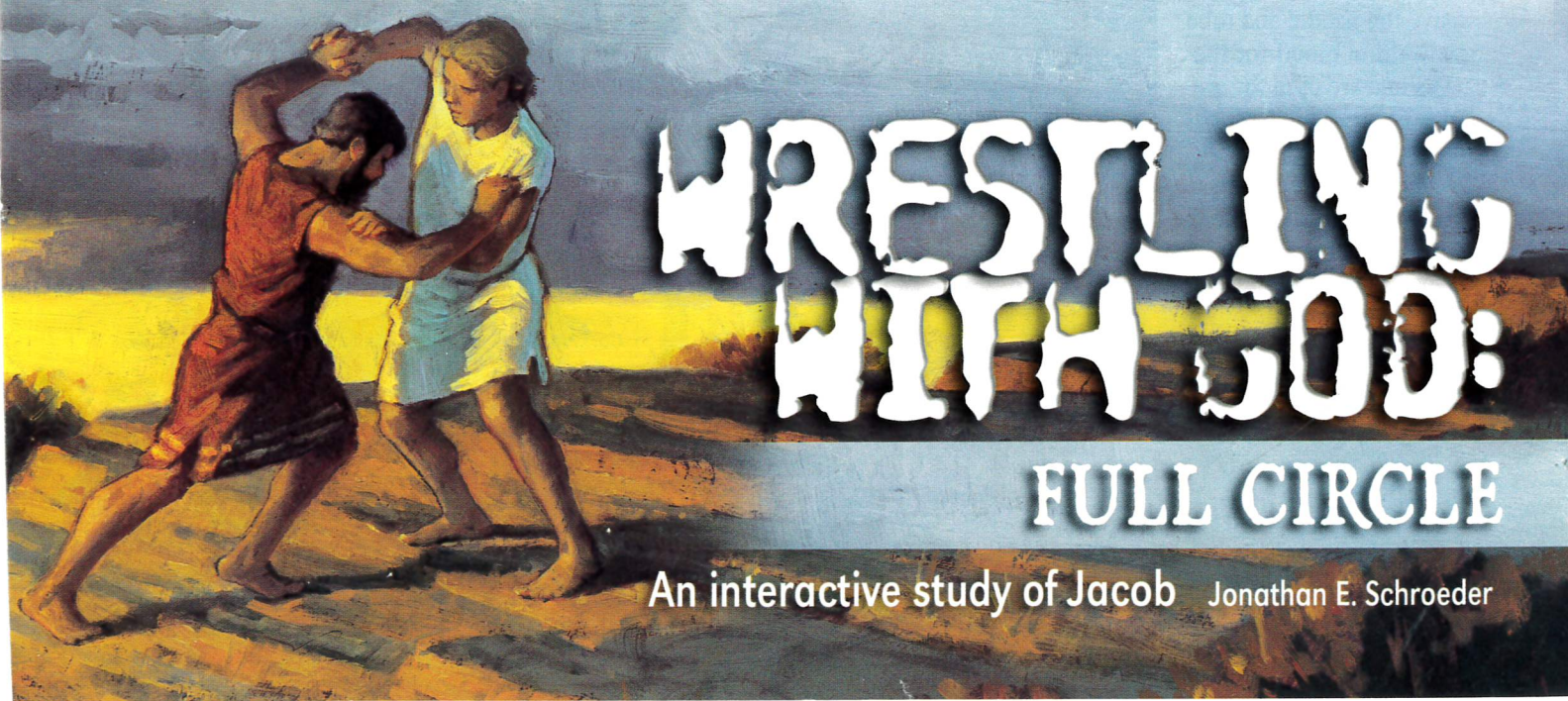
Bringing it home

Jacob's life was far from over. He still was to see more adversity and more promises fulfilled. He would lose a son, only to find him again ruling over one of the world's superpowers. He would die in a foreign land, but lie in state and be carried to his grave by the nobility of Egypt. Through it all he lived as we do, as people of the Promise. God fulfilled every promise and took Jacob and turned him into Israel, the man who wrestled with God.

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

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

ILLUSTRATION: JOHNSON AND FANCHER



WRESTLING WITH GOD:

FULL CIRCLE

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder

The ultimate gift

A conversation about Jesus while giving blood leads to a mistake—and a prayer that one soul would be saved.

