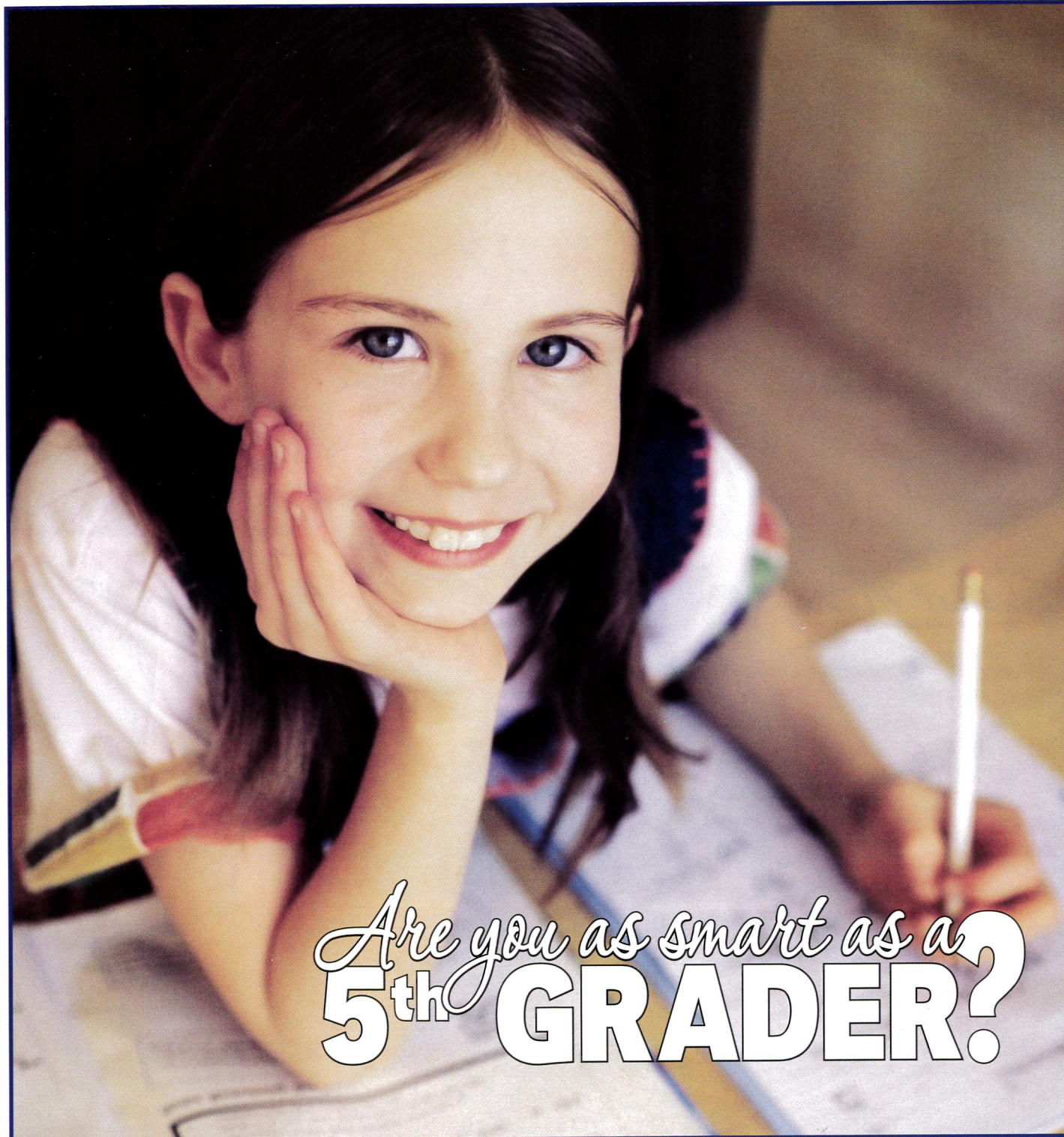


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MAY 2008

Forward in Christ

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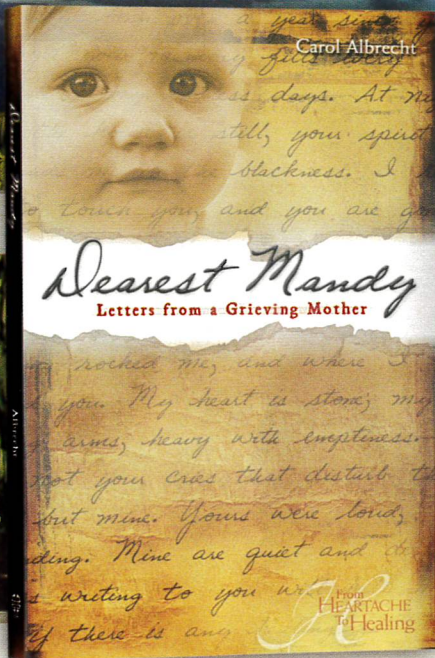


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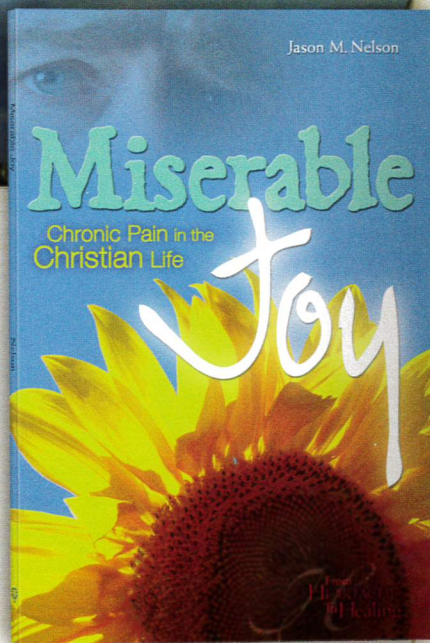
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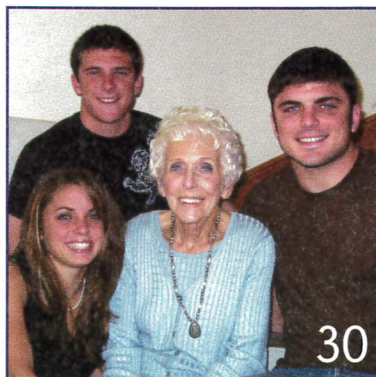
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“How does your biblical knowledge stack up to a fifth-grader’s?”



DESIGN PICS



Forward in Christ

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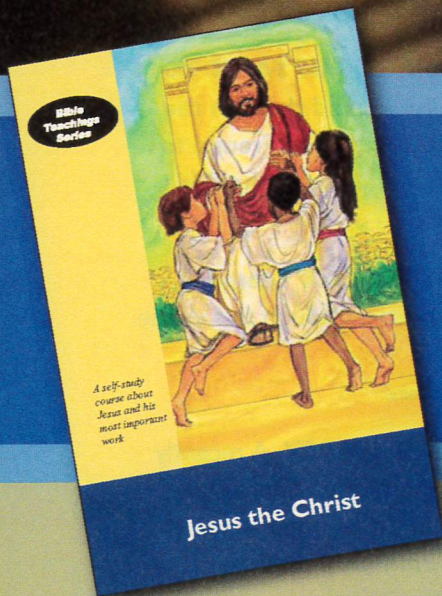
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BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.

1 Kings 8:57

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WHAT'S INSIDE

by Julie Wietzke

With confirmation fast approaching, I thought back to my own. I remember receiving my confirmation passage: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). I remember the nervousness I felt before and during examination, the white dress I wore, the promises I made.

