

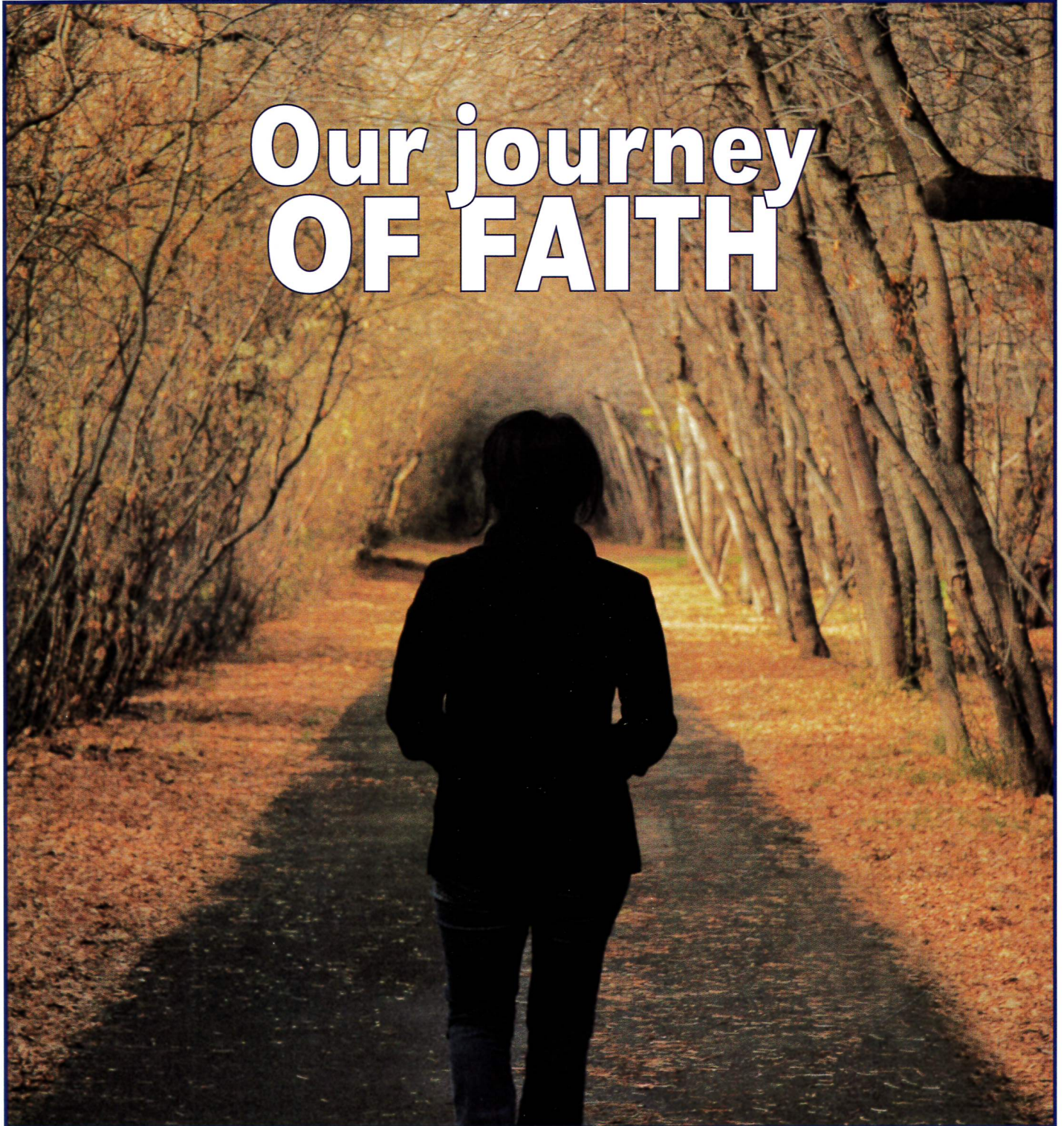
POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION • MILLENNIALISM

FEBRUARY 2008

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness

Our journey
OF FAITH



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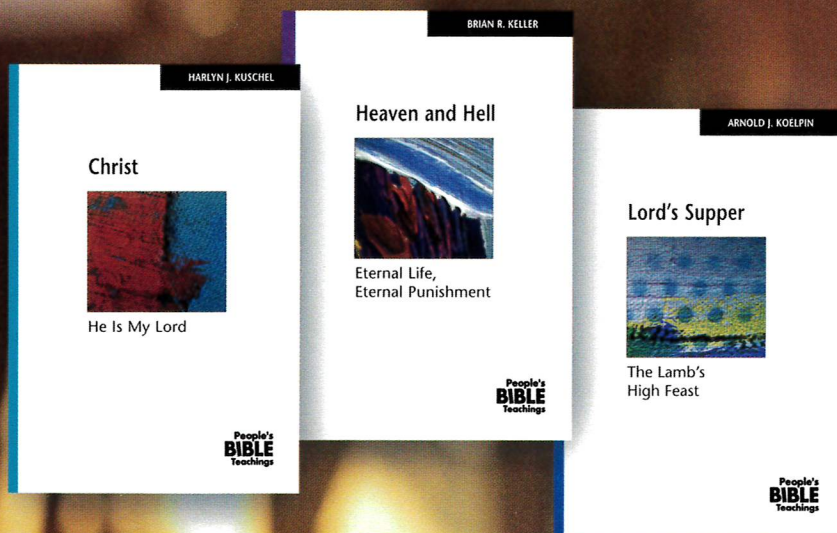
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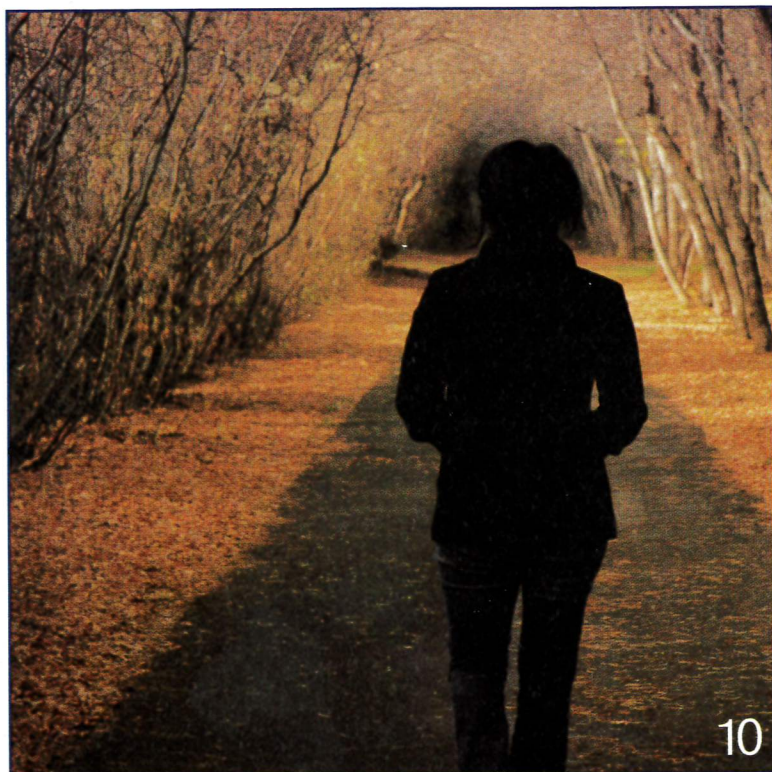
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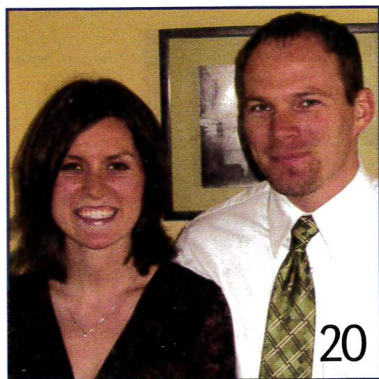
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“Every Lenten season,
walking beside my Lord
and seeing his passion,
my soul is stilled.”



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Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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2008

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June 16-19, 2008

Country Springs Hotel ■ Waukesha, Wisconsin



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English Standard Version

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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

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FEBRUARY

WHAT'S INSIDE by Julie Wietzke

To most Christians, the seven words Jesus spoke from the cross are probably as familiar as the Luke 2 version of the Christmas story. We can recite these statements from memory and easily describe the circumstances that surround them. But have you stopped lately to consider what those words mean to your life now? What comfort they can bring, especially when your soul is restless or troubled?

In "Our journey of faith" (p. 10), Mark Gass invites us to "follow the journey of our Lord's passion" and to let the words that Jesus spoke calm us, wherever we are in our own journey. It gave me an all new appreciation for what these almost 2,000-year-old words mean to me and the world I live in.

This issue, I also gained a new appreciation for how Old and New Testament heroes of faith dealt with trouble in their lives. But Thomas Jeske in "Ball in play" (p. 8) also reminds us that they needed God's help and guidance just like we do now.

God bless your Lenten journey as you let Jesus and his Word still your soul and guide your actions.

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WHO CAN TAKE HOLY COMMUNION?

Your piece, "Connected to Jesus" [Dec. 2007], carried a statement that surprised me.

Speaking of the eligibility for Christians to commune, you stated "... those with certain diminished mental abilities should not attend." What are those "certain" disqualifiers?

*Ed Scott
Denver, Colorado*

Executive editor John Braun replies: Paul wrote that one should "examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). Those who have impaired mental abilities that make self-examination impossible should not participate at the Lord's Table. They cannot reflect on their sins and the meaning of the Sacrament. Such cases are difficult at times and require the human judgment of a pastor or family member—usually both. However these "diminished mental abilities" came about—birth, accident, or aging—Jesus has purchased that soul with his blood and claimed it by the work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel in the Sacrament of Baptism. They remain in the loving forgiveness of their baptism. They simply are unable to examine themselves and to understand what the Sacrament of the Altar gives them.

SACRIFICIAL GIVING

I believe that the concerns expressed by Mr. John Sazy in his letter [Feedback, Dec. 2007] have already been addressed at the most recent synod convention. Here there was almost a complete turnaround in the direction the synod is taking. Mr. Sazy should continue his sacrificial giving and thank the Lord for this change.

*Arthur E. Brandt
Mesa, Arizona*

NEW MISSION START-UPS

In an article titled "WELS membership declining" [Sept. 2007], the author stated that in the past 16 years, 150,000 persons have been released from membership in WELS.

I would like to point out that in the fluid society of today, many people are relocating due to employment changes or retirement and that many areas of our country are void of WELS churches. When we retired to Crossville, Tenn., in 1996, we found no WELS church in the area and, as a result, were left with little choice but to join in fellowship with an LCMS church.

Tennessee, although known as a Bible Belt area, has less than 10 percent of its population attending church on a regular basis, making it one of the prime mission fields of North America. With many areas

like ours that do not have a WELS church to reach out to the lost or to receive dislocated WELS members, perhaps the synod should consider realignment of its priorities to assist and support start-ups of new mission congregations.

Thankfully, with God's help and direction, a group of us are hopeful that in starting a WELS mission church to serve this area, we might start reversing the trend of WELS membership decline.

*Don Schimmel
Crossville, Tennessee*

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*.

EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL!

Teens, let us know what's on your mind. We're looking for 600-word articles with a Christ-centered focus to print in **Whatever**, a *Forward in Christ* department that's written by teens for teens about teen issues. Tell us what issues you're dealing with and how your faith helped you face them.

Share your experiences by sending your stories to **Whatever**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222.

Or you can submit stories online at www.wels.net/jump/whatever.



Atop Mt. Misery

“Sit here while I go over there and pray. . . . My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Matthew 26:36,38

James A. Mattek

At this time of the year I’m reminded of a particular hill from my childhood. The hill was legendary in the minds of children and triggered visions of broken bones in the minds of parents. The city’s founding fathers hadn’t given the hill a name, but every child in town knew where you were going when you said, “I’m going sledding on Mt. Misery.”

From the top of snow-covered Mt. Misery one could see for miles. The steep grade and multiple moguls invited only the bravest of hearts. Few sleds made it to the bottom without spilling the passengers along the way. Some wooded toboggans even broke into pieces.

Our toboggan was long and as many as five friends would sit one behind the other, locking legs around the person in front of them. We wrapped our arms tightly around as well. We were in this together, and somehow that made us braver. Onlookers gathered around and smiled while one of them pushed us over the edge. Would we make it to the bottom or would we hit a mogul, become airborne, and upon impact fly in all directions like popping popcorn? To “survive” the descent would bring shouts of jubilation.

Jesus’ Mt. Misery

On the night of his betrayal Jesus climbed a familiar hill. From the top he could see forever—far into eternity. Across the valley he saw more than the nighttime campfires of Jerusalem. He saw his betrayer slinking through the shadows with a plan. He saw

armed temple guards gathering with torches. He saw hissing demons, giddy with anticipation. Then in the darkness, emerging from the earth, he saw the ruler of darkness, strong and bold. Hell was breaking loose for the big event. The Prince of Life was about to experience the wages of sin in doing battle with the prince of hell.