Carl R. Henkel

The bag connected to my arm by a needle and plastic tube filled quickly. “Record speed,” said the technician as she made small talk. “You’ll be out of here in no time.”

I was donating blood. Christmas was coming, and blood was in short supply.

A life-giving discussion

As we continued to talk, she learned that I was a Lutheran pastor, and I learned that she wasn’t “into the church thing.” She also told me that her mother and grandmother were Christian, but that she had “never gotten into it.”

But she was interested. She asked several questions. It seemed her biggest fear and concern was “where do I start?” I encouraged her to attend Christmas Eve services since Christmas was just a couple days away. I told her that Christmas was a very good place to start because that was when God sent his Son to start his life on earth as our Savior from sin. She thought that was a good idea and that she and her children might go. She mentioned again how pleased her grandmother and mother would be if she were to join them at a Christmas Eve service.

I knew that her questions and our discussion were more than just casual chitchat. She removed the filled bag from my arm along with the tube and the needle. She was so engrossed in the conversation that she forgot to leave the needle and tube in to draw blood for the vials that are used for testing. Those vials had to accompany the bag.

She apologized and said she’d have to take the blood for the vials from my other arm, which meant moving to the other side of the bloodmobile. I said that it was no problem and that she didn’t have to apologize.

Three different technicians poked and prodded and poked some more, trying to locate the vein in my other arm, each without success. As time went on, I must have been getting pale because they cranked up the air conditioning and changed the position of the bed.

What began as an uneventful “record speed” donation had now reached the maximum time limit, and they had to stop.

My technician was very, very sorry. She knew that because she was engrossed in conversation she had made a mistake. I was sorry for her because she was so sorry!

Because the testing vials were missing, my bag of blood would have to be thrown out.

A prayer for opportunities

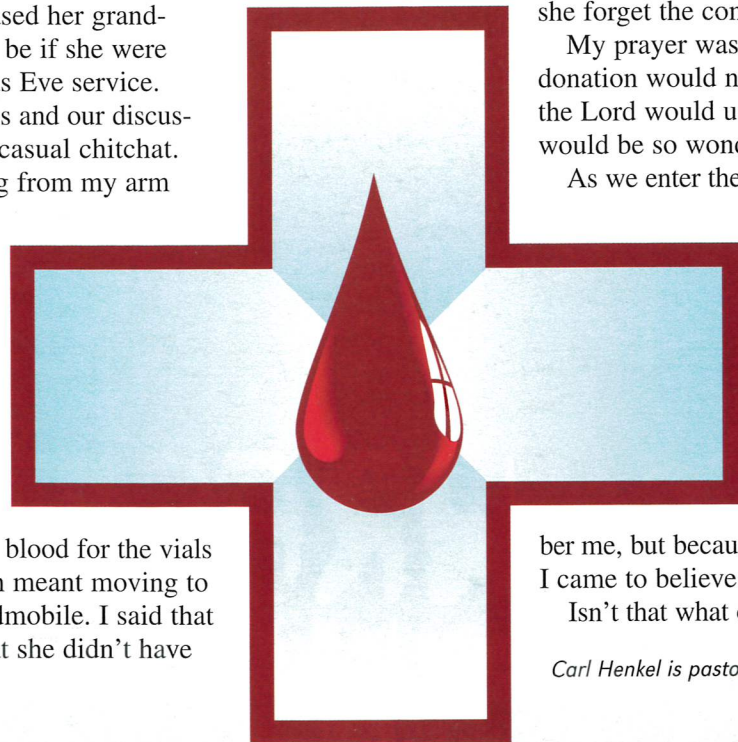
My prayer that afternoon—and many times afterward—was that the Lord would use that conversation and “mistake” for a higher purpose. That he would use it to bring this lady and her children into a relationship with him. She wouldn’t soon forget her “mistake” nor would she forget the conversation that led up to it.

My prayer was that even though my blood donation would not be used to save a life, the Lord would use it to save a soul. That would be so wonderful and amazing!

As we enter the new year, I pray that each of us look for—and seize—the opportunities the Lord places before us to share the life and love of Jesus with others. Wouldn’t it be great if, in heaven, someone were to come up to you or me and say, “You probably don’t remember me, but because you told me about Jesus I came to believe in him!”

Isn’t that what our life on earth is all about?

Carl Henkel is pastor at Mt. Olive, St. Paul, Minnesota.



I pray that each of us look for—and seize—the opportunities the Lord places before us . . .