Do you remember your confirmation? One author this month reflected on her confirmation after she found a document, handwritten by her mother, containing her mother's confirmation promises (p. 28). What's amazing is that those responsibilities, spelled out by a teenager in 1937, are still our responsibilities today. And that work doesn't end once confirmation is past. The work is just beginning.

Sometimes it won't be easy. Pastor Earle Treptow reminds us that we will struggle in our Christian living and we will be discouraged (p. 12). But he also reminds us that God will continue to love us, even when we fail. The "Whatever" column this month shows us that he'll be with us even when we have doubts (p. 18).

He will be with us, wherever we go. Just like he promised.

MAY

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DID YOU SEND CARDS?

My son, Christian Sherman, is currently serving in the United States Navy. Over Christmas 2007, he was in Bahrain. On Christmas Eve, Christian received a wonderful surprise for him and his crew. A package containing many Christmas cards made by children was delivered to him! He said the crew really appreciated the cards. Some of his shipmates hadn't received anything for Christmas. These cards were really welcome! My son didn't keep the return address but thought he remembered the address was from a church/school in Wisconsin.

I was wondering if this note could be put into *Forward in Christ*. I hope someone sees it and could contact me so I could thank them! The Navy sailors often feel like they are forgotten. This kindness showed them that they weren't!

Jan Sherman
Findlay, Ohio

You can contact Jan Sherman at
janets01@aol.com—ed.

**HYMNS, HYMNS,
AND MORE HYMNS**

I'm sorry, I cannot get excited over the soon-to-be-published *Christian Worship: Supplement* [Dec. 2007]. Our present hymnal has over 600 hymns. On a given Sunday our congregation usually sings four or five hymns. So, except for special services, it would take more than two years to sing each hymn only one time. When are we to use 86 more hymns? Furthermore—hymns are to sing praise or thanks to God—correct? For those of us who are elderly or have vision problems, and have never had formal music instruction, it is very difficult to follow music which is strange to us and still be able to concentrate on the wording and meaning of the hymn. I think our present hymnal is adequate. Thank you.

Lorraine Nehls
Juneau, Wisconsin

Bryan Gerlach, administrator for the Commission on Worship, responds: We understand that some will not see the necessity of these new worship resources, but others are looking forward to them. There is value in seeing new worship resources through others' eyes, not only our own. . . .

Most congregations do not use all of the hymns (or tunes) in Christian Worship (CW). Many are looking for solid new hymns—songs that powerfully proclaim God's Word. The December 2007 issue of FIC commented on new songs available since CW was published: "The late 20th century was a gigantic explosion of solid, wonderful hymnody and texts and songs."

Some congregations provide large-print worship folders for those whose eyes are not as good as they once were. This is a commendable courtesy, made even easier through the supplement's electronic edition. And learning new tunes? Fifteen of the 80 or so tunes are already familiar to most WELS parishes but with new texts. Many of the other tunes are easy to learn. Introduction guidelines will be available to parishes that purchase the supplement. A good plan for the average parish is "not too much too fast," introducing new tunes at a pace comfortable to most people and with assistance from choirs or soloists. This will help to accomplish what you rightly desire: the ability to concentrate on words and meaning.

THE GOSPEL AS MOTIVATION

A few months back I purchased a book advertised in *Forward in Christ*. The book (written by Robert J. Koester) is titled *Gospel Motivation: More than 'Jesus Died for My Sins.'*

I found that book very helpful in sorting out the difference between using the gospel as a tool—a no-no in orthodox Lutheran theology—and proclaiming the gospel to Christians who are new creations through the Holy Spirit's working in and through that same gospel.

This letter is prompted by the "President's Desk" article [Mar.]. I notice how the article speaks repeatedly of the gospel as "motivation," as well as of how the Christian "will strive to live for God because of the thanks we have for what he has done for us."

To this particular reader such modes of expression are an example of a well-intentioned writer using the "no-no" approach. Such expressions easily come across as leaning on God's children to respond to the gospel out of a necessary indebtedness to that gospel. Bottom line, making Christ another Moses.

I write only to call attention to how easily we pastors can slip into a form of phraseology in preaching and teaching that "uses" the gospel (against which Koester's book cautions), with the result that the gospel of "Jesus dying for my sins" is reduced to mere motivation for doing good works.

Paul Fleischer
Cheyenne, Wyoming

IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH

In response to the wonderful article by Pastor Robert Sawall [Mar.], please accept my thanks. . . .

Responsibility and devotion to wife and church family, over the years, would tax the endurance of any man. We cannot imagine the stress and heartache he has gone through—and must still face. But, as he said, "You depend on your Savior—and with God all things are possible."

Our prayers are with him. We are surely blessed to have him as our shepherd.

Hope Dexter
Clintonville, Wisconsin

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*.

Counting the casualties

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Acts 7:59

Peter A. Panitzke

On *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, the names and pictures of the latest war casualties are displayed in silent tribute.

I've wondered if we should do the same thing in our churches. Should we show the names and pictures of the latest casualties of war? Not the wars being waged in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the spiritual warfare going on in our communities.

We could show the picture of Jerry. His bedroom didn't look like a battlefield. The only evidence of the battle was the casualty—Jerry's body lying on his bed. The devil had used depression and drugs to destroy him.

We could show the picture of Jim and Joe. Jim is a teenager awaiting trial for first-degree murder. Joe is in jail for having sexual relations with an underage girl. Jim's and Joe's lives are destroyed and so are the lives of their victims. Satan claims more casualties.

We could show the picture of Lynn who listened to the flattery of the guy on the softball team. When her husband learned of the affair, she lost her marriage and her children. In her shame she flees any contact with her Christian friends. The tempter rejoices in another victory.

I've changed the names, but the situations are all real.

The victory is sure

Stephen, whose death by stoning is recorded in Acts 7, was also a war casualty. But Stephen's death was not a defeat. Moments before he was stoned to death, God gave Stephen a vision. "'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven

open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:56).

His audience refused to listen to him. Rocks broke his body. But Stephen knew the victory was sure. He had seen the resurrected Christ! In Christ he saw forgiveness of his sins guaranteed and a life that would never end. Jesus was at the Father's right hand with the entire power of the universe at his disposal. Stephen could place himself safely in the hands of this almighty Savior.

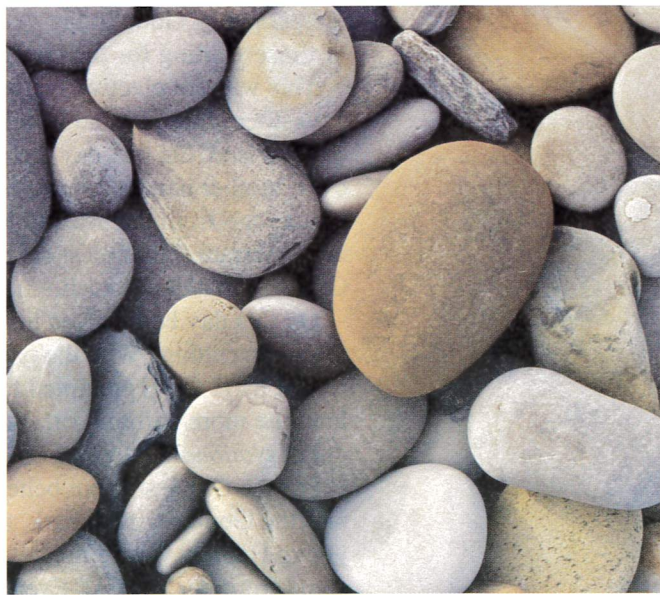
Satan continues to battle against us. But if we ally ourselves with Jesus, we cannot lose. We join Stephen in praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The price of victory is high

That doesn't mean the victory will be easy. It cost Stephen his life.