The thought of descending this hill sent chills down his holy spine. Gethsemane was becoming Jesus’ Mt. Misery. “Stay here and keep watch with me.” Even for him, being in this together with friends helped somehow. And then he prayed and prayed and prayed.

We don’t know everything Jesus thought and saw that night, but we do know that he was shaken to his incarnate core. His earthly friends weren’t much help. A comforting member of the heavenly host would be his friend there.

Jesus’ other hill to climb

From that hill Jesus saw another hill, outside the city wall. Obedient to his Father he would descend this hill and climb that one . . . alone. Why? Because of something else he could see from that hill. He saw me and you. He saw the dead, the living, and the yet-to-be born. He saw the inclinations of our hearts. He saw our filthy, ragtag, best efforts at righteousness. He looked for holiness—even one who was holy—but found none. What he saw in us, he



would become on the distant hill. Because God so loved the world, his Son would need to become the world’s sin. An enormous price for eternal pardon.

So Jesus left the angel sent from heaven to meet head-on the angel cast from heaven. Before ascending to heaven he would descend the hill alone to do battle on a cosmic scale. Love walked down that hill. Jesus would rather go to hell for us than go to heaven without us. Our response? Shouts of jubilation.

Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

Ball in play

Thomas J. Jeske

The shortstop watches carefully, poised for the unexpected. The batter may send the ball his way. Each inning all through this contest, the man with the glove is on the receiving end of surprises. Sometimes the ball comes at him like a lightning bolt, and sometimes it looks more like a rabbit running for its life.

ESPN *SportsCenter* know-it-all watch, replay, and condense each play. With the benefit of slow motion and hindsight, they make glib editorial comments and render opinions and judgments about every play. Yet not one of them is out there in the dirt between second and third base. The game's outcome rides on the one who has to handle the ball in play.

Beloved Bible episodes are often compressed into replay mode, too. We don't have to lie face-down on the ground for seven days as David did when he grieved the consequences of his hard heart (2 Samuel 11-12:25). Nor do we have the anxiety of Abraham's all-nighter before he saddled his donkey for Moriah (Genesis 22:1-19). We can simply read it from our recliner in 20 seconds.

We say we have known the episode of Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6) since we were children? But are we still able to hear it as if the ball is in play? Instinctively we think "Oh, Daniel gets out of this." That's only because we didn't have to crouch in the bones and litter, see the green eyes in the darkness, or hear the grunts of large predators. Who can say Daniel knew he was going to get out of that den of lions?

What about the muck at the bottom of the cistern that slipped away under Jeremiah's feet (Jeremiah 38:1-13)? No fair for me to say, "Oh, it's all right; he gets out of there." The gang stoning the apostle to death outside

Lystra's city gate (Acts 14:8-20) did not say, "Enough of that, boys. Paul gets to stumble away from this one. There are still 14 more chapters of Acts to go."

God permits troubles into the lives of his redeemed children in order to conform us to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29). These range from the pressures of our daily duty to migraines. There are long, drawn-out periods of waiting that test our patience, like John in Herod's prison cell, when doubts about Jesus cook away in us. There are shocks, up to and including the death of our bodies, that make our knees give way.

We remember heroes of faith. But they did not all have unusual strength, intrepid self-command, unflinching grasp of words, coolness under pressure, or undaunted courage. We might slip into thinking that Bible women had all achieved elite status or were to be found in accelerated courses of faith.

They were just believers, but believers they were. They got scared. They had to learn some hard truths about themselves. They shuddered at the sins they were capable of. They feared what God's justice must do. And then they remembered: "When I am afraid, I will trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). Every one of them knew that the "you" in that sentence was the One who promised to send his Son.

God wants his children to call on him in the day of trouble. God wants our deliverance to be a marvel, not a given. For you and me there is always an element of surprise, a new reason to thank the Father, a new song to sing today. Heads up. Ball in play.

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

God wants my deliverance to be a marvel, not a given.

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

Questions about Cain's wife are often asked by Bible students and frequently used by religious skeptics who seek to discredit the reliability of the Bible.

Clarence Darrow, ACLU lawyer in the infamous 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee, asked about Cain's wife. When William Jennings Bryan, seen as a representative of Bible believers at the trial, failed to provide a suitable answer, the media portrayed Christians as unable to defend the biblical text. This caricature persists. Prominent atheist Carl Sagan's 1985 bestseller *Contact* assigned the question about Cain's wife a prominent role in bringing disillusionment to a fictional professing Christian. Again, the real target was the integrity and reliability of Scripture.

Do we have an adequate answer? The Bible does not answer the question directly, but provides ample information for us to draw a solid conclusion. All people are descended from Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:20; Acts 17:26), who had many children aside from Cain, Abel, and Seth (Genesis 5:4). Genesis 4 does not give us a complete listing of all of Adam and Eve's children or a full account of everything that happened during their lifetime. It stresses those people and events that are pertinent to the purpose of the book of Genesis. As is common throughout Scripture, we are given selective snapshots of purposefully chosen people for the presentation of law and gospel in the course of history.

The Bible does not say how old Cain was when he killed Abel. Both may have been adults, possibly with families of their own. Adam and Eve may have had many children besides Cain and Abel by the time Abel was murdered. The fact that Cain was scared for his own safety after he killed Abel (Genesis 4:14) indicates that there were other children and perhaps even grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Adam and Eve at that time. Eve calls Seth a replacement for Abel (Genesis 4:25), but it

Q. It is not legal or moral to marry your sister. So whom did Cain marry?

does not necessarily follow that she had no other children between the births of Abel and Seth. The focus on Seth is important because he was chosen to perpetuate the ancestral line of the Savior (Genesis 5; Luke 3:38). A reasonable

assumption drawn from the chronology given in Genesis 5:3 may see the birth of Seth occurring a century or more after the births of Cain and Abel—and of many other siblings.

Cain and Seth—and perhaps Abel—must have married a sister or niece or great-niece. Cain's unnamed wife (mentioned in Genesis 4:17) was a daughter or granddaughter of Adam and Eve. This was not immoral or illegal at that time, but necessary. Formalized in Mosaic regulations, prohibitions against marrying close family members did not come until much later in history (Leviticus 18:6,9). Even Abraham's wife Sarah was his half-sister (Genesis 20:12).

When we react negatively to this kind of intermarriage, we are viewing the act in the light of civil laws, genetic concerns, and social norms that developed long after the earliest generations of mankind. Since God started with one man and one woman, the second generation had no choice but to intermarry among themselves if they were to be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28).

The question about Cain's wife is valuable to remind us not to make assumptions that aren't revealed in Scripture, to alert us to the valid use of implicit conclusions drawn from explicitly revealed information, and to stimulate us to do our homework and be prepared to respond courteously yet firmly to skeptics seeking to discredit the Bible's integrity.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

Learn more about Prof. Bivens on p. 22.

A person in a dark jacket is walking away from the camera down a path lined with trees. The ground is covered in fallen autumn leaves, and the trees have some yellow and orange foliage. The scene is lit with a warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Our journey of FAITH

Wherever we are in our journey, following the journey of our Lord's passion provides hope and comfort to our souls.

Mark A. Gass

*I*t was another one of those roller-coaster days. This time it was the downhill of the ride.

The journey of the life of faith

Once again our hearts were plunging. Sitting in the family counseling room, the doctor explained why they had to put my wife, Kris, into the medically induced coma. There she lay, motionless—the only evidence of life was the beeping of the monitor. Right outside the door a waiting room of friends and family waited for us. How could I face them with the tears running from my eyes?

"Stop it! Stop it!" I yelled inwardly to myself. "You are a pastor. You can't be crying. You are a pastor and you must be strong." The more I rebuked myself, the more the tears came.

Then those words hit me—from my favorite psalm—"Be still, and know that I am God . . . Be still, and know that I am God." Take a deep breath. "Be still, and know that I am God." Wipe those tears from your eyes. "Be still, and know that I am God." The shaking was less noticeable. "Be still, and know that I am God." I could speak to my friends and family once again. God was in control. "Be still." I became still as I reached my hand for the doorknob and walked into the waiting room.

For me, Lent is a journey. It is a journey of life. Through the eyes of faith, we view the passion of our Lord. We walk with him from the upper room to the cross to the tomb. Lent is the journey of Jesus' life, and it is also the journey of my life of faith. I bring to my Lord the various experiences of life. I bring my sorrows and joys, my temptations and weaknesses, my trials and sufferings. I bring them to the passion of my Lord, and I find stillness for my soul—the quiet confidence of forgiveness that comes only from his cross and the empty tomb.

Bring all your unsettling thoughts

What do you bring to the cross this year? What causes your soul to be disquieted? What unsettles your heart? Where are you in your journey of faith? What stillness do you need?

Do you come to the cross in the midst of the betrayal of your own sins? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that has betrayed our Lord with our sins. "Lord, I have sinned against you," my soul cries out. Looking up to the cross, my Lord says, "Be still. I forgive you."

Do you come to the cross in the midst of hopelessness? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *Today you will be with me in paradise.* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that flounders in a lack of hope. They speak of a sure and certain hope of heaven. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief," my soul cries out. Looking up to the cross, my Lord says, "Be still. Heaven is your home."

Do you come to the cross in the midst of family need? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *Here is your son . . . here is your mother.* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that sees families torn apart by many temptations and hardships. "Lord, my wife is attacked by cancer," my soul cries out. Looking up to the cross, my Lord says, "Be still. As I took care of my mother, so I take care of you."

Do you come to the cross in the midst of loneliness? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that has turned its back

on God. Those words speak of eternal comfort that my God will never turn his back on me. "Lord, I feel so alone," my soul cries out. Looking up to the cross, my Lord says, "Be still. Even though I was forsaken because I bore sin, I will never forsake you."

Do you come to the cross in the midst of sickness? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *I am thirsty.* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that has been decimated by ravages of diseases and sicknesses. In our Lord's body, he bore not only an eternal punishment of hell, but he also faced great physical pain. "By his wounds," the prophet Isaiah reminds, "we are healed" (53:5). The gospel of Mark reminds us that this applies both to spiritual and to physical needs. "Lord, I am sick and in pain," my soul cries out. Looking up to the cross, my Lord says, "Be still. I care for you."

Do you come to the cross in the midst of uncertainty? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *It is finished.* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that finds so little to be certain about. If we were to look at our own lives, we would be uncertain about the outcome. "Have I done enough to pay for my salvation?" my soul wonders. Looking up to the cross, my Lord says, "Be still. I have done it all."


Do you come to the cross in the midst of life's ending? Look up to the cross and hear the words of your Savior: *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.* Those words speak to you—to me—to a world that is taking a slow, but steady journey to death. Do you come to Lent this year with the possibility of death close at hand? Are you walking someone else to heaven's door? Looking up to the cross, the Lord speaks to our souls and calms our fears. Our Savior confidently lay down in the sleep of death, knowing that he would rise. He confidently holds our heads as we fall asleep only to whisper to our souls, "Be still. You will rise again."

He stills our souls

I have entered Lent at various stages of my journey of faith—and so have you. Wherever we are in our journey, following the journey of our Lord's passion provides hope and comfort to our souls. I have walked with my wife to heaven's door. I have walked in the path of uncertainty. I have walked in the valley of hopelessness. I have walked in the sorrows of sickness. I have walked in the valley of loneliness. I have walked in steps of betrayal. Yet, every Lenten season, walking beside my Lord and seeing his passion, my soul is stilled.

Another Lenten journey is upon us. What do you bring to the cross this year? Where are you in the journey of faith? Bring it to our Lord and hear his words that calm our souls. Through his passion, he quiets our souls: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

Mark Gass is pastor at Redeemer, Tomahawk, Wisconsin.



YOU SHALL BEAR MUCH FRUIT

Earle D. Treptow

Love letters soothe hearts and offer comfort. God's love letter does that and more. It also transforms.

While serving his country in the Armed Forces, a 23-year-old man suffered a horrible injury. A piece of shrapnel damaged his brain. Never again would he communicate clearly. His bride, whom he had married just weeks before heading off to war, would never again hear him say, "I love you."

That's why she so appreciated the last letter she received from her husband—a letter he sent her for Valentine's Day. That love letter would never win the Pulitzer Prize, but from her perspective it ranked as the most beautiful letter ever written. In it he professed his love for her, promising to be faithful to her in good times and bad, "as long as we both shall live." Every day, like clockwork, she read that letter; every day, like clockwork, she served her ailing husband. Whenever family and friends suggested that she deserved a fuller life than "babysitting" her husband, she read that letter again. She never left. That love letter motivated her to love him and serve him.

The Lord's love letter to sinners

Just like that man who wanted to assure his bride of his love, the Lord of the Church wants his bride to have no doubts about his commitment to her.

Because he is in heaven and can do whatever he pleases, the Lord could reveal his love for us in

many ways. He could opt to paint the words "I love you" in the sky. He could decide to appear to us, wrap his arms around us, and whisper in our ears: "You are mine and no one will ever take you away from me." But the Lord has chosen to operate with us indirectly, for our own protection, because no one can see the face of God and live.