What cost are you willing to bear in this warfare with Satan? What efforts will you make to reach out to those who battle depression and drugs? Will you be that person who patiently comforts the victims of crime? What energy will you expend to rescue people whose sins are detestable in your sight? Will you care enough to be persistent in offering the hope of healing Christ brings?

Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). Stephen paid that price. Am I willing to pay that price? Are you?



The plan is God's

It is not for us to understand the outcomes of individual skirmishes. Could Stephen's friends have seen that with Stephen's death God was throwing a pebble into a pond? The waves of Christians fleeing the persecution in Jerusalem caused the gospel to flow out to many more people and places.

Don't let Satan's apparent victories discourage you. By faith you too have seen the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Trust that he is the God who "makes everything work out the way he intends" (Ephesians 1:11 *God's Word to the Nations*).

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

Not yet

Thomas J. Jeske

Eyes pinch shut; the tiny mouth forms a screech. Sudden blood appears on fresh, new skin. It's okay, little man. Welcome to the people of God. Today you join the ranks of those waiting for the consolation of Israel.

This was not elective surgery. A brief eight days after childbirth, an Israelite baby boy was circumcised. On that day the infant was handed over: mother handed him to father who handed him to one from the priestly family of Old Testament Israel. The littlest citizen of the city of God was marked as such.

On this day he received his name. But why the sharp cutting? Why the pain? Why the body's sexual part? One is tempted to recoil at all this. Is it one more barbaric rite of passage, straight out of *National Geographic*?

For the Old Testament believers, circumcision was the God-ordained mark, the badge. By it, a young Hebrew was reminded, "The Christ will come from our bodies." Even in his most private moments, the head of the Israelite family was reminded, "I am the LORD's man."

Circumcision was a God-given law. While it comforted the Jewish believer, it fenced away the Gentile world. The people of the Promise must be maintained. God had said that the Messiah would come from Abraham and Sarah—not from diversity, not from intermarriage, not from the rich experience of other cultures.

It had been 2,000 years from Jesus back to Abraham. God said that from the seed of Abraham all nations on earth would be blessed (Genesis 12 and 22). Interesting: it's 2,000 years from you, reader, back to Jesus.

It wasn't a value judgment that God chose to speak no similar commandment for girls; none was needed. Because the fathers were marked, all God's people were marked. God had said in Eden that an offspring of Eve, a male child, would come to crush the serpent's head.

Though there was much seed of Abraham down through the centuries, when the time had fully come, no human seed was involved. It was a female human being whose body God chose, and Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. "So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

In preparation for his birth, the remnant had been kept. Then this ceremonial law—this shadow of an approaching reality, this sign, this fence that defined Israel for 2,000 years—fell down. Other things, too, were fulfilled: Sabbath, priesthood, temple, the Passover lamb, the king. God had come to help his people.

Can you see why the collected letters of the New Testament Church—our "epistles"—need to deal with the sharp memory of circumcision? How difficult it must have been for a Jewish family to set aside circumcision, which was not just a Jewish tradition but a command of God!

What difficulty they had applying the new reality,

"in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value" (Galatians 5:6).

Since the time of Jesus, our heavenly Father has been calling and adopting children of every nation. The chosen people of God now have different skin colors and passports. They speak a variety of languages,

but each believer holds citizenship in a new, spiritual Israel: the Christian church.

The message of circumcision was "not yet." When Christ came, the fences fell down. Like scaffolding on a building, like braces on teeth, like stakes on trees, circumcision was needed but temporary. Thank you, dear Jesus, for always remembering that you were the LORD's man . . . for us.

The message of circumcision was "not yet." . . . Circumcision was needed, but temporary.

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



Forrest L. Bivens

Q. Why do we always refer to the Holy Spirit in the masculine? Reliable academic sources say the Holy Spirit is referred to as feminine in the original Bible languages.

Throughout church history, Christians have consistently referred to the Holy Spirit using masculine pronouns. Recent decades, however, brought intense debate about the gender of the Holy Spirit and the language the church uses to describe this person of the deity. Your timely question reflects the renewed interest and allows us briefly to consider the matter as the Festival of Pentecost approaches (May 11).

Adequate biblical reasons

There are biblical reasons why Christians habitually refer to the Holy Spirit with masculine terms. When referencing the Spirit and his work in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13, the masculine form of the demonstrative pronoun [*ekeinos*] is used, although the word used for “spirit” is neuter in Greek. In the first two passages, if the grammar is stretched a bit, one could perhaps say that “he” [*ekeinos*, that male one] refers to the “counselor” (a masculine word) mentioned earlier in the sentences. However, in John 16:13 there is no other word in the sentence that “he” [*ekeinos*] could refer to except the word spirit.

God has chosen to reveal himself with a variety of terms, and among the most prominent are the masculine terms “Father” and “Son.” The Son, Jesus, became human, and did so as a biological male. The church’s consistent use of masculine terms in describing God reflects this. Passages like Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 also play a role here (“... in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit . . .”). By correlating and coordinating the Spirit with the Father and the Son, we see the personality of the Spirit affirmed. Also, since “Father” and “Son” are masculine terms, many conclude that referring to the Spirit in masculine

terms is most fitting. English Bible translations consistently retain the masculine pronoun for the Spirit.

Inadequate non-biblical reasons

The reportedly scholarly comment that the Holy Spirit is revealed as feminine in the original Bible languages is misleading. The Hebrew word for spirit [*ruach*] is usually feminine

(but sometimes masculine), while the corresponding Greek word [*pneuma*] is neuter. In English we usually link the ideas of masculine, feminine, and neuter to men, women, and things respectively, but not in the biblical languages. We wisely refrain from reading too much into the grammatical gender of Bible words.

The current debate over the Spirit’s gender seldom stems from legitimate theological or purely academic interests. It has more to do with the cultural shift toward feminism. Agenda-driven scholars cite apocryphal writings that speak of the Spirit as feminine, conjecture that church fathers altered biblical texts to remove original feminine references, and conclude it is high time that the “feminine principle” in God be given prominence in the church. This thinking may be considered politically or culturally correct, but is without adequate biblical support or historical evidence.

Most adequate approach

Christians understand that the Father and the Spirit don’t have gender in the same way humans do; God is neither male nor female. Yet we maintain that masculine terminology be normative with reference to God because that is how God has revealed himself in Scripture. Of greater importance is the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying work of God for all humanity. We rejoice in that above all else.

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

Are you as smart as a 5th grader?



How does your biblical knowledge stack up to a fifth-grader's? The following quiz, which includes a variety of biblical questions gleaned from our synod's fifth- and sixth-grade Bible curriculum materials, will help you review some biblical truths. You may find a few questions easy, while others may prove more challenging. God's blessings as you use this quiz to help you study the most important book we have: God's Holy Word.