Though God may not appear to us directly, he certainly does profess his love for us. He gave us his holy Word—his love letter to sinners. My Bible has 1,270 pages. Have you ever received a love letter that long? Far more impressive than the length of this love letter is the beautiful message of a Savior for undeserving sinners. On page after page, the Lord says, "I love you." By the account of Jesus' willing suffering and death, by the announcement that the blood of his Son purifies us from all sin, by the promise of life with him in glory through faith, the Lord proclaims for all to hear: "I love you."

That love does not find its beginning in our beauty or our potential or anything we have to offer God. If it did, God would never love us. No, God's love begins in God. He loves because he is love. Though he needs no one and nothing to be complete, he chooses to love those who deserve his wrath. The message of God's love, recorded in Scripture, has no equal. No one has loved us like the Lord has; no one ever will.

The Lord's love letter transforms hearts and lives

The Lord's message of love doesn't just inform. It transforms. As we carefully read and reflect on the Lord's unfathomable love for us, the Spirit of God works wonders in our hearts. Hearts that once overflowed with hatred toward God now burst with love for him. That divinely inspired love sprouts forth in a life of good works. Jesus promised as much when he told his disciples, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). We remain in Christ by regularly hearing and reading the Word that reveals him as our Redeemer. The results top any "before and after" pictures ever seen. Without the Word of Christ, we could do nothing that God would call good—nothing that would honor God. Through the Word of Christ that transforms our hearts, we bear much fruit. The message of the Lord's unconditional love changes us, so that we no longer live for ourselves but for him who died for us.

Could our Christian living be as simple as that? Could it really be that growth in sanctification happens just by hearing, reading, and reflecting on God's message of love and forgiveness? "Not spiritual enough," says the world. "Too basic," argues the old evil foe. The devil wants us to consider ourselves too advanced for such things, so that we leave the Lord's love letter on the shelf to gather dust as we join the growing search party looking for some higher "spirituality." The last thing that the murderer of souls wants is for us to reflect often on the Lord's great love for us. That's why he drives us to busyness and distraction. When he convinces us that we have no time to sit at Jesus' feet, he effectively short-circuits our Christian living. He stops the fruit from growing and hinders us from living in a way that glorifies the Lord and attracts others to the Christian faith.

Craving the Lord's love letter

Is it any wonder that the Lord encourages us to make his Word our constant companion? Our Christian living hinges on our unhurried time at the foot of the cross. That's why the apostle Peter

directs, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). Babies know what they need. They know that a lack of food will kill them, so they request sustenance. They demand it, actually, even if it means interrupting their sleep. Infants boldly and clearly make their urgent entreaties until they receive the milk they need. That's the way the Lord tells us to crave the food that we need for our souls.

As you plot out your schedule for the day, be a baby. Insist on spiritual food. Set aside time for quiet reflection on the Lord's words of love. Push the newspaper aside. Lose the remote. Turn off the computer. Bury your BlackBerry. Disengage from your Day-Timer. Then lose yourself in that message of love. Immerse yourself in his promises and feast on his Word. When you do, you will grow in your salvation. You will grow in faith and love.

But be forewarned. If you set aside time for the Word, you will experience some loss. You'll miss out, for example, on anxiety and concern. You'll lose frustration and fear. You'll find yourself short on stress and running low on selfishness. The Lord will cause you to bear much fruit. He will strengthen you in faith and thus equip you for a life of service. His love will shine forth from you and through you.

Only God's love letter will empower our lives of service. The law with its rules and commands can order us around, but the law can never enable us to do what God demands. We live by the word of forgiveness. We live and serve by his love. His love is so wide, so high, so long, and so deep that we can only exclaim in our hearts and with our lives, "Lord, I love you, because you loved me first."

Earle Treptow is pastor at Zion, Denver, Colorado.

This is the second article in a five-part series on sanctification. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Feb. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net.

"Build something that looks like a church."

"Don't build something ostentatious."

"Build something that will interest the young people."

"Build something the elderly will be comfortable with."

I heard all of these comments—and hundreds like them—while our parish went through a building project. But did you notice something? All of them are personal opinion. That can be problematic: one man's cathedral is another man's chapel! What are parish planning and building committees to do?

Let's look at our buildings with a principled approach. The principles that govern our worship practices also govern our worship spaces. Let's see how these principles can transform bricks and mortar into the Lord's lovely dwelling.

Let the gospel predominate

If you scratch behind the paint of our faces, look behind the walls of our hearts, and kick the foundation of our souls, every one of us must confess that all is not well. We desperately need the gospel. The gospel alone is the power of God for our salvation (Romans 1:16). The gospel brought us into the church and keeps us in the church. It is the gospel that makes us distinctly Christian. Take away the gospel, and worship dies. Proclaim the gospel, and the dead live! The good news of Jesus rings from our pulpits. It flies off the pages of our hymnals. But can the gospel be seen in our buildings?

Think of how buildings—bricks, wood, and glass—can preach the gospel to us. Did you know that the rising sun was a universal symbol of Jesus' resurrection in the ancient church? It's not accidental that most churches are built facing east. The position of a church can say something about the resurrection.

Study the floor plans of the great Gothic cathedrals. Most of them are shaped like a cross. The floor plan of a church can be a witness to Christ crucified. When I was a child, the baptismal font was stored in the ushers' room when not in use. Now many churches install prominent baptismal fonts. Some even place their font at the entrance to the sanctuary. The placement of a font can make a point: for many of us, Baptism was our entrance to the church.

Let the experience of the church be honored

Lutheran Christians respect the past. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to "remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you" (Hebrews 13:7). Isn't it comforting to know that the gospel didn't begin with us? We owe a debt of gratitude to men and women who were faithful with the gospel in the past, so that the gospel could come to us in the present.

Scriptural truth is not debatable. All traditions, however, are not created equal. The church's traditions or customs come in several different flavors. They are—in descending order of importance—ancient, universal traditions; denominational traditions; parish traditions; and finally personal traditions.

Consider two examples: A church may decide that it will not have an altar in its sanctuary. This parish decision, while free, runs against thousands of years of ancient, Christian tradition. A question should be asked: what does this parish know about altars that has escaped the consideration of so many Christians over thousands of years? Another may have a personal preference against crucifixes. But

Making the Lord's

Lutheran principles of worship can help make our worship places lovely.

at Luther's church in Wittenberg, Germany, there is an altar painting of Luther in his pulpit pointing at a crucifix. Two of our early WELS presidents served at a church in Milwaukee with a life-sized crucifix hanging on the altar!

Yet because Lutherans view tradition as a living thing, they have warmly embraced many architectural advances over the years. Luther's church wasn't heated. That wouldn't be warmly received today! We also understand that the meaning of certain building traditions can change. Communion rails were originally installed to keep people back from the priest and the Sacrament. Covers—and even locks—were placed on baptismal fonts in the Middle Ages to keep people from stealing the “holy water.” We don't view rails and font covers that way today. Things do change, but we should not change simply in order to change.

Let the people participate

The gospel gathered us into the church. The church loves to chant, speak, and sing the “praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). God's people have a gospel-given role in worship. Our buildings can help or hinder their participation.

Congregations are wise to evaluate periodically how well their churches enable their people to participate. Is there something hindering a fuller participation? If so, do we continue to “live with it,” or do we work to change it? Love for God and our neighbor plays an important role here.

How far is it between your altar and back pew? People feel “connected” to an event when they are within roughly 60 feet of it. How bright or dark does your church feel? There was a time in the 1960s and 70s when natural lighting was eliminated in many churches. Lighting is an important issue not only for reading but for ambiance. Does the singing in your church seem less-than-angelic? The carpet under your feet might be the culprit. Is your church 80 percent full? You're full. Americans like big cars. It seems we like our elbow room in the pews too.

Let all of God's gifts be used in worship

Lutherans love the arts. If one tours old-world Lutheran churches he or she will find many paintings and sculptures, woodwork and metalwork, instruments and organs. Why? Because the fine arts are a fine tool for proclaiming the gospel.

Much of our artistic heritage was lost on the American frontier. Music continued, but quality suffered. Many Lutherans caved into revivalist pressure to view statues and paintings as “graven images” or the trappings of Catholicism. Now many Lutheran congregations are once again pondering the role of the arts in their buildings. This is a most welcome development! The arts provide a beautiful way to carry the gospel to people's hearts. Lutherans always have recognized this. Today we are reclaiming more and more of this. A beautiful altar painting can be a powerful tool for proclaiming the good news to generations of people.

Think of how buildings—bricks, wood, and glass—can preach the gospel to us.

It is the Lamb and his sacrificial love for us that transforms a big empty room into a sanctuary, a table into an altar, a desk into a pulpit, and years of building committee headaches into a heartwarming place that pulsates with the gospel. How gracious is our God! He gave us his Son. He provides us with so many wonderful ways to bring the gospel of his Son to hearts in desperate need. The message of God's love in Christ is—simply put—lovely. May that lovely message continue to make your churches lovely places for God and his people to be.

Aaron Christie is pastor at Faith, Antioch, Illinois.

Aaron L. Christie

dwelling

Heaven is the rock-solid promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Scripture reinforces that promise many times over. Jesus' words to the criminal next to him on the cross have brought immeasurable comfort to believers on their deathbeds: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The Savior's encouragement to his disciples in the upper room has been the biblical basis for countless Christian burials: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2,3).

The victorious Christian lives every day with this confidence: what the world considers the worst possible scenario—death—only secures him in the eternal arms of his Savior.

The devil's detours

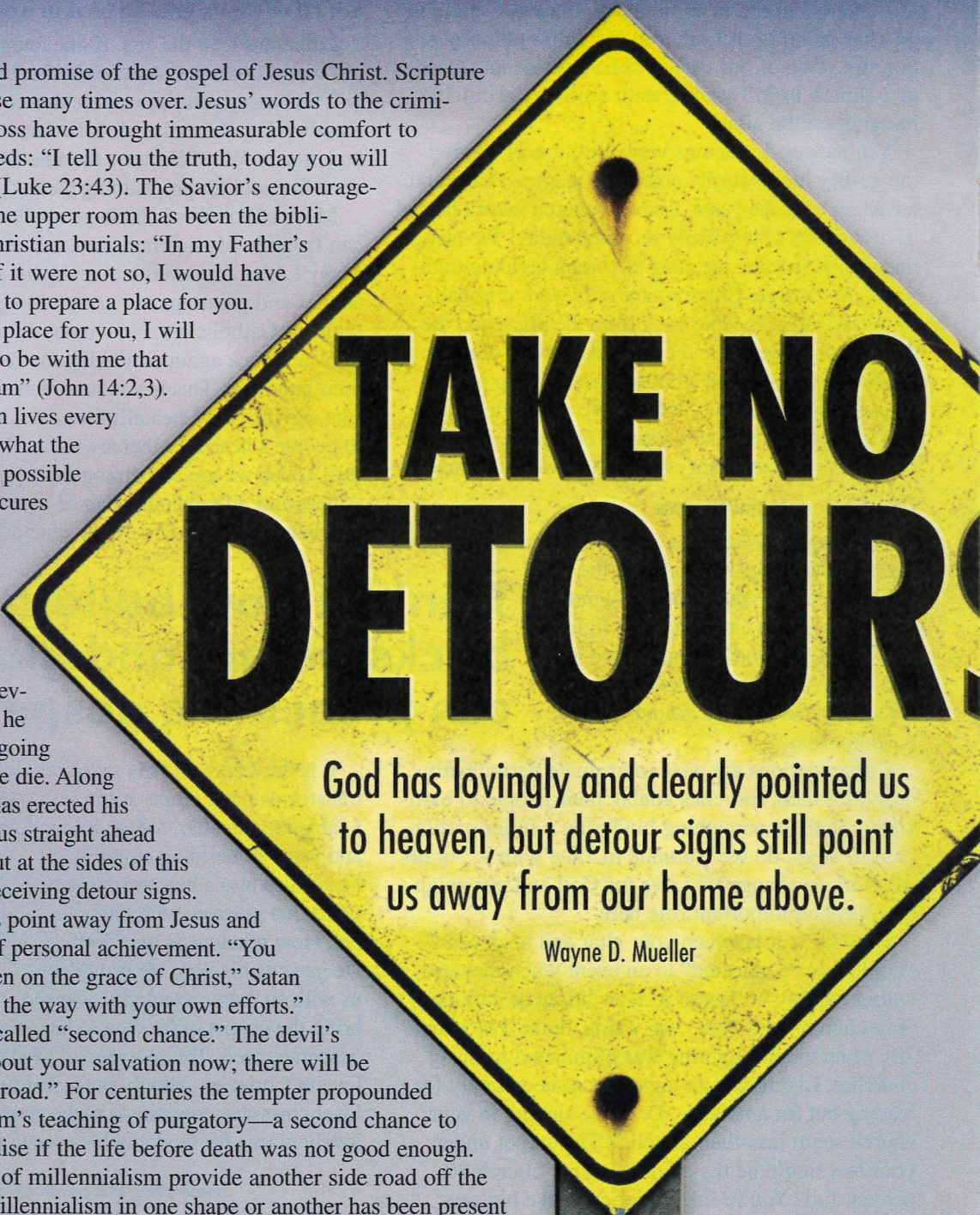
But the devil hates the security the gospel puts into the hearts of believers. He will do everything he can to unseat our hope of going straight to heaven when we die. Along our road to heaven Jesus has erected his promising signs that urge us straight ahead to our final destination. But at the sides of this path, the devil posts his deceiving detour signs.

The devil's detour signs point away from Jesus and down various side roads of personal achievement. "You can't just cruise into heaven on the grace of Christ," Satan whispers. "You must pave the way with your own efforts."

Closely related is one called "second chance." The devil's pitch is: "Don't worry about your salvation now; there will be another chance down the road." For centuries the tempter propounded this detour with Romanism's teaching of purgatory—a second chance to earn one's way into paradise if the life before death was not good enough.

Today resurgent forms of millennialism provide another side road off the straight path to heaven. Millennialism in one shape or another has been present in fundamentalist, pentecostal, and evangelical denominations for two centuries. Recently it has been given new life by two popular writings: Hal Lindsay's *The Late, Great, Planet Earth* in the 1980s and the more recent "Left Behind" series of novels, movies, and children's books.

Since many Lutherans are among the readers of these books, the revitalization of this old heresy plants a big detour sign pointing away from the



**TAKE NO
DETOURS**

God has lovingly and clearly pointed us
to heaven, but detour signs still point
us away from our home above.

Wayne D. Mueller

gospel's sure promises of heaven. The diversion from "grace alone, Jesus alone" comes from a number of attractive, but unscriptural, teachings, including the rapture, a second chance to come to faith, a physical triumph of Christians over their enemies in the current world, and a denial of the power of the sacraments.

One thousand years?

Millennialism and its synonym, chiliasm, derive their names from the Greek and Latin words for the number one thousand. The devil makes millennialism attractive in the same way he tried to make jumping off the pinnacle of the temple appealing to Jesus: he perverts Scripture. Millenarians cite Revelation 20:3 as their proof passage for their final thousand years.

Although every picture in the context of this passage is symbolic—and explained as such in the text itself—millenarians teach that the thousand years is a literal thousand years.

The devil makes every aspect of millennialism an appeal to our sinful flesh. The supposed thousand years at the end of the New Testament age offers everybody a second chance to come to faith.

The "second chance" detour appeals to our sinful laziness, which wants to delay attention to our spiritual relationship with God.

Millennialism teaches that the thousand years will culminate with a physical, military victory of Christians over their enemies at Armageddon. Such an idea invites vengeful temptations to get even with those who persecute us, ridicule our faith, or simply reject our message.

The rapture?

In the early 1980s, news media reported the growing tendency of southern California evangelicals to team up for their commute to work. This wasn't to save energy. Instead, it expressed a belief in the teaching of the rapture. Supposedly based on 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, the rapture is a belief that God will take certain faithful believers out of this world before the millennium begins. Carpooling allowed the front-seat passenger to grab the wheel in case the driver was snatched up to heaven.

But the rapture is also a deceit of Satan. A careful reading of the passage he cites indicates just the opposite of a silent, premillennial rapture. It speaks of the loud and public return of Jesus at the last judgment ("with the voice of

the archangel and with the trumpet call of God"). It does not describe a stealthy rapture of super-believers prior to a millennium.

The gospel in Word and sacraments

Another demonic ploy associated with millennialism is the difficulty it causes for those who need to get back on the right road to heaven. First, the devil tempts us to take all kinds of detours away from God's amazing grace. Then he makes it more difficult to be led back to the one sure path by removing access to the promises of sure salvation. Specifically, Satan takes away the power of the sacraments from those who follow the side road of millennialism.

With few exceptions, churches that espouse millennialism also deny the saving power of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Even where the clear promises of the spoken gospel are obscured with detour doctrine, the sacraments and the forgiveness they bring are the Spirit's own power to draw the heart back to Jesus. St. Peter wrote that the water of the flood symbolizes "baptism that now saves you also" (1 Peter 3:21). In the Holy Supper our Savior promises, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). However, when churches teach millennialism and deny the power of the sacraments, they can be causing irreparable harm to souls for whom Jesus died.

Lutherans are often criticized for being confident of going to heaven when they die. People think that we are filled with some kind of spiritual conceit. Remember, though, this criticism comes from those who base their surety of the afterlife on their personal moral efforts. So they wrongly conclude that our confidence in heaven is based on how good we think we are.

Instead God is giving us a chance to call people from the devil's detours and put them back on the path of life with Jesus. While we humbly admit that we do not have a righteousness of our own, we proudly declare that we have "the righteousness that comes from God" (Philippians 3:9).

The signs of the times are clear. Some signs make it clear that Jesus will come quickly. Even more important are the gospel signs pointing us to the conviction that when Jesus came the first time he did everything necessary to put us on the straight path to glory. Take no detours.

Wayne Mueller is the first vice president of WELS.

Read more about the end times in Revelation, an NPH publication written by Wayne Mueller. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Feb. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

WHATEVER

A lost soul

A tragic event helps one student recognize the importance of witnessing to others.

Claire Zarnstorff

It was Sept. 11, 2001. For me and a lot of others, it started out just to be a normal day. I live in Alaska so we were still asleep when the planes hit the Twin Towers. The first time my parents and I heard about the terrorist attacks in New York; Washington, D.C.; and Pennsylvania was when we arrived at school.

I was so far away that I thought I didn't have anything to worry about. There was one girl at our school whose uncle was in the Pentagon when the plane hit. That's the only way the attacks hit close to us. Later, we found out that her uncle was okay.

Our teacher decided to let us listen to the radio reports about it during class. I remember while I was listening that I thought that it was the worst thing that would happen that day. But I was wrong.

When school had started that year, a new student entered the eighth grade. No one knew much about him. He was kind of a shady person. He didn't talk much and always wore baggy clothes and hoodies. You could never see his face. My dad, the principal at that time, was a little concerned about letting him come to our school. My dad suspected that the new student had most likely been involved with drugs and alcohol before coming to our school.

On Sept. 11, 2001, the new student wasn't in school, but we all just thought he was sick. So when my dad walked into our classroom, I didn't expect it to be about the new student. My classmates didn't either. My dad walked to the front of the classroom, talked to our teacher quickly, and stood in front of the podium as if to make a speech or an announcement.

As he was making the announcement, you could tell that he was sad. I can remember watching him and

seeing his pain through his facial expressions. The announcement seemed long. When it was over we were all stunned, including me. This boy had killed himself.

The attacks of that day had nothing to do with his suicide, even though I thought that it might have been because of the initial shock of the attacks. After most of us got over the initial shock of the news and my dad left, I started to cry. Everyone asked me why I was crying. At that time I couldn't give them an answer, but now I can.

I thought about the boy and what had happened. He was a lost soul. Why did he kill himself? Wasn't he interested in Bible history and God, I wondered. I cried because I felt that it was my fault that he didn't believe or that I didn't put enough effort into helping him understand the Bible or planting the seed of faith.

But it wasn't my fault. Satan had tempted him into the life he lived and had tempted him to take his own life against God's will. He followed that temptation.

Looking back on what happened that day still makes me sad, but it shows me that I need to make an effort to witness to others.

Claire Zarnstorff, a senior at Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Washington, is a member at Faith, Anchorage, Alaska.



I started

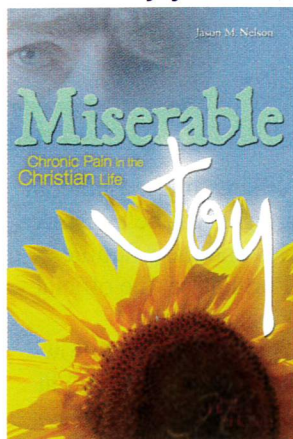
to cry



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.

Miserable joy



\$10.99

Miserable Joy: Chronic Pain in the Christian Life by Jason M. Nelson is a remarkable book. With honesty and clarity, Nelson has written about “the rigorous exercise of faith—mind, body and spirit—that is required to live a Christian life while battling chronic pain.”

Nelson injured his back in 1988. Since then he has lived with constant severe pain, tried countless medications, and had three surgical fusions of the spine. He is well-acquainted

with post-operative complications and grueling physical therapy. Eventually he was forced to resign his position as a high school principal and reassess who he is and what God’s plan is for his life.

Nelson is therefore well-qualified to offer encouragement to others who suffer chronic pain. He speaks candidly about the “dark places” that pain can take us—the frustration, anger, bitterness, and despair. He offers assurance that everything in a Christian’s life, including pain, suffering, and healing, happens according to the master plan of a loving God.

A chapter entitled “Survival Guide for Pain People” offers suggestions for coping with chronic pain. Working along with your doctors, becoming your own advocate in the healthcare system, doing something you like—all of these strategies have proven helpful.

This book belongs in every church library. Pastors and others who work with the sick would certainly benefit from reading it. Most of us can think of someone we know who might be enlightened and comforted by Nelson’s strong faith and words of hope.

Janet Klann, Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Arizona

Untangling the Web

Have you checked out Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s Web site lately? Here you can learn more about our school that trains WELS pastors. Features include a listing of upcoming events on campus, news about seminary happenings, pictures of past graduates, and feature articles about professors and students.

Not only can you keep up with what is going on at the seminary, but you also can grow in your own faith. You can listen to podcasts of lecture series, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* articles, and daily chapel services as well as download or read more than 2,000 essays, most of which were written by WELS pastors and teachers.

Find it online at www.wls.wels.net.

Obituaries

Trudy Lynn Sack 1958-2007

Trudy Sack (nee Buettner) was born March 9, 1958, in Ann Arbor, Mich. She died March 6, 2007, in Indianapolis, Ind.

A 1980 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Good Shepherd’s, West Allis, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her father. She is survived by her husband, Donald; one son; and two daughters.

Carol L. Peter 1934-2007

Carol Peter (nee Frassetto) was born Feb. 16, 1934, in Kimberly, Wis. She died Nov. 9, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nev.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Zion, Akaska, S.D.

She is preceded in death by two brothers and one sister. She is survived by her husband, Arvon; one son; five daughters; 17 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

MARCH 2008

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Genesis 6 | 17. Luke 9:57–10:12 |
| 2. Gen. 7:1–8:19 | 18. Lk. 10:13–24 |
| 3. Gen. 8:20–9:29 | 19. Lk. 10:25–42 |
| 4. Gen. 10:1–11:9 | 20. Lk. 11:1–13 |
| 5. Gen. 11:10–13:4 | 21. Lk. 11:14–36 |
| 6. Gen. 13:5–14:24 | 22. Lk. 11:37–52 |
| 7. Gen. 15 | 23. Lk. 11:53–12:12 |
| 8. Gen. 16, 17 | 24. Lk. 12:13–34 |
| 9. Gen. 18 | 25. Lk. 12:35–59 |
| 10. Gen. 19 | 26. Lk. 13:1–17 |
| 11. Gen. 20:1–21:21 | 27. Lk. 13:18–35 |
| 12. Gen. 21:22–22:24 | 28. Lk. 14:1–24 |
| 13. Gen. 23 | 29. Lk. 14:25–35 |
| 14. Gen. 24:1–60 | 30. Lk. 15 |
| 15. Gen. 24:61–25:34 | 31. Lk. 16:1–31 |
| 16. Gen. 26 | |

WELS prepares to send first missionary team to Mozambique

For the first time since 1998, WELS is sending resident missionaries to a new world mission field. Pastor Jeff Enderle and Mr. Bill Meier comprise the two-man team that will be going into Mozambique, Africa.

Enderle, previously pastor at Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb., accepted the call in November 2007. Meier, previously a lay missionary to Malawi, accepted last May.

"The really ironic thing is that [before I received the call], Bill Meier did a presentation on Mozambique at our school," says Enderle. After the presentation, Enderle says he peppered Meier with questions about this new mission venture. "It just seemed really exciting, using the work that missionaries have been doing for 40 to 50 years in Malawi and Zambia as a stepping stone for reaching out in a different country," says Enderle.

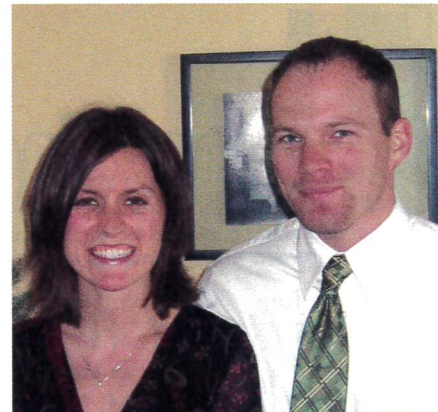
Before WELS Board for World Missions made the decision to enter this field, Meier and others serving in Malawi made several exploratory trips to Mozambique, including the most recent visit in October 2006.

"Everywhere we went, not only were we welcomed, but we were actually solicited and invited by the people: 'Yes, bring God's Word here. Please bring your mission here,'" says Meier. "It's just such an open door."

Based on the recommendations of the exploratory groups, the missionaries will begin work in Nampula, the fastest growing city in northern Mozambique. "There are opportunities for urban work in the city, with the potential to reach millions in the vast, rural areas," says Meier. "We'll begin by doing survey work in the city. We'll also be exploring the possibility of doing radio ministry."

Meier hopes that six months after arriving in Mozambique they will have a ministry plan in place and the first organized outreach efforts will be underway. "I also expect that one or two elements of the ministry plan may not go so well," he says. "So every six months or year we will have to closely evaluate everything, and we may have to change what we're doing."