Michael P. Albrecht

1. How many books are there in the Bible?
 - a. 27
 - b. 39
 - c. 66
2. What are the two great teachings of the Bible?
 - a. Law and gospel
 - b. Prayer and repentance
 - c. Love and salvation
3. The prophet Balaam, while traveling to curse God's chosen people, the Israelites, was scolded by _____.
 - a. the King of Israel
 - b. the archangel Michael
 - c. his donkey
4. Who wrote the book of Acts?
 - a. Luke
 - b. Paul
 - c. John
5. God provided manna for the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. What does "manna" mean?
 - a. White bread
 - b. "What is it?"
 - c. Heavenly food
6. "By grace you are saved through _____."
 - a. works
 - b. faith
 - c. yourselves

7. How many healed lepers returned to Jesus to give thanks?
- a. None
 - b. One
 - c. Ten
8. Which of the following is NOT a use of God's law?
- a. Obstacle
 - b. Mirror
 - c. Curb
9. "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" is a famous Easter hymn written by Samuel Medley. What Old Testament believer spoke these words?
- a. Moses
 - b. David
 - c. Job
10. Who was bitten by a snake and shook it off into a fire, experiencing no harm?
- a. Peter
 - b. Paul
 - c. Samuel
11. What are the means of grace?
- a. The gospel in the Word
 - b. The gospel in Baptism and Holy Communion
 - c. The gospel in both the Word and the sacraments
12. What discipline did Jonah receive because he was unhappy that God spared the Ninevites?
- a. God made him seriously ill
 - b. God killed his favorite plant
 - c. God made him wander in the desert for three years
13. What weapon did Samson use to defeat a thousand Philistines?
- a. Jawbone of a donkey
 - b. Spear
 - c. Sword
14. What is the threefold office of Christ?
- a. High priest, prophet, king
 - b. Savior, deliverer, comforter
 - c. Redeemer, ruler, judge
15. Who wrote the first five books of the Bible?
- a. Joshua
 - b. Jacob
 - c. Moses
16. Where were the Ten Commandments given?
- a. Mount Sinai
 - b. Mount Nebo
 - c. Mount Ararat
17. Jesus is called the Alpha and the _____.
- a. Beta
 - b. Omega
 - c. Delta
18. What did King Belshazzar see that frightened him immensely?
- a. A talking statue
 - b. A hand writing on the wall
 - c. A vision of God
19. What are the blessings of Baptism?
- a. God forgives our sins and delivers from death and the devil
 - b. God gives us eternal salvation
 - c. Both a and b
20. How many wise men came from the East to worship Jesus?
- a. Three
 - b. Five
 - c. We don't know
21. "Now _____ is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."
- a. faith
 - b. love
 - c. grace
22. To what was Jacob's name changed?
- a. Joseph
 - b. Saul
 - c. Israel
23. How far did Jesus tell us to go and preach the gospel?
- a. Into neighboring cities
 - b. Into many countries
 - c. Into all the world
24. 1 Corinthians 13 is sometimes referred to as the _____ chapter of the Bible.
- a. best
 - b. love
 - c. shortest
25. What is the last word in the Bible?
- a. Jesus
 - b. Soon
 - c. Amen

How did you do? Check your answers on p. 27.

Michael Albrecht is a teacher at Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin.





YOU SHALL BEAR MUCH FRUIT

When you struggle in your service to the Lord, don't throw in the towel. Remember that your life of service is not a prerequisite for God's love.

Earle D. Treptow

Start with one heaping helping of exhaustion. Mix in mounds of frustration. Finally, stir in an unhealthy dose of fear. (Please don't try this at home!) The result of such a concoction? The Lord's prophet Elijah, sitting under a broom tree in the desert, stepping away from the work the Lord had given him to do. Convinced that failure awaited him even if he somehow found the strength to go on, Elijah decided his time had come. He submitted his resignation. " 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors' " (1 Kings 19:4).

A life of service had not gone the way he had hoped. Instead of seeing success, Elijah saw that what he did had little influence. From Elijah's perspective, two options remained: either continue to tackle an impossible task or throw in the towel. Deeming the former foolish and the latter logical, Elijah quit.

The struggles of Christian living

More than one child of God has found himself under Elijah's broom tree ready to give up. Not intentionally, of course; it just happens. The child of God, filled with love for the one who freely gave himself into death for sinners, longs to live in a way that glorifies God.

He strives, with all of his energy, to serve the Savior by serving others. Knowing that the strength for Christian living comes not from self but the Spirit, the child of God turns regularly to the Word of Life. He recalls each day his adoption into the family of God through Holy Baptism. He frequently dines at the Lord's Table, receiving the Savior's body and blood under the bread and wine. In other words, he follows the Lord's recipe for holy living.

But what he witnesses in his life bears little resemblance to the picture on the recipe card. Expecting an abundance of deeds of love, he notices an abundance of transgressions in their place. He thought he'd have put those pet sins to sleep and made holy living a habit. Instead of selflessness, he detects a growing selfishness. Instead of a life increasingly different than the world around him, he observes that he has blended in with the crowd. Even a redoubling of efforts seems to yield the same result: failure.

The enemy's "solution"

Soon the child of God finds himself under the broom tree, horribly disappointed with himself. He has, in full measure, each of the symptoms of the Elijah syndrome: exhaustion, frustration, and fear. All by himself, he begins to ponder his options.

Only he's not all by himself. Underneath every broom tree stands the Liar, eager to "help." He suggests that there is only one way to be free from disappointment—quit.

He has the resignation papers in hand, needing only the child of God's signature.

If the devil senses reluctance, he offers several sound reasons to resign. Call the first one the "impossible" argument. "You've tried and tried and tried," he argues. "There's no use beating your head against the wall, when you know that you'll never serve him perfectly." The second is the "your best interests" approach. "Disappointment is debilitating," he contends. "That's all you will ever know if you don't resign." The third might be called the "beat him to the punch" claim. "You have failed God repeatedly," he offers. "God can't stand failures. He's going to fire you anyway, so you might as well resign."

God's truths to remember

When the devil tempts you to sign those resignation papers, keep several truths in mind. First, as long as you live in this world, the sinful flesh will cling to you. Even the great apostle Paul had to lament his sinfulness and the power of the old Adam in his life. "What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Romans 7:19,20). We ought not be surprised that our sinfulness shows itself in sinful deeds and that our lives do not match our dreams. It's a reality this side of the grave. The flesh will stand in the way of the service we desire to offer our Savior.

In that same chapter, St. Paul also gives us a second truth to remember when we have the resignation papers before us: we have the victory in Jesus. The apostle concludes his analysis of his life with these words: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24,25). When we are tempted to quit, it's in part because we have forgotten that our lives of service are merely the response to God's love, not a prerequisite for it. God's love for us does not increase

or decrease on the basis of our lives of obedience. His love for us is rather based on Christ's perfect life in our place and his willing death for our sins. By rising from the dead, Jesus proved that every one of our sins has been forgiven. His triumphant ascension into heaven demonstrated that he had completed the saving work the Lord had assigned to him.

The ascended Lord now sits at the right hand of God. There he intercedes for us. He constantly pleads for our forgiveness on the basis of his sacrifice. Make no mistake about it. He has the Father's ear. The Father does what the Son asks him to do.

Our failures in holy living have not separated us from God. We may fear that they have; we may feel that God cannot love or forgive us. Don't bother with your feelings! Listen to the truth.