Before heading to Nampula, however, the missionaries will travel to Portugal for language training.



Pastor Jeff Enderle and his wife, Angela.

Pastor Artur Villares of the Lutheran Church of Portugal will be assisting the missionaries and their families as they learn Portuguese, the official language of Mozambique.

"Our synod just declared fellowship with the church of Portugal at [the 2007] synod convention," says Enderle. "This will be a great opportunity for us to really enjoy that fellowship as they help us with starting a new mission in a new country."

Enderle and Meier will remain in Portugal for about one year. In addition to learning the language, they will determine how to best communicate through written materials. "There are a lot of resources available in Brazilian Portuguese, which is different than Mozambican Portuguese," says Meier. "In some cases the differences will be significant—but manageable." Meier hopes that eventually he and Enderle will be able to adapt the Brazilian materials—and possibly translate some of the materials currently used in Zambia and Malawi—to fit the Mozambican culture.

Meier leaves for Portugal in February, while Enderle continues to prepare for the trip. He says that although many of the details are still being worked out he is confident God will bless this new mission venture. "Everyone says Mozambique is a great mission field and there's a lot of potential. When we get there next year, we just have to take it person to person and soul to soul. And then as that takes root, God will bless it."



Mr. Bill Meier (left) baptizes a child in Malawi. Meier, part of WELS' mission team to Mozambique, served in Malawi for six years.

Family highlights the importance of ministerial education

I first met Pastor Ralph Scharf in his office at Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis. Eager to introduce me to his wife, Annette, he led me down the few steps to the parsonage's front walk. As soon as the door opened, we were drawn into a lively scene of children playing and laughing. Annette (Nettie) has been running a daycare in their home for more than 20 years. I couldn't help thinking that this scene must be reminiscent of the days when the Scharf's children were young. You see, they have 14 children, one of whom was featured on the January edition of the *WELS Connection*.

What's especially unique about these siblings is that they all attended Luther Preparatory School (or the former Northwestern Preparatory School) in Watertown, Wis. From the time the eldest began in 1984 to when the youngest will graduate in 2011, the Scharfs will have had one or more children at Luther Preparatory School (LPS) for 27 consecutive years.

Sending 14 children to LPS certainly presented challenges to the Scharfs. Ralph recalls looking at their finances some years to find that the cost of tuition for their children at both LPS and Martin Luther College was greater than his total annual salary. But with Nettie's daycare income and the Lord's ever-providing hand, they did not have to abandon their education goal. Nettie shares that it has also been difficult to be apart from their teenagers during the school week, even though they are "in the good hands of a caring, Christian staff."

The Scharfs say they are thankful that all their children have been challenged and have received a firm foundation to succeed in any profession. Both of them have appreciated that over the years the students have had more opportunities for early hands-on ministry experience. An added blessing is the unique camaraderie that develops among LPS students who are all considering full-time church work.



The Scharf family at Cynthia's wedding. Back row (l to r): Nathanael, Juliana, Benjamin, Angela, Matthew. Middle row (l to r): Deborah, Cynthia, Annette, Ralph. Seated (l to r): Jonathan, Rebecca, Annette, Charissa, Katherine, David. The pointillias on the altar are in memory of Erika, a sibling killed in a car accident.

A pastor's son himself, Ralph reflects, "The model my parents set for my three sisters and me was outstanding—consistency and fairness almost to a fault. I only wish that I could come close to the example my father set as a pastor and later as a professor at Northwestern College."

Ralph says that while in grade school, "I began to understand that I, a sinner who deserved only God's punishment, had been chosen and called by God to be one of his children. I recall thinking, 'This is something special; there are billions who do not have that gift.'" And his hope of being able to thank God by serving as a pastor grew.

Whether they knew from little on or they were convinced by their experiences at LPS and MLC that the Lord was calling them to preach or teach (or serve him in another field), all of the Scharf children are living their lives in the same thankfulness to God.

Pastor Scharf now serves as the chairman of the MLC Governing

Board. "My prayer," he shares, "is that the Lord uses whatever gifts I have to his glory, forgives my wrongdoing, covers my efforts with his forgiveness, and accepts my thankfulness."

The Lord has certainly done this and continues to do this for all the Scharfs who are now spread around the country (and the globe!).

Laura Warmuth

DEFINING RELIGION

Sovereignty of God—God's supreme, autonomous power and rule over the universe. Everything is ultimately subject to him, and he makes everything work out for the benefit of his people (Psalm 115:3; Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Romans 8:28).

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

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

One of Prof. Forrest Bivens’ favorite Bible verses is a group of questions: “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). With these questions, Paul reminds Christians that all we have and even who we are is a gift from God. Throughout Bivens’ education and ministry, he has been aware of God directing his life and ministry.

Bivens grew up in Tucson, Ariz., with four siblings. “My favorite aversions were horseback riding, hiking in the desert, and avoiding responsibility as well as anything that required maturity,” he says.

While in school at Northwestern Prep he met his wife, Sue. Among Bivens’ role models are his father, “for his personal integrity, honesty in business, and devotion to church and friends,” and Sue’s father, Pastor Carl Leyrer, “for his no-nonsense ascribing of all blessings purely to God’s grace.”

As a vicar in Arizona in 1969, he recalls his supervising pastor showing him how to use the mimeograph machine on the first day he arrived in town. “This impressed on me that the pastoral ministry involves a lot of nuts-and-bolts aspects aside from preaching, teaching, and counseling; and that such tasks were not to be despised or avoided, but embraced as early as necessary.”

This attitude has served him in his previous calls to congregations in San Jose, Calif., and Saginaw, Mich., and now at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., where he teaches dogmatics (doctrine) and Old Testament. He also serves as vice president and financial aid officer. “Organization and attention to detail plus the resolve to understand what others around me really need characterize my approach to ministry,” Bivens reflects.

Over the next several months, FIC



The Bivens family at a reunion in August 2007. Back row (l to r): Forrest, Sue, Katie Rautenberg (holding son Samuel), David, Joanna (holding Callie, David’s daughter). Middle row (l to r): Andrea Alejandro, Krista Lange. Front: Jessica Fry.

readers will write in with many spiritual questions. In the Q&A section of the magazine (p. 9), Bivens’ goal is to answer them in a way that will be “straightforward, clear, helpful, and faith-building, with law and gospel components.”

He and Sue, a teacher, share that “we are both in constant amazement that we can make careers out of studying and teaching God’s Word to others.”

WELS serves troops in Middle East

Pastor Paul Ziemer, national civilian chaplain to the military and Armed Forces liaison, traveled to Kuwait in December to minister to troops stationed overseas.

“I thought I would be of greatest value to troops who were not going to be home for Christmas,” says Ziemer. “I was surprised to find out that I was especially sought out by people who were headed for leave. They were very anxious about how they would be received, how they would conduct themselves, and about

the questions that would be asked of them. Even the hours spent waiting in airports proved to present bounteous opportunities to minister to people.”

Unfortunately Ziemer has not been able to visit soldiers in the Middle East more than once or twice a year because of inadequate funding and difficulties in gaining access to the troops. While there, however, he worked to continue building relationships with key military contacts.

“These relationships are extremely important for future trips to the Mid-

dle East and elsewhere,” says Carl Ziemer, administrator of WELS Special Ministries. “If we are serious about wanting to serve WELS members in areas of hostility, then we must engage and win the respect and cooperation of military leaders and chaplains.”

For more information or to enter or update a military referral, visit www.wels.net/jump/military. To read some of Pastor Paul Ziemer’s reflections, visit www.wels.net/jump/militarychap.

Reflections on Hong Kong

Dan Koelpin, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions, traveled to Hong Kong in November 2007 in part to help WELS' sister church, South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM), celebrate its 30th anniversary. Here he shares some historical background of the city of Hong Kong and more importantly how the gospel was spread in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is one of the more fascinating cities of our time. During the 19th century, men of adventure settled the island and nearby peninsula on which the city is built. It soon became a perfect place for smuggling. Entrepreneurs sold products from Europe without paying duty. In return they purchased inexpensive goods in China to sell to Europeans at great profit.

Britain won Hong Kong as a free port in the Nanjing Treaty of 1842. In 1898, a 99-year lease added a rural area north of Hong Kong. This lease expired in 1997 when both the Crown Colony and its hinterland became a semiautonomous special administrative region of mainland China.

During the century of British rule, Hong Kong's population jumped to seven million. Many were fleeing warfare, poverty, and political oppression. Hong Kong was a safe haven, as well as a place that offered opportunities for a better life.

Over the past 50 years an astounding transformation has taken place. Hong Kong is no longer a scattering of shantytowns. It is a city of beautiful high-rise skyscrapers. Hong Kong's harbor today welcomes ocean liners and thousands of container ships. In 2007, Hong Kong is a center of finance, serving China, Asia, and the entire world.

This brief history is all a backdrop to an even more important and fascinating story, the story of those in Hong Kong who found a blessing greater than they could have ever

imagined. A WELS mission team brought God's Word of truth—the gospel of Jesus—in the early 1960s.

Religion in Hong Kong is a mixture of Taoism, Buddhism, and folk religion. Many believe that when people die they go to one of 18 levels of hell. Their punishment is certain. Rebirth is a vague possibility. If it comes at all, it comes with no remembrance of a former life. Ancestors must be honored or their spirits return to earth to torment the living. Those who believe in demons and superstition are filled with fear.

love in Christ. As a result a Chinese national church was formed in 1977. The name of the church is South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission or SALEM.

On Nov. 25, 2007, the eight congregations of SALEM observed their 30th anniversary. More than 700 souls gathered for celebratory worship in the gymnasium of Immanuel Lutheran College, a middle and secondary school operated for the city of Hong Kong by SALEM. The day's message was taken from 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priest-



Carol Schroeder, wife of former missionary Gary Schroeder, is surrounded by the national pastors of SALEM as they celebrate the church's 30th anniversary. Gary Schroeder, who died in 2004, was one of two WELS missionaries who started SALEM in 1977. He served in Hong Kong for 27 years.

During the past generation the message of Scripture has brought joy and peace. For those touched by the gospel, faith in the certainty of heaven has replaced fear. The new Christians of Hong Kong know for certain that Jesus has paid for all their sins on Calvary's cross.

All this happened because missionaries reached out with kindness, education, and the message of God's

hood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

SALEM's people are a royal priesthood. They are believers whom God has called out of darkness into his marvelous light, people who by God's grace have come to a better place for time and eternity.

Martin Luther College graduates

On Dec. 19, 2007, 14 students graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.



Jacob A. Beilke ●
Mankato, Minn.



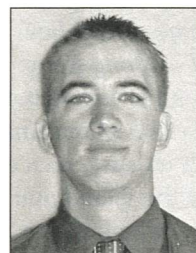
Amanda R. Burfeind ●
Zumbro Falls, Minn.



Joel C. Cordes ▲
New Ulm, Minn.



Gretchen I. Kock ●
Saginaw, Mich.



James C. Livingston ▲
Watertown, S.D.



Trista S. Martin ●
Lake Mills, Wis.



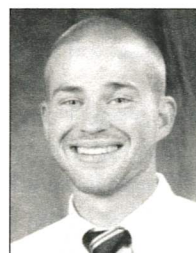
Rebecca A. Meyer ●
Hastings, Neb.



Margaret E. Polzin ●
Cudahy, Wis.



Eric A. Scheuerlein ▲
Thiensville, Wis.



Jeremiah D. Schmiede ▲
Madison, Wis.



Kaitlyn R. Schumacher ●
Milwaukee, Wis.



Laura R. Wagie ●
Wauwatosa, Wis.



Rebecca M. Wilkens ●
Yakima, Wash.

Not pictured:

Brett Bengel ▲
Menasha, Wis.

- Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary Education
- ▲ Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary and Secondary Education

Martin Luther College December assignments

Teachers

Beilke, Jennifer R., to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.

Prahl, Abby A., to St. John, Burlington, Wis.

Scheuerlein, Eric A., to The Hope School High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Go to www.mlc-wels.edu/home/academics/resources/assignments for complete lists of assignments since May 2007.

District news

Dakota-Montana

St. Paul's, Rapid City, S.D., dedicated a 17,000 square-foot addition in December 2007. The addition includes four classrooms, two offices, a large school entry, and a gymnasium to accommodate the congregation's growing grade school and preschool.

Minnesota

Jacob Behnken, senior at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., was one of three Midwestern students invited to play at a master class given by Paul Jacobs, international recitalist and renowned organ teacher. The class was held Nov. 3, 2007, at Augustana in West St. Paul, Minn.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Illinois Lutheran High School (ILHS), Crete, Ill., hosted 15 German students for a week in October 2007. While here, the German visitors attended classes at Illinois Lutheran and paired up with ILHS students for a weekend trip to Chicago. "Events like this one are important opportunities for students to learn about and better understand different cultures and ways of life," says ILHS teacher Jeff Spaiser.

Minnesota



Philip Ewerdt and Luke Tembreull, both students at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., met for the first time while serving in Iraq. The two were paired up for guard tower duty and soon found out they attended the same school. Both served as specialists in Iraq from April 2006–July 2007. Pictured is Philip Ewerdt (right) and an Iraqi patrolman.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Pictured are attendees of the Chinese worship service held every Saturday night at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. The Chinese services began in September 2005 with three families in attendance; now more than 50 people attend worship services, Bible classes, and "Q&A time," where people ask questions about the Bible and Christian faith. "We use the WELS church as a gospel base to outreach Chinese," says Joshua Yu, Chinese pastor at St. John. "To outreach to Chinese more directly, we don't need to do more kind of social activities. . . . Just a worship service and Bible class can draw people." For more information, visit www.sjtosa.org/cm.htm.

South Atlantic

Christ the King, an exploratory mission in Palm Coast, Fla., had a grand opening weekend Nov. 3-4, 2007. One hundred sixty-five attended the Kid's Carnival, and 52 attended the worship service. Since that weekend, the congregation has had an average attendance of 30 people.

Faith, Tallahassee, Fla., recently purchased a new facility. The congregation is completing some refurbishing before the dedication, which is planned for the end of February or beginning of March.

The district reporters for this month are: D-M—Wayne Rouse; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

South Atlantic



Students and teachers from Peace Lutheran School, Bradenton, Fla., participated in the "Keep Manatee Beautiful" sand sculpting competition Nov. 17-18, 2007. Students worked for several hours to create a sand sculpture of a nativity scene with the theme, "Follow the star." The project was a standout, being the only religious-themed sculpture in the entire holiday category.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Enderle, Jeffrey D., to Mozambique, Africa
Johnson, Timothy W., to Rockwood, Manitowoc/Zion, Mercer, Wis.

Krause, Daniel E., to Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Milwaukee, Wis.

Muetzel, Ronald M., to retirement

Paul, Norman T., to retirement

Schomberg, Carl A., to retirement

Semro, Ronald A., to retirement

Sievert, Robert A., to retirement

Smith, Lowell K., to retirement

Werner, Paul J., to Prince of Peace, Englewood, Fla.

Zehms, Roger R., to retirement

Teachers

Dankert, Steven W., to retirement

Grulke, Joel A., to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.

Horn, Katherine L., to OMNI Learning Resource, Milwaukee, Wis.

Wendland, David T., to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

Staff minister

Garbe, Robert W., to Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Orlando, Fla.—Crown of Glory (25). March 2. Worship, 9 A.M.; special celebration, 4 P.M.; dinner to follow. Karen O'Brien, 407-352-0264; jschumann1@bellsouth.net.

Green Bay, Wis.—St. Paul (125). April 13. School anniversary worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; potluck lunch to follow. RSVP by April 6. Carla Hoffmann, 920-435-8468, ext. 22; lcfrank@new.rr.com.

Omaha, Neb.—Gethsemane School (60). May 31. School alumni activities. June 1. School anniversary worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; dinner and program to follow. RSVP requested. Corey Pederson, 402-493-2550; geth@cox.net.

Allegan, Mich.—St. John (140). Sept 21. Worship at 3 P.M.; open house and light luncheon to follow. Ron Kruse, 269-673-2079; lutheron@charter.net.

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

COMING EVENTS

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

Faith Stepping Stones training seminar—Feb. 23. WLCFS' Bethany Chapel, Milwaukee, Wis. fss@wlcfs.org; 877-205-2443.

CEO Men's Rally—March 7-8. Brian Lampe, brianandtracey@tds.net. Web site, www.ceo-ministries.com.

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

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary chorus tour 2008—

- March 12—7 P.M., Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.
- March 19—7 P.M., Prince of Peace, Salt Lake City, Utah
- March 20—6:30 P.M., Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, Nev.
- March 21—1 P.M., St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.; 7:30 P.M., Gloria Dei, Belmont, Calif.
- March 22—7 P.M., Apostles, San Jose, Calif.
- March 23—10 A.M., St. Peter, Modesto, Calif.; 7 P.M., Hope, Penryn, Calif.
- March 24—7 P.M., St. Paul, North Hollywood, Calif.
- March 25—7:30 P.M., Grace, Yorba Linda, Calif.
- March 26—evening, Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, Calif.
- March 27—7 P.M., Risen Savior, Chula Vista, Calif.
- March 28—7 P.M., Christ the Vine, Temecula, Calif.
- March 29—7 P.M., Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev.

Prep Singers of Luther Preparatory School tour 2008—

- March 14—7 P.M., St. Paul, Platteville, Wis.
- March 15—6 P.M., Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.
- March 16—8 & 10:30 A.M., Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.; 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- March 17—7 P.M., St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.
- March 18—7 P.M., Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
- March 19—7 P.M., Mount Olive, Shakopee, Minn.
- March 20—7 P.M., Trinity, Minocqua, Wis.
- March 21—7 P.M., Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.
- March 23—6:30 A.M., Christ, Eagle River, Wis.; 10 A.M., St. John, Florence, Wis.

Pathways to Christ Women's Retreat—April 4-6. LaSure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: "Jesus is the Rock." Web site, www.martinlutheroshkosh.com.

Christian Woman Today Retreat—April 4-6. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

Today's Christian Woman Retreat—April 11-13. Radisson Hotel, Kalamazoo, Mich. Web site, www.tcwr.org.

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

Women's Enrichment Weekend—April 18-20. Salem, Stillwater, Minn. Theme: "Walking in the light of the Lord." Karen Diethert, 715-549-6519; diethert@sbcglobal.net.

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

WELS Staff Ministers Conference—April 25-26. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Kevin Walker, 905-817-0026; kevin.walker@crossoflife.net.

WELS-Church Librarians' Organization Spring Conference—April 26, 9:30 A.M. St. Paul's, Muskego, Wis. Joanne Weber, 414-425-4225; jaweber@wi.rr.com or Howard Wilsmann, 920-682-5351; hbwilsmann511@sbcglobal.net.

MLC, DMLC, and NWC Reunion Weekend—July 25-27. 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

Fredericksburg, Va.—Heath Butler, 703-361-4866; pastor@bethlehem-lutheran.org.

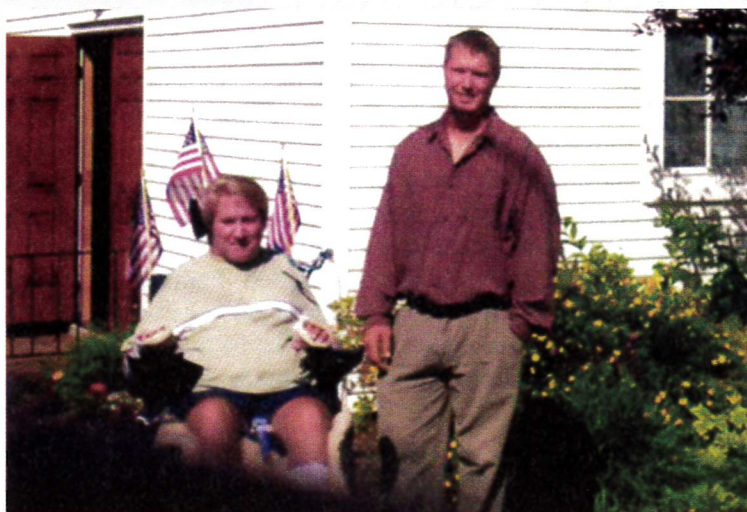
POSITIONS AVAILABLE

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.

Counseling positions—Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc., through its ministry of Christian Family Counseling, is looking to hire Licensed Psychologists, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Licensed Clinical Social Workers with specific area(s) of specialty for its offices located in Milwaukee, Fond du Lac, and Appleton, Wis. Applicants must be an active WELS member. Mary Schultz, human resource director; PO Box 245039, Milwaukee WI 53224-9539; 888-685-9522; mschultz@wlcfs.org.

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.

Picture this



Ken Jackson (right) and Matthew in front of Grace, Powers, Mich. In good weather, Ken escorts Matt, a quadriplegic, from his rehabilitation center to church. Gail Maxwell, a member at Grace, writes, "Today I watched as Ken and his three older children hiked up the long hill to Pinecrest with their fellow believer, Matt. Tears came to my eyes as I see Jesus' love being instilled in these young Christian children by the faith in action of their dad!"

Submitted by Gail Maxwell

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.



Little Kyle had often heard me saying, "How I wish our little congregation would grow," in conversations with others before and after our service. One day, Kyle said to me (and others), "It's okay, Mrs. Max. It doesn't matter how big our church is! It just matters how big the hearts are in the church."

Gail Maxwell, Grace, Powers, Michigan



It's February, and that means one thing to couples everywhere: Valentine's Day. But we shouldn't wait for a Hallmark holiday to show love to our family, friends, and neighbors. Our "Picture this" this month shows one example of how we can show love to our neighbors. Here are some other suggestions:

- Leave a muffin or a handmade note of thanks for your newspaper delivery person.
- Write a note to the boss of someone who has helped you, praising their employee.
- Give another driver your parking spot.
- Visit a retirement or nursing home and spend time talking and visiting residents.
- Buy some extra groceries and give them to your church's food pantry.
- Leave flowers for a colleague.
- Write a thank-you note to a person from your past who has made a difference in your life.
- Buy a cup of coffee or soda for a coworker.
- Call your pastor and your children's teachers and thank them for their hard and faithful work.
- Give blood.
- Invite a friend to attend church with you.
- Call a family member who lives far away.
- Have a family night—eat dinner together and play games.

T

orgive us, Lord, for taking them for granted, for giving them titles like “service personnel,” for putting ever-greater demands on them, for failing to see and thank the real persons who walk namelessly behind the classification of helping professions. There they are, often so taken-for-granted: waitresses, nurses, surgical attendants, policemen, EMT personnel, members of the military, those who work at night while humanity sleeps.

Thank you, Lord, for those so devoted to serve and help

How can we address all the variety of service Christians in helping professions provide? They can recognize and make uncomfortable experiences positive. They can put the anxious at ease. They can make a dull or boring procedure at least interesting. They can put a crowning touch or an added positive word on an event or experience that is already joyful. They can rejoice with those who rejoice or weep with those who weep. They can live in the grace of Jesus by practicing the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) in their service. They can show that they care. They can love their neighbor as themselves. They can be ready to share the joy and hope that they have in Jesus our Savior. They can turn the mood of a gray day into one that displays God’s sunshine. They can be like Christ to people because through faith he dwells in them.

Nurses come to mind. As a visiting pastor I often observed them, on their feet all day or all night, moving from room to room, patient to patient, listening when no one else would, doing their best to respect visitors and demanding relatives, seeing that needed medications were taken and IVs were flowing, trying to explain any and all situations to doctors as they made their rounds. More recently, as a patient I experienced their attending care and attention to detail. I asked questions, listened, encouraged, and, more than once in the difficult hours of pre-

surgery or post-surgery’s sleepless nights, heard nurses whisper that they would pray for me.

Lord, help us understand the lives of those who serve

So how do we treat those who serve us? Take food servers, for instance. I have met many of them in my life’s journey. I have witnessed and read about how some are mistreated, even by Christians. Certain people, it seems, are never satisfied with their food or the promptness of service, no matter how busy the waitress may be. Some make demand upon demand, rarely say thanks, and then display stinginess in the gratuity left. Perhaps we forget that this could be our server’s third job in her need as a single mother to make ends meet. Maybe our example, our understanding, our interest, our attitude, our words of com-