Here's a third truth to bear in mind when that resignation letter looks appealing: the time is coming when frustration

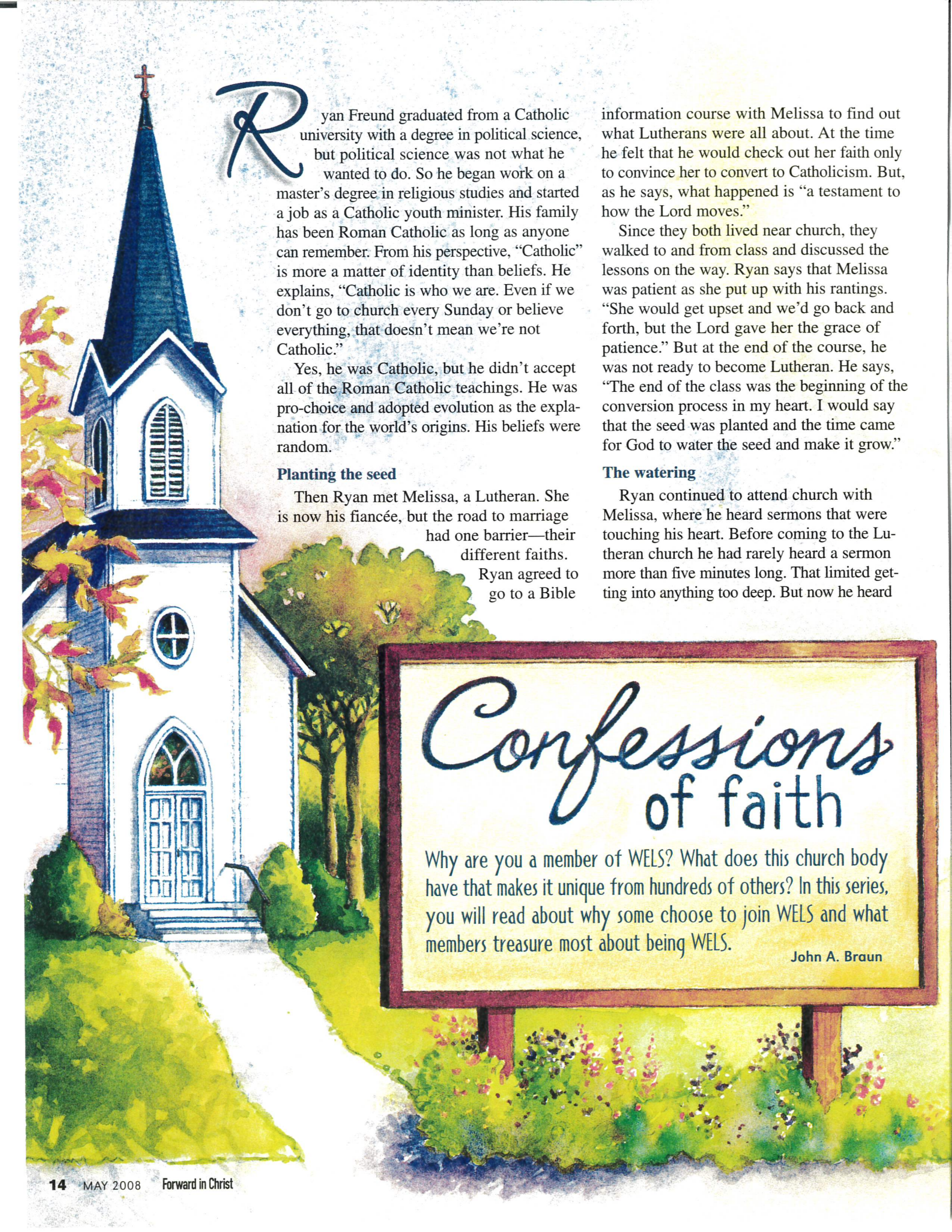
and disappointment with our Christian living will be a thing of the past. The same Jesus who ascended into heaven promises to return in glory. On that great day, Jesus will raise our bodies from the dead and glorify them. He will "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). Free from the sinful nature, we will serve our Savior perfectly. Free from the temptations of the devil, we will never again think shameful thoughts or speak biting words or indulge in rebellious activity. Instead we will offer the Savior the perfect service we desire to give already now.

Rather than resign in frustration, then, we carry on with joy. Forgiveness is ours. Our risen and ascended Savior has won the victory. His victory is our victory. Soon, in the new heavens and the new earth, we will serve him perfectly. So we joyfully say each day, "Take my life, Lord! Work in me what pleases you!"

Earle Treptow is pastor at Zion, Denver, Colorado.

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

**God's love for us
does not increase
or decrease on
the basis of our
lives of obedience.**

A watercolor illustration of a church with a tall, dark blue steeple topped with a cross. The church has white walls and a large arched doorway. To the right of the church is a sign with a wooden frame. The sign has the title 'Confessions of faith' in a large, blue, cursive font. Below the title is a paragraph of text in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font, followed by the author's name 'John A. Braun' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. The background shows green grass, trees, and a path leading to the church.

Ryan Freund graduated from a Catholic university with a degree in political science, but political science was not what he wanted to do. So he began work on a master's degree in religious studies and started a job as a Catholic youth minister. His family has been Roman Catholic as long as anyone can remember. From his perspective, "Catholic" is more a matter of identity than beliefs. He explains, "Catholic is who we are. Even if we don't go to church every Sunday or believe everything, that doesn't mean we're not Catholic."

Yes, he was Catholic, but he didn't accept all of the Roman Catholic teachings. He was pro-choice and adopted evolution as the explanation for the world's origins. His beliefs were random.

Planting the seed

Then Ryan met Melissa, a Lutheran. She is now his fiancée, but the road to marriage had one barrier—their different faiths.

Ryan agreed to go to a Bible

information course with Melissa to find out what Lutherans were all about. At the time he felt that he would check out her faith only to convince her to convert to Catholicism. But, as he says, what happened is "a testament to how the Lord moves."

Since they both lived near church, they walked to and from class and discussed the lessons on the way. Ryan says that Melissa was patient as she put up with his rantings. "She would get upset and we'd go back and forth, but the Lord gave her the grace of patience." But at the end of the course, he was not ready to become Lutheran. He says, "The end of the class was the beginning of the conversion process in my heart. I would say that the seed was planted and the time came for God to water the seed and make it grow."

The watering

Ryan continued to attend church with Melissa, where he heard sermons that were touching his heart. Before coming to the Lutheran church he had rarely heard a sermon more than five minutes long. That limited getting into anything too deep. But now he heard

Confessions of faith

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

John A. Braun

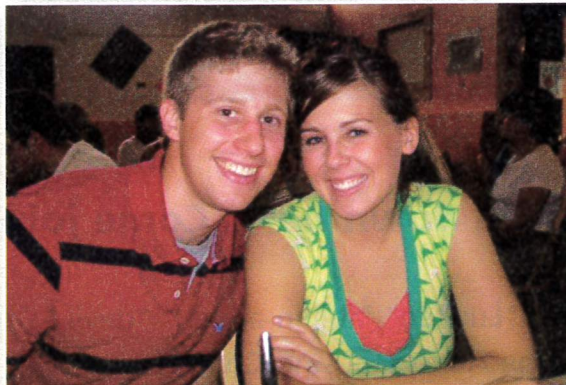
a consistent message: the seed was watered by the Holy Spirit through the preaching he heard.

It was a gradual process, and he could not identify any one sermon that was especially important or any moment when he had a “breakthrough.” It was all in God’s hands. Of course, he and Melissa continued to discuss what he heard. “At times, I just wanted to be right,” he confesses. But the more he heard and thought, the more he felt he didn’t have any choice.

The Holy Spirit had created a deep respect for the Bible in Ryan’s heart. He remembers how the Lutheran pastor “told it to me straight.” The Bible is God’s Word and true. Ryan says that accepting the Bible as God’s Word was the cornerstone of his conversion. He couldn’t any longer pick out what he would believe and not believe. He came to realize that “even if I have difficulty with portions of the Bible, I know it is true.”

He was still attending classes at the Catholic university pursuing his master’s degree in religious studies. Much of what he heard at the university was different from the Bible. He sensed his teachers were turning away from any idea of absolute truth. There was no “yes” and “no” or “black” and “white.” Instead truth was all relative. He began to ask questions. The answer was often, “Well, Ryan, we have a different way of understanding that now.” Ryan wondered why.

He remembers one question in particular. Some Catholics question why they should refer to God as “Father” instead of addressing God as the “Father/Mother God.” Such theology concludes that the modern world is so much further along than the ancient concepts of “Father” and the Bible. But the preaching he heard at the Lutheran church and the Bible said something different.