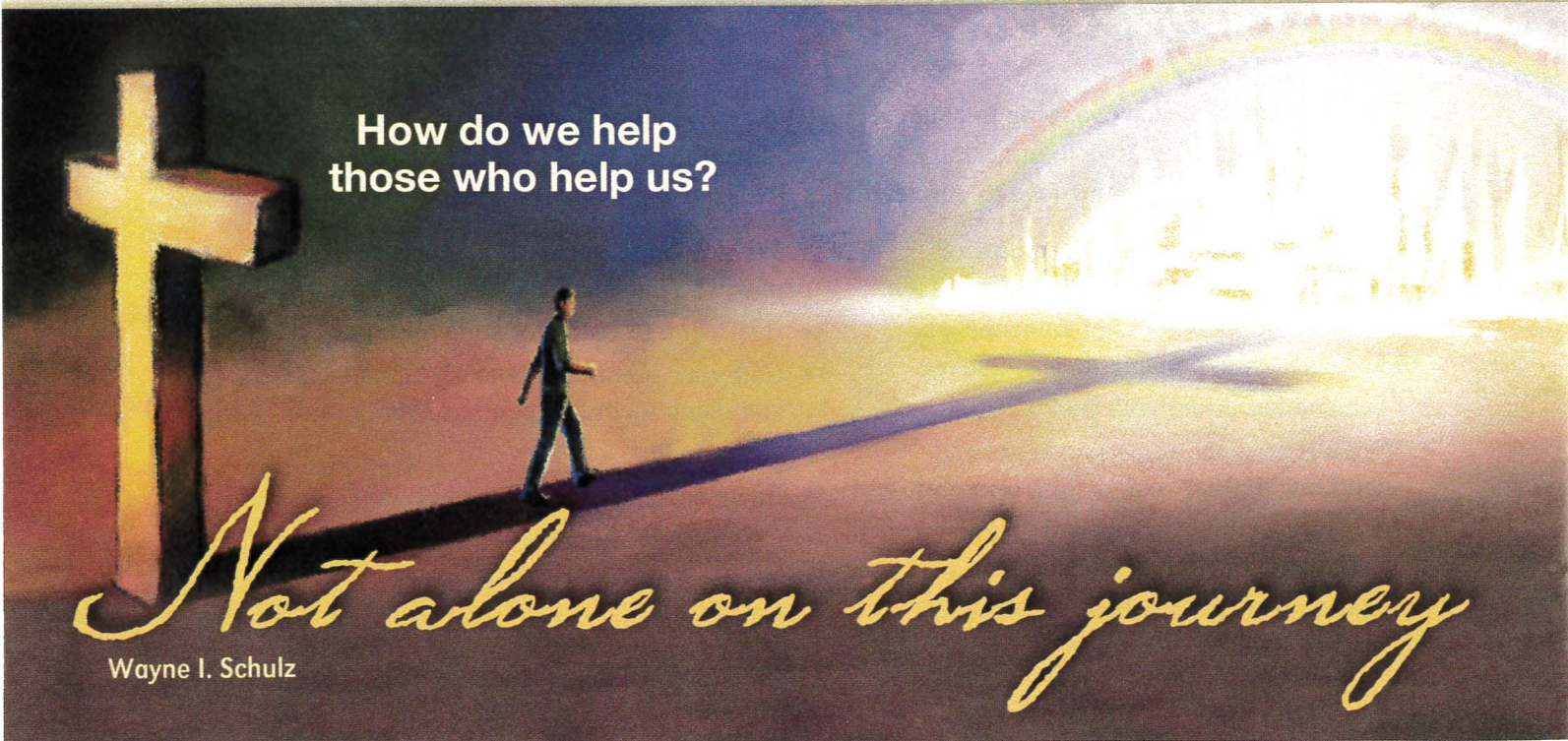
**Thank you, Lord, for those
who serve and help humanity.**

mendation, and example of appreciation could go a long way in displaying what it means to be a caring Christian. Maybe there’s even an opportunity for a gospel uplift?

And so we pray: Thank you, Lord, for those who serve and help humanity. Give them joy in what they do each day. Keep me from adding misery to their selfless lives by what I say or don’t say. Make my response one that displays appreciation. Make my encouragement one that makes their day. Let my commendation breathe with the fresh, vibrant, and hope-filled air of your uplifting Son who came to serve, not to be served. Let those who serve me see in my face the concern of my Savior who walked on this earth ahead of me and asked me to love all people, even the nameless ones.

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

ILLUSTRATION: GOODSALT



How do we help
those who help us?

Not alone on this journey

Wayne I. Schulz

Marlene Schlomer:

We give thee but thine own

Marlene Schlomer used her skills as a registered nurse innumerable times in the mission field.

Rachel Hartman

Nigeria, 1992: twin babies were laid out to die. Their mother had passed away, cutting off their only food supply. Feeling helpless, the father placed them on the ground. That's where Marlene and her husband, Missionary Larry Schlomer, found them. The Schloemers took the babies to the doctor and brought them food. With medical care and better nourishment, both babies survived.

Getting babies proper healthcare barely scrapes the surface of ways that Marlene, a registered nurse with a master's degree, has helped on the mission field. From teaching pastors about diabetes to getting a dying woman the medicine she needed, Marlene has used her skills in countless ways. She has aided family, coworkers, and friends with healthcare needs.

The global nurse

The Schloemers' first trek in world missions took them to Colombia. In addition to going through cultural adjustments, Marlene experienced a dose of medical eye-openers. A week after arriving, she went to the emergency room of a public hospital. "There were around 100 patients there," Marlene remembers. "Many of them had been in accidents. There was only one doctor and one nurse on duty. I kept wondering, 'What would I do as a nurse with all those patients?'"

It was tough to accept that some things just weren't available. Soon, though, Marlene found she could still

help. Other missionary families called her for advice on prescriptions and treatment. Congregation members and friends sought her counsel. Marlene treated them as best she could.

Sometimes these situations were a matter of life and death. After a woman in Medellín, Colombia, had thyroid surgery, she fell ill. When Marlene arrived at her home to help, she was only semi-conscious. Marlene recognized the problem: the woman was not taking a medicine she needed to prevent life-threatening complications. "When I asked about the medicine, her husband said they couldn't afford it." The Schloemers quickly got the medication. The woman lived.

When the Schloemers were called to Nigeria, Marlene again did whatever she could. She was one of the first to realize the seminary students were undernourished. With the help of others, she made sure they got beans and rice each week.

Besides hands-on involvement, Marlene has often served as the go-between. In Mexico, where the Schloemers currently reside, two Mexican pastors were diagnosed with diabetes. Marlene found monitors for their condition through donors in the United States.

Recognizing limits

Once an earthquake struck while the Schloemers were at a church gathering in Medellín. When the shaking stopped, they drove home. Along the way, they



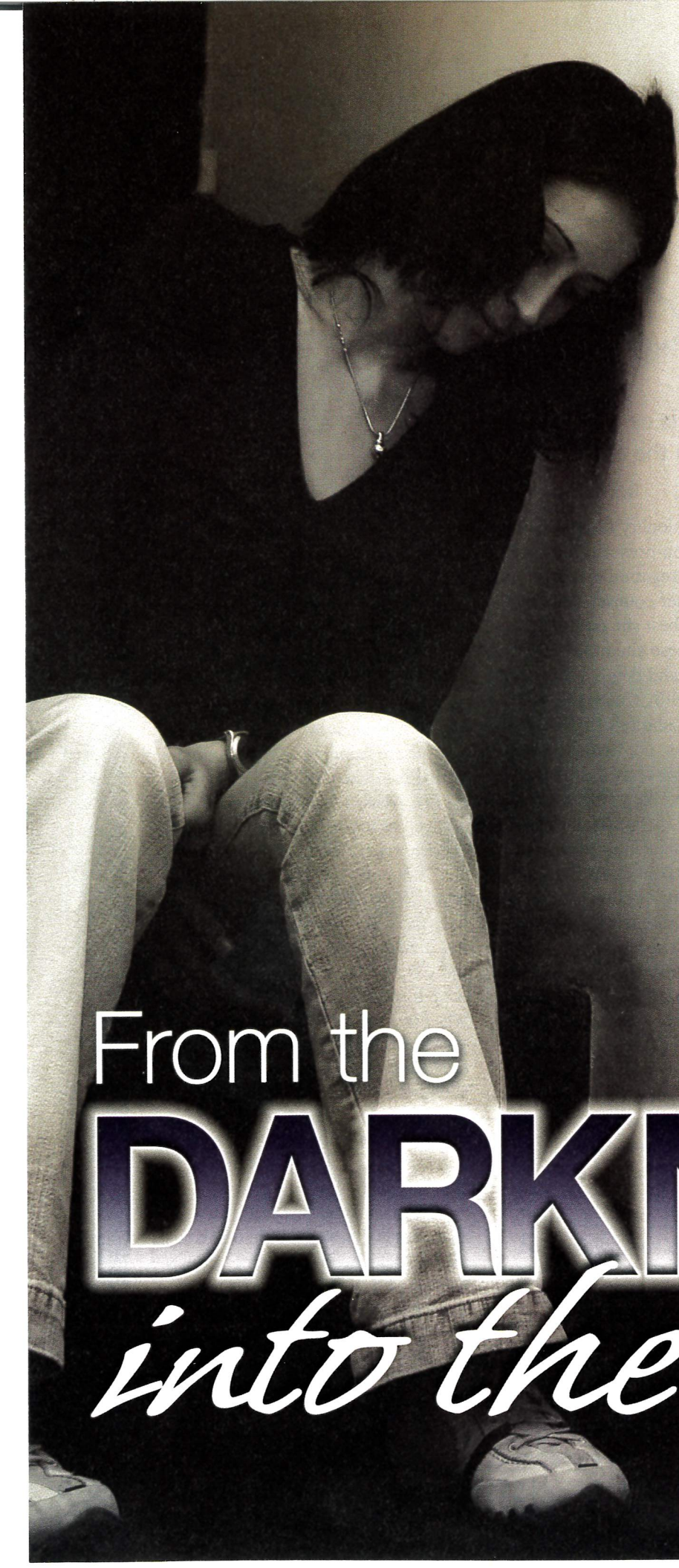
passed a hospital. "There was a long line of ambulances," Marlene recalls. They were bringing in those injured during the quake. But the hospital was on fire. Marlene wanted to intervene, and yet, as her husband reminded her, "There was nothing I could do."

Ultimately, our health is in God's hands. When Marlene's son had an operation in Colombia, Marlene and her husband waited nearby. Suddenly the electricity went out. Marlene, who knew the anesthesia machine was hooked up to the power supply, worried that her son would wake up during surgery. There was nothing she could do. Fortunately, five minutes later, the generators kicked in. It was one of the many cases where, Marlene says, "You could tell that God was there."

God gives us each specific gifts. He also provides ways to serve others with that knowledge. Whether we are trotting the globe or staying close to home, there are opportunities for us to use our talents. In doing so, we glorify God.

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

Next: Margie Habben: In God I trust



Postpartum depression can send you or someone you love into dark days of guilt and shame. But with help one can find the light again.

Postpartum depression (PPD) wasn't supposed to happen to me, but it did.

Prior to having PPD, I sincerely believed that most psychological problems, especially those related to depression, were due to a lack of faith in God. I also felt it was a sinful state for which healing came only through repentance. I thought I was above any type of depression. But, shortly after the birth of my third child, my theory collapsed and my life changed forever.

My husband, Chad, was in his first year of ministry when postpartum depression entered our lives. He was ordained in his first call in July 2000. I gave birth to our third child, Ethan Paul, on Dec. 22, 2000. We brought him home from the hospital on Christmas Eve and spent a quiet Christmas together as a family of five. I look back on those very early days with fondness; they were filled with amazing beauty. I had no idea at the time what lay ahead of us. I was simply immersed in the joy of our newest little blessing.

A descent into the darkness

When postpartum depression hit me, I was caught completely off guard—like a sucker punch to the stomach. I was left gasping for air.

From the

DARKNESS

into the light

Shanna Wright

At first I tried to give myself positive pep talks. I thought it was simply a bad mood that I could shake if only I tried hard enough. I told myself that I just needed to spend more time in God's Word. But with each passing day I slid further and further into darkness.

I did not understand what was happening. Depression was not supposed to happen to people like me. My denial did not ease my descent into the darkness. I sank at a rapid pace, and I became frantic. I fought it but to no avail. I landed hard on the bottom of a black pit. No matter how desperately I tried to climb out, I just kept sliding back down to the bottom. I was trapped.

Describing what it feels like to have PPD is hard because it is so intimate to the individual experiencing the depression. For me, it was a war that raged within. I would feel sad, dejected, isolated, and disconnected. Then the guilt and shame would begin to slither into my thoughts, slamming me down violently onto the floor of that black pit. I was supposed to be there for my husband during his first year of ministry. I had duties. I had obligations. I had no time for PPD, but of course PPD didn't care about my duties or my obligations. It worked its way into my life, and all I saw was darkness.

Most of my days were spent walking around in a hazy fog that never lifted. I could fake being normal out in public if I had to, but it took so much energy that I started to prefer staying at home. The concept of what "normal" was became foreign to me; it was a struggle to make it day to day. I was clinging onto my life by a thread. The fear I felt was indescribable. I thought I had gone mad.

Though I did fairly well at hiding my depression from the world around me, my husband was not as easily fooled. He did not understand PPD either. He kept asking me what he

could do for me, but I had no answer. We would read God's Word together and pray, but it didn't take the PPD away. My husband suffered right along with me. He was by my side for it all, from beginning to end. During those months when my PPD was at its most intense, he experienced a range of emotions from sadness to anger to confusion. He wanted to fix me and a part of him felt he was partly to blame.

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Except for my husband, I told no one about what was going on with me. The thought of anyone in our church or extended family knowing I had PPD was too embarrassing for me to even consider. In my mind, I had PPD because I was weak in faith. I felt like a failure. I truly believed that my PPD was because I was not a strong Christian, and the idea of being judged was too much for me to bear.

The climb out of the darkness

The journey back from PPD was a long one. After suffering for almost a year, I was desperate enough to get help. I finally realized that I was hurting not only myself but my family as well by not getting help.

The approach to recovery was a multifaceted one. I did use antidepressants to help stabilize myself because

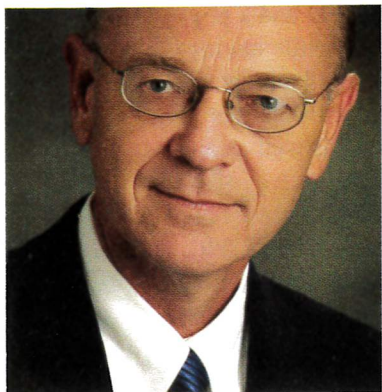
I recognized that my PPD had a physical element to it. But, while having PPD did not mean I was lacking in faith, I also embraced the idea that it had a spiritual element as well as an environmental element.

As I recognized the root causes of my PPD, the guilt and shame I felt began to fall away. I went from believing that my depression was a sin to recognizing that I had depression because I lived in a fallen world. Because of this shift in thinking, I began to approach God's Word differently. By allowing the guilt and shame to control so much of my life, I had unconsciously built a wall between myself and my Lord. Once that wall was gone, my soul began to heal as the Holy Spirit worked through the Word. The battle that once raged so ferociously in my soul finally ceased, and I was free for the first time in months.

When I look back on my experience with PPD, I feel a variety of emotions. A part of me winces when I remember the pain and the darkness, but overall I am thankful that I had the experience. I know that sounds odd—to be thankful for PPD—but it gave me an understanding of what it is like for so many women in the world today who struggle with varying degrees of postpartum depression.

It also helped me realize that no matter what I went through, my husband would always be there for me. Nothing is more powerful than being held as you lay broken on the floor. That is what my husband did for me, and mere words cannot fully express my love for him. I then began to see that not only did human arms encircle me but so did the arms of my heavenly Father. No matter how low I got, no matter how broken—I was never alone. God was with me through the darkest of days, and he held my hand as I stepped back into the light . . . back into life.

Shanna Wright is a member at Immanuel, Hadar, Nebraska.



Mark Schweden

A synod grounded on the Word of God

Who we are as a synod? What blessings does God give to us in this group of Christians who walk together in a common faith? What do we stand for?

We confess with boldness—without apology or embarrassment—that we are a synod that believes, teaches, and upholds the truth of God's Word.

In a recent presidential debate, candidates were asked bluntly if they believe that the Bible is true. Most seemed quite uncomfortable with the question; even those who started to answer correctly ended by qualifying and hedging their answers carefully: “Yes, I believe the Bible, but . . .”

It's one thing to see politicians trying to wiggle out of that question. But the sad fact is that the vast majority of Christian theologians, denominations, and church bodies today would have the same difficulty. Is the Bible truly and completely the Word of God? Many Christians today would echo the politicians and say, “Yes, but . . .”

By the grace of God, WELS stands firmly on God's truth as revealed in the Scriptures. We believe that the Bible is verbally inspired—the Holy Spirit moved the human writers of the Bible to write the exact words that he wanted them to write. We believe that the Bible is inerrant—everything in the Bible is factual and true, with no errors or mistakes. We believe that the Bible is infallible—the Bible, as the powerful Word of God itself, always accomplishes God's purpose.

In WELS every called worker, every confirmand, and every church leader publicly declares a personal conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. Every sermon preached in our churches, every class taught in our schools, every teaching held by our synod must be measured by the truth of God's Word alone.

We believe that it is not up to us to pick and choose which words of the Bible are true and which can be discarded. Some people will deny historical accounts in the Bible. Some people will set aside truths that don't make sense to human reason and logic. Still others reject biblical teachings that don't match their own personal beliefs.

The problem is that once you begin to tear pages out of the Bible, you undermine the trustworthiness of everything it says. A set of travel directions with only one inaccurate turn will get you lost every time. A Bible that has errors and mistakes mixed with truth is as untrustworthy as an inaccurate road map.

Like Martin Luther, we believe that the Bible is nothing less than the Word of God. In that Word alone we hear God's law and gospel clearly taught and proclaimed. We learn from the mouth of God himself who he is; how we've sinned against our Creator; and how, through Christ's life, death, and resurrection alone, we have forgiveness and eternal life.

We can be thankful that we are part of a synod that is committed to the Bible as the Word of God. But we can't become complacent. God's truth is always under attack. False teachers from without and within will try continually to distort the teachings of Scripture. We need to be vigilant so that God's truth is not denied or changed or silenced among us. Nor can we become proud or boastful. The blessings of true doctrine and faithfulness to the Scriptures are blessings that come only by the grace of God.

We pray that God would graciously enable our synod to remain faithful to his Word for generations to come.

Next month: We are a gospel-centered synod.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:14,15

This might take a little imagination, but let's try it anyway. You are at the county fair looking at the prize-winning sheep. The owner comes up to you and says, "I'm planning to send that sheep to be slaughtered."

"No," you say.

"Well," he says, "I won't do it if you go in its place."

So who dies, you or the sheep? A sheep isn't worth all that much. Why would anyone give up his or her life for one?

Bad sheep need a good shepherd

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd . . . I lay down my life for the sheep." The metaphor is clear. He is the shepherd and we are the sheep. He draws a distinction between a good shepherd and a hired shepherd. When a hired shepherd sees danger coming, in this case a wolf, he just runs away (John 10:12,13). Why chance getting hurt for a bunch of sheep? How much can a sheep be worth? But a good shepherd does not run away; he lays down his life for the sheep. What could be the reason?

Could it be that we sheep are really valuable sheep? Now, we don't want to stretch this metaphor too far, but no one ever says, "Wise as a sheep," or "Strong as a sheep." Anyone who has ever raised them knows that sheep aren't known for their intelligent behavior or their ability to defend themselves. What they are known for is getting lost. If Jesus wanted to emphasize our value, he wouldn't have compared us to sheep. The truth is, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). We are sinful people. We have done a pretty good job of shunning God's commandments and doing things our way instead of God's way. We have been bad sheep. What we need is our Good Shepherd.

A good shepherd cares for his sheep

But why would even a good shepherd lay down his life for such sheep?

The answer is in Jesus' explanation of why a hired shepherd runs away. "He is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (John 10:13). A good shepherd cares for the sheep; he loves them. A good shepherd's

love for the sheep is profound. Our Good Shepherd doesn't just risk death in order to rescue us; he knew that his death was a certainty. It was the only way to pull us from the jaws of death and damnation. But it cost him his life.

And now something else happens that Jesus refers to in this metaphor, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." When a shepherd spent all day watching his sheep he got to know them individually. And the sheep got to know the shepherd and trust him. Jesus even says later on in this chapter, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life" (10:27,28).

Contributing editor David Sternhagen is pastor at Crown of Life, New Orleans, Louisiana.

This is the second article in a seven-part series on Jesus' "I am" statements. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net, and search by the author's first and last name.

I AM
the good shepherd



Like sheep, we have done a pretty good job of doing things our way instead of God's way. What we need is our Good Shepherd.

David D. Sternhagen



ICS?

Do you have Irrelevant Christian Syndrome (ICS)? Of course, you will not find medical journal articles that explain the syndrome. It is not medical. Neither do psychological or psychiatric researchers study it. It's not psychological. It's more a set of symptoms attached to Christians in this world.

The first symptom is one of language. Christians and non-Christians speak a different language while they use the same words. For example, when Christians talk of redemption, they mean that they are purchased back from sin, death, and hell by the suffering and death of Jesus. For non-Christians, redemption means an opportunity to make up for a mistake. If a football player fumbles, he has an opportunity to redeem himself with a great play later. It applies to other actions in this life too. If you fail once, you can make it up or redeem yourself. Other terms like sin, peace, forgiveness, love, and hope have different definitions in each camp too. The two different sets of definitions bring about widely different theologies and create opposing attitudes and practices. The non-Christian thinks that the Christian's definitions are irrelevant.

And they are, at least if you consider the second symptom. Christians view their lives here as temporary with a perfect world to come—a world Jesus not only promised but opened by his sacrifice. Non-Christians don't share that view. They may believe in a world to come but it is one that everyone will enter if they at least intend to do good. But for the most part, non-Christians are decidedly "this" worldly. They are worried about politics, finances, the environment, and everything else so much that thoughts of Christ, heaven, and the sacrifice of Jesus are irrelevant. That's why—among other reasons—redemption as a do-over concept makes more sense to them than being purchased and won by the blood of Jesus.

Certainly, Christians are in this world, but they are not of this world. They understand that here they have no enduring place, and so they set their attention and efforts on things above. All these ideas flow from the Scriptures, and Christians can prove them by citing the references. But non-Christians view the Bible largely as an archaic and ancient book of old, worn-out ideas. While Christians attend church, many non-Christians think it is a waste of time and irrelevant to their jobs, families, and earthbound futures.

So one form of the malady is a perceived Irrelevant Christian Syndrome (pICS). Non-Christians often simply lump Christians in the irrelevant category, and they not only say so but also don't want to listen to Christian messages and music.

The challenge for Christians is to break through the perceptions. Unfortunately I've read some of the attempts. Some abandon Christian definitions and adopt the definitions current in our world. Peace becomes the end of war. Forgiveness is an interpersonal strategy instead of a cleansing by the blood of Christ. Hope becomes a wish. And faith becomes endurance and resolve in the face of opposition, not trust in Jesus.

My reading list includes Christian and Lutheran writers who have adopted the world's definitions without Christ. From these authors, I can read an entire article and even an entire book about peace, hope, love, and forgiveness, and not find one word about Jesus who died for me and rose again. To my mind, such an approach gives no strength to Christians or any real hope to non-Christians. No gospel is proclaimed. In effect they become irrelevant to both the Christians and the non-Christians.

But I think that two forms of ICS exist. The second is not perceived (pICS), but real (rICS). God willing, we will explore that next time.



GOD'S tool belt for unity

Donald W. Patterson

What needs to be fixed to give us unity? Our tendency to be dishonest.

The father had that painful look in his tear-filled eyes as he spoke with his eight-year-old son. "I am not so upset that you broke the window but that you lied to me about it." The broken relationship was bothering him much more than the broken window. Isolation set in while father and son stared at each other. They felt a million miles apart. Why? Dishonesty. Dishonesty will threaten a relationship every time. If we cannot trust one another to be real and honest then we cannot have a relationship.

Where did dishonesty come from anyway? It came from Adam and Eve. It was their first choice after falling into sin, remember? And we all have the same tendency in our selfishness. We are all tempted to bend the truth, lie to avoid trouble, put on a false front, distort to get what we want . . . the list goes on and on. The truth is that nothing is more destructive to a relationship than not telling it (the truth).

That's why Jesus restores truth when he comes into our lives. He knows how badly we need to be truthful. He talked about it all the time. He restored the truth about God and the truth about how to live our lives. When a person comes to faith in Jesus, one of the marks of that faith is a desire to be truthful.

The apostle Paul led the Ephesians to this realization in his letter to them. Read the passages below and with the guide questions explore together how being truthful builds unity in our relationships.

²⁰You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹Surely you

heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body (Ephesians 4:20-25).

Familiarize yourself with the tool

- According to verses 20-24, what two forces are in a believer's life?
- What characterizes our old sinful self?
- What characterizes our new self?
- How did we come to put on a new self?
- What two reasons does Paul give for being honest with each other (verses 24,25)?

Use the tool

- Think of a key relationship that you have let die because you were not totally honest with that person. Plan how you will go to that person in humility and share the truth and ask for forgiveness.
- List at least three ways that honesty can protect a relationship.
- What is it about Jesus that makes us honest with God, ourselves, and others?

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

This is the second article in a 10-part series on Christian unity. Find this article and answers online after Feb. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

I HATE LENT

Lent forces me to look at things I want to forget.

Joseph B. Johnson

Oh Lent, dark season of dread and despair! How I hate and despise thee! You come into my world as winter and spend your 40 days trying to destroy my whole life! You force me to look at things I want to forget. You make me hear things that I have worked so hard to ignore. Why do you insist on showing me the cross? Why do you force me to see the pain and the sorrow, the blood, the nails, the cursed tree? Is there not enough sorrow in this wide world that you have to show me the Son of God dying? Why, Lent, do you make me look when even the sun in the sky could not bear to keep shining? I hate you for making me watch. And why, Lent, do you tell me that I am to blame? That it was not Pilate and the people of Israel but it was me. It was me! How dare you accuse me of this atrocity and drag me to the foot of Calvary!

You fail to understand that I don't have time for this! I am busy. My days are full; my work important. I have commitments, family, and a schedule. I don't have time for a grim, unwanted guest! I want to see life and joy. I want the brothers three—victory, glory and fame—to visit me. Keep your sorrow. Keep your guilt and your tears. I want the crown. I want Hollywood happy endings! So why, brutal Lent, do you make me kneel next to him as the soldiers mock and torture? Why must I hear the scourge tearing his flesh and the crowd ridiculing him? Why grab me and place my shoulder with Simon's on the cursed cross? I want sunshine, and you bury me in purple darkness!

Grim Lent, you are a hard doctor, and I hate everything you say about me. My pride hates you. My smug self-righteousness loathes you. My independent spirit, that wishes the throne of heaven some other way, wants you dead!

But my new self loves you even as it weeps tears of sorrow filled with joy. I still hate what I have to watch. I want to look away from my Lord's scorned compassion and his terrible loneliness on that tree of death. I still don't want to see my sins nailed, written, and engraved all over his body—as he hangs there, the shame of earth, the glory of heaven.

Oh lovely Lent! You break my heart, and I'm not the same person when you're done. I love Jesus. I love him because you remind me that in spite of everything I've done, he did everything for me!

Yes, Lent, I hate your grim and dark reminders of my failures and sins. They are painful. "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

But, Lent, you are a faithful doctor giving me distasteful medicine so I might discover the healing of Christ. I still find the dark days disturbing, but I need to be disturbed so the crucified Jesus can rescue me from myself.

Then I can sing, "Oh, Lent, how I love thee! Let me count the ways."

Joe Johnson is pastor at True North WELS Campus Ministry, Minneapolis, Minnesota.