Ryan and his fiancée, Melissa. Ryan and Melissa are members at Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.

Ryan came to believe that the Bible is the center and all beliefs come from the Bible. What is not in the Bible should be discarded.

He was still working as a Catholic youth minister, but his “heart was in another place,” he says. “I wanted to go to church and hear God’s message. It was a hard thing for me to choke down. Wow! I had a master’s degree in Catholic theology and starting a career in Catholic church work, and now I was starting to be a Lutheran.” Finally he “gave in to the work of the Holy Spirit.”

Growth and strength

Ryan describes his conversion as wrestling with God. It was a year-long struggle, but you don’t wrestle with God and win. “Like Jacob you learn to lean on God. You come away from wrestling with God realizing you don’t win. You simply go forward with him,” says Ryan. The time came for Ryan to leave the Roman Catholic Church and abandon his job as youth minister. Fortunately he found another job and looks forward to marrying Melissa this June.

His confession is Lutheran now. He says, “The work of Jesus on the cross is 100 percent enough for salvation. Jesus did it all. He covers a multitude of sins. He brings forgiveness. He is the eternal sacrifice. It’s his purity, his spotlessness, his righteousness. That’s the one and only thing that atones for sins . . . No amount of what we do aids him.

I don’t help Jesus save me. He saved me—a poor, wretched person. There’s nothing I could add to that.” And living your faith? It’s not the Catholic idea of Jesus and works. Ryan concludes, “Well, if you don’t live your faith, there’s a question of whether or not you have faith. Our actions only show that we have faith.”

Ryan also slowly has become part of our Lutheran community.

He thinks we have a “good thing going.” Our liturgy is not Roman Catholic but ancient and historic. We have been around a long time; our teachings are apostolic. “I love that” he says. “It’s cool. I feel like if every Catholic could go through a Bible information class and experience this kind of church, I think they would all convert.” Why? “Because God is behind it. His Holy Spirit is moving in this church and we speak the Word of God. God will bless that.”

He misses celebrating Holy Communion every week. Now he has a deeper understanding of what that means, and he would like to participate more often. He also has a little difficulty with the way WELS members all seem to know everyone. Conversations often start with how people are related to others and how they knew each other when they went to school. He’s an outsider coming in, but it hasn’t been a huge problem. When people hear that he was a Catholic youth minister, they say, “Oh man, how did that happen?” The conversation is easy from then on. The answer is that the Holy Spirit worked through the gospel to bring Ryan to treasure the truths of the Bible.

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.

Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member or what you treasure most about WELS? Send it to Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net.

Satan's Profile

satan



"It's warm down here. Come join me."

Name: Satan

Nicknames: "Lucifer," "fallen angel," "devil," "the ancient serpent"

Address: The Abyss Housing Complex

Education: Attended Divine State University

Accomplishments: Starred in numerous movies and TV shows

Relationship status: Looking for friends

Name: Angel of Light

This is not his real name. While he can appear as an angel of light he is far from it. He is the devil, a fallen angel, the ancient serpent, and the evil one.

Address: The Abyss Housing Complex

This is no Holiday Inn. Far from it. It is another name for hell. This is not only Satan's address, which will soon be made permanent, but notice that it is called a "complex." That means that there is plenty of room for others. Satan would love to have others—including us—join him in this terrible place.

Educational background: Divine State University

Don't let this fool you. The truth is that he was expelled from this place called heaven because of violent behavior. He led a "student rebellion" and tried to take heaven over. A number of other "students" now called demons joined him in this evil act. That is how he ended up living in the housing complex mentioned above.

Employment history: Truth Enhancement Consultant

The only way to enhance the truth is to lie and the devil is good at it. He is even called the father of lies. He lied to our first parents about the fruit. He lied to King David about the fun he would find in an affair. He lied to Peter about the need to look out for himself. He will lie to you and me. Don't believe a thing he says. It may sound good. It may look appealing. That's the way he works. He likes to package his lies in a wrapper of truth. But they are still lies.

Titles: The god of this age / Ruler of the kingdom of the air / Prince of this world

These are some pretty impressive titles that Scripture gives the devil. They not only indicate that he has great power, but also that he is followed and honored by many. Sadly that is the case not only in the spirit world but also in the material world. Many do not trust in the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. They follow a lesser god and lord, the devil. A few actually worship him. They are called Satanists. Others let him rule their lives through greed, selfishness, and other forms of sin.

Experience: **Food Provider / Financial Advisor**

Provided quality food. He's talking about the way he convinced Adam and Eve to sin. Yes, it was good quality fruit but also forbidden fruit. This was not a highlight in the lives of Adam and Eve or in the history of the world. It was earth's darkest day.

Increased financial portfolio. I believe he is talking about how he tempted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus for 30 silver coins—not exactly a large amount of money. What he doesn't mention here is that it ruined Judas in the long run, not only financially but eternally.

Skills: **Entertainment Coordinator**

This is nothing but a politically correct term for "tempter," which is one of his main skills. He has studied us for a long time and knows our weaknesses better than we do. What is your weakness? Is it pornography? Then he will tempt you in front of a computer keyboard. Is it gambling? Then it may be encouraging you to pull that lever one more time. Is it laziness? The work will still be there tomorrow. Is it workaholism? He will convince you that you need to work this way to get ahead.

Skills: **Conflict Resolution Facilitator**

Another fancy name for "accuser." After he tempts you to sin, he will then accuse you of being a terrible sinner, hoping to lead you to despair. He will try to tell you, "Forgiveness is not for you. Your sin is too great. Your situation is hopeless." Don't listen to him. Remember Christ died for all sinners and paid for all sins—including you and yours.

Notable accomplishments: **Movie Star**

Satan has starred in numerous movies such as *The Exorcist*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Unholy*, *The Gate*, *The Omen*, and *Warlock*. He also appears in the new TV program "Reaper." There is little doubt that "Satan sells." But, friends, do we really want to be entertained by the devil? Remember the words of the apostle Paul. They not only apply to what we think about but also what we see: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

Satan would like nothing better than to be your friend. He says that he can help you improve your situation in life. Don't listen to him. He wants nothing more than to make you spiritually bankrupt. He wants your ruin. Don't consider Satan's invitation to be your friend. Get rid of it. Throw it away. This is one person you don't want as your friend. Remember who you are. Remember whose you are. You are a child of God.

John Schuetze, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee.

Find a related Bible study on this topic after May 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

WHATEVER

Unsure

Have you ever had doubts about your faith? I have, and it took a friend to open my eyes to see the truth.

How would you feel if you were completely unsure about something your friends seemed to be so certain about?

I know how it feels to be going about my life as a Christian, in a Christian high school, and not really being sure what I believed about God. I wasn't even sure I believed. I just didn't grasp the concept like I thought I was supposed to. To me, God was like a lesson in school, and I just couldn't get it through my head.

Ever since I was in kindergarten I've been in Christian schools. I sang all the songs, I learned all the memory work, and I did all the Bible history worksheets. But as I got older, I couldn't help but think, "What if there is no God? What if after we die, we just die? What if the religions we learn about in history class are right? We believe just as strongly as they do. What if Allah is the only true god? What if our religion is the untrue one?" I just didn't know.

I felt like this from seventh grade until ninth grade. I didn't talk to anyone about it because it didn't seem like anyone felt the way I did. Everyone seemed to be perfect Christians who were firm in the faith and never had doubts.

Then I met someone during the second semester of ninth grade. She was different than the other girls. It seemed like I could really be myself around her and tell her how I felt. As we got to know each other I opened up about things, but I still kept my doubts to myself. It took me some time to figure out how to word it and how I would bring it up.

I can't say I remember exactly how I **did** it, but one night on the phone I just came out and told her. I said that I wasn't sure about God and nothing made sense to me. I asked her how she felt about it. She

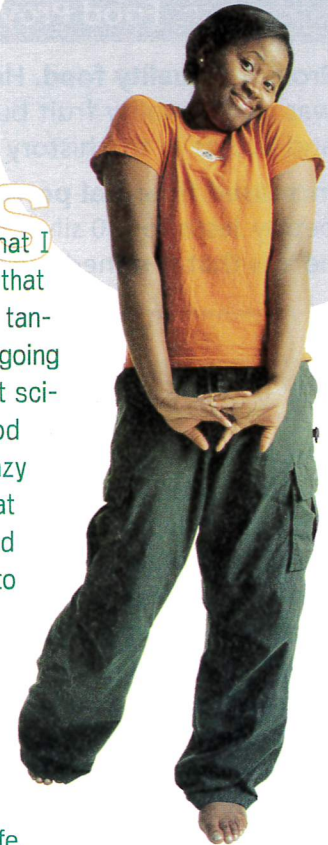
seemed to understand what I was feeling. She told me that faith isn't about facts and tangible evidence. Faith isn't going to come down to an exact science. Faith believes in God even though it seems crazy to believe. Faith knows that Jesus humbled himself and left his heavenly kingdom to give his life for us. Faith knows that we will be taken to heaven after we leave this earth. Faith just believes.

Although I went to Christian schools all my life, and went to church every Sunday, I still didn't see Jesus in my life. This is what it took to finally make me realize that he is all around me. Jesus won't just show up in front of your face and say, "Hi. It's me, Jesus. Believe in me now." You need to find Jesus in the words of the Bible. The hardest part of this was the fact that I wanted to see some proof, and that kind of proof wasn't there.

I found God. Well, actually, he had been there the whole time. It just took the help of a friend to show me what to look for.

Sometimes you may feel like you're the only one who feels the way you do, but I assure you: you are not. God is always there, waiting for you to see him. All you need to do is open your eyes, even if someone has to open them for you.

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



Obituaries

Judith Ann Schroeder 1940-2008

Judith Schroeder (nee Wantoch) was born Jan. 7, 1940, in Norfolk, Neb. She died Jan. 26, 2008, in Appleton, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Emanuel, Fairfax, Minn., and St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her parents and an infant brother. She is survived by her husband, Don; one son; one daughter; two sisters; and many other relatives and friends.

Wilhelm Harold Wiedenmeyer 1914-2008

Wilhelm Wiedenmeyer was born March 17, 1914, in Roscoe, S.D. He died Feb. 5, 2008, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1941 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served in numerous congregations as well as Lutheran Institutional Ministry Association, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Esther; four brothers; and three

sisters. He is survived by nieces, nephews, and many friends.

Charlotte S. Spitzer 1921-2008

Charlotte Spitzer (nee Ziesemer) was born June 6, 1921, in Appleton, Wis. She died Feb. 23, 2008, in Marinette, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Elroy; and two brothers. She is survived by three sons, one daughter, and four grandchildren.

Arnold William Tiefel 1916-2008

Arnold Tiefel was born March 3, 1916, in Orchard, Neb. He died March 8, 2008.

A 1941 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Jehovah-Zion, Detroit, Mich.; Emanuel, Greenwood Township/Redeemer, Yale, Mich.; Bethel, Menasha, Wis.; Immanuel/St. Peter,

Kewaunee, Wis.; Faith, Oshkosh, Wis.; First, Green Bay/Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Grete; two brothers; and one sister. He is survived by his second wife, Erma; one son; one daughter; eight grandchildren; two brothers; and one sister.

Bernhardt Henry Boese 1909-2008

"Ben" Boese was born March 22, 1909, in Nashville Township, Martin County, Minn. He died March 16, 2008, in New London, Wis.

A 1929 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught for 45 years at Emanuel, New London, Wis.

He was preceded in death by two brothers and three sisters. He is survived by his wife, Beata; two sons; one daughter; seven grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Untangling the Web

Want to know what's going on in the daily life of WELS world missionaries? Check out the new World Missions blog at <http://missions.wels.net>. This blog is designed to let the story of missions be told by those in the mission field. Here you can read and comment on updates that come directly from world missionaries, lay missionaries, and layworkers. One example of the blogs that you will find are updates from the Meiers, who along with Pastor Jeff Enderle and his family started language training in Portugal in February to prepare for initial outreach efforts in Mozambique in 2009.



READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

JUNE 2008

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Acts 7:44-8:4 | 16. Ex. 8 |
| 2. Ac. 8:5-25 | 17. Ex. 9 |
| 3. Ac. 8:26-40 | 18. Ex. 10, 11 |
| 4. Ac. 9:1-19a | 19. Ex. 12:1-36 |
| 5. Ac. 9:19b-31 | 20. Ex. 12:37-13:22 |
| 6. Ac. 9:32-42 | 21. Ex. 14:1-15:21 |
| 7. Ac. 9:43-10:33 | 22. Ex. 15:22-16:36 |
| 8. Ac. 10:34-48 | 23. Ex. 17 |
| 9. Ac. 11:1-18 | 24. Ex. 18 |
| 10. Ac. 11:19-30 | 25. Ex. 19, 20 |
| 11. Ac. 12:1-24 | 26. Acts 12:25-13:12 |
| 12. Exodus 1, 2 | 27. Acts 13:13-43 |
| 13. Ex. 3:1-4:17 | 28. Acts 13:44-52 |
| 14. Ex. 4:18-6:9 | 29. Acts 14:1-12 |
| 15. Ex. 6:10-7:25 | 30. Acts 14:13-28 |

Program gives a Christian education to children in Thailand

In a village in Thailand called Baan Ruam Thai 9, many families part with their children year after year as they send them to receive a free education at Buddhist temples far from their village. While many of these families know Christ and are members of the village's Hmong Lutheran church, they simply cannot afford to pay for the village schools. Through a program called "Bring the Children Home," the WELS mission in Thailand is making it possi-

ble for these families to stay together and for their children to have a Christian education.

The program began in May 2006 with 21 eager Hmong children. It has grown to more than 30 children between the ages of 4 and 14. Through sponsorships and donations, the program provides funding for the children to attend the village schools during the week. In addition, they spend Friday evening through Sunday afternoon at the church where the village evangelists teach Bible classes along with Hmong literacy and music lessons.

Teachers Sam and Joe are originally from Baan Ruam Thai 9 and, after being among the first graduates of the "It Is Finished" Bible Institute in Chiang Mai, they returned to their village as full-time evangelists. As they work to bring the gospel to their village, it has been a challenge for them to find time to organize this program and spend the week-ends teaching and supervising. But the work they do is invaluable, not only in sharing God's

Word with the children, but also in building a good rapport among the church and the village families.

"These children are learning God's Word early on in their lives, and it shows," says Robert Meister, a WELS missionary who has been with the Thailand mission since it began in 1993. "To hear them sing hymns by heart, recite prayers, and respond in the Sunday morning liturgy is indeed a blessing from God."

The hope is that these children will be the evangelists of the future. Perhaps they will continue learning the Scriptures at the Bible Institute and Seminary in Chiang Mai, where they could train to be lifelong Christian leaders. "We pray that these children will one day be teaching their own children the truths of God's Word," says Eric Duwe, a WELS Kingdom Worker volunteer in Thailand. "We also trust that they will be solid Christian believers in the churches they will attend in the future."

To learn more about the "Bring the Children Home" program, e-mail promisupdate@gmail.com.



These children can now stay home with their families and receive a Christian education through the "Bring the Children Home" project in Thailand.

WLCFS program widens counselors' reach

In an effort to support called workers as they counsel congregation members, Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service (WLCFS) has developed the Member Assistance Program, a program that uses distance and on-site counseling, educational programming, and one-on-one staff consultation to help WELS congregations strengthen their members.

"We want to help the organization by helping its members grow and solve their problems so that those members can work together more effectively to help carry out the goals and mission of that congregation," says Dan Nommensen, DCC and coordinator of the program.

In the Member Assistance Program, WLCFS, based in Milwaukee, Wis., contracts with a congregation, school, or organization to provide a certain number of counseling sessions and other services per year.

Open Bible, Whiteriver, Ariz., was the first organization to get involved in the program. Open Bible is located on the Fort Apache Reservation, a place where counseling needs are great. "We needed to offer Christian counseling because in our community it's hard enough to be a Christian. It's even harder to find good, professional, Christian advice," says Dan Rautenberg, pastor at Open Bible.

One of the features of the Member Assistance Program—video assisted counseling—makes the program especially helpful to the members of Open Bible. The counseling, which uses computers, a secure video conference platform, and a Web cam, allows certified WLCFS counselors to provide an assessment and short-term counseling to congregation members not within driving distance of a WLCFS counseling office. If more help is needed, WLCFS counselors can then refer members to a counselor in the area.

"We do not want to replace what their spiritual leader is doing," says Nommensen, "but we're here to

Crass accepts call to be new president of Luther Prep

In March, Rev. Matthew Crass accepted the call to be president of Luther Preparatory School (LPS) in Watertown, Wis., one of two WELS Ministerial Education preparatory high schools. The president position had been vacant since former LPS President Mark Schroeder was elected WELS president at the 2007 synod convention.

Crass served for the past 10 years as dean at LPS. As president, he says he looks forward to continuing to work with parents and students in encouraging and preparing young men and women for public gospel ministry. "That's why we exist," says Crass. "That purpose has remained constant for the past 143 years. By God's grace, LPS has fulfilled that purpose and will continue to do so."

According to Crass, one of the challenges currently facing LPS is enrollment. "In my new role, I'd like to ask my brothers and sisters in the ministry to help identify students who could come to Luther Prep," says Crass. "In some cases, pastors and teachers can be the most influential people in terms of encouraging students for the ministry—and what a blessing that is."

Crass says this is important because not many eighth-grade students know they want to be a pastor or teacher; there is also a preconception that students have to commit to the public ministry to attend Luther Prep. During his years as dean, however, Crass says he saw many LPS students enter the ministry who originally had little intent of doing so. "I think of a boy who recently graduated and never seriously considered attending Martin Luther College (MLC)," says Crass. "But he transferred to MLC after his first semester at another college. I credit God's grace for that, but I also contend that God used the encouragement of LPS professors, tutors, and peers."

Crass is excited by his own children's interest in serving in the full-time ministry: one is studying at MLC, two are attending LPS, and one is enrolled at a Lutheran elementary school. "Their desire to serve the Lord gives me the greatest joy of what they've done in their life," he says. "But at the same time I say that without ever wanting to pressure my own children—as with the LPS students—into serving in the min-



New LPS President Matthew Crass; his wife, Kathy; and his children: (l to r) Johannah, Isaac, Samuel, and Elizabeth.

istry. They have to want to do that."

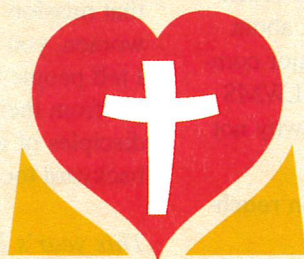
Crass says that even though sending children away from home to a preparatory school can be intimidating, the payoff is amazing. "The continual Christian education during these formative years of their lives is so important," he says. "I have to believe that any parent who sends their child to a prep school would say, 'Whatever investment I made was well worth it and then some—eternally worth it.'"

support the services they already receive from their pastor or teacher."

Besides offering this counseling, Open Bible also sponsors Faith Stepping Stones seminars, a WLCFS program on family ministry, every couple months. It hopes to put together support groups as well as open a Christian bookstore to help fund counseling programs in the future. Through a WELS Kingdom Workers grant, Open Bible was able to hire and train a layworker to coordinate the program on its end. "We want to be able to provide help," says Rautenberg. "We have many people who need more advanced counseling than pastors are able to offer.

It's heartbreaking not to be able to help when you have nothing professional to offer."

WLCFS is thrilled that it can help. "We feel a desire and a calling to serve [WELS members]," says Nommensen.



**Wisconsin Lutheran
Child & Family Service**

WLCFS currently has four organizations in the Member Assistance Program. "We are taking a controlled-growth approach to enable us to provide the best service to those we serve," says Nommensen. "We are solidifying [the program] with the groups we have now and will grow as the Lord enables us to do so."

For more information about the Member Assistance Program, contact Dan Nommensen at 888-685-9522; dnommensen@wlcfs.org.

Q&A with Lynnette Hupman, LWMS president

With the 2008 Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) convention approaching in June, Lynnette Hupman sat down with *Forward in Christ* to talk about the organization's history, its mission, and its future.

Question – Tell me a little bit about LWMS—how was it started?

Answer – The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society was established about 45 years ago when a group of women decided they wanted to be involved with mission work. The Central Africa Medical Mission was around during that period, but the women felt like there was just so much more to missions that needed to be supported. So they got together and decided the best thing to do was work on increasing interest in and supporting non-budgeted mission needs of the synod.

Question – What are some of the really unique projects LWMS has supported over the years?

Answer – I think the biggest thing is sending women to Africa. A few years ago we had four women travel to Malawi. They presented Bible studies and worked with the missionaries over there. This year we have the "Sisters Serving Jesus" team, which consists of four women—ages 30-60—who traveled to Nigeria in April. They are part of God's army, and they went out on the front lines and saw what's happening in another part of the world. So those two trips are unique.

Question – Aside from the Nigeria trip, are there any other big projects or goals for this year?

Answer – One of the things that I would like us to do is to come up with a mentorship program. We've already formed an outreach team to focus on college-age women and the congregations that are not LWMS members. We want to reach out to those groups and say, "You should think about being a part of this." And we're not talking major commitments of time—the extent of being part of LWMS can be just praying. You're praying anyway, so why not pray for the missionaries?

Question – What is the biggest challenge in reaching out to these groups?

Answer – For college-age women, I think the biggest thing that stands in the way is the fact that our founders have gray hair. People think that because they don't have

gray hair it's not their organization. When I got married, I kept thinking I had to have a baby to become part of the women's circle or ladies aid at my church. There's that [mindset] of "when I get old enough, then I'll do stuff like that," instead of people realizing that the "go telling" needs to be now. So our image needs some updating.

We're also trying to reach retired professional women like myself. There are women who are living longer and are trying to figure out what to do with the rest of their lives and how to best serve their Lord. So we want to tap into that group and see what they can do to help our organization along.

Question – What are some of the blessings women experience by being part of this organization?

Answer – We've given women a chance to use their leadership and their spiritual skills to lead women. And we expect them to lead. We want women to say, "You know what? This is important and I want to get my congregation excited about missions." LWMS is the only women's group that is for women and by women in WELS. And we do what God has commanded us to do, which is to "Go, tell."

Question – How does LWMS help the work we do as a synod?

Answer – You know, somehow people are so busy doing what they do that they don't have time to focus on missions. I want to get congregations to

host mission fests. I also want people to understand that mission work can be at home. As mission-minded women, you and I have mission opportunities every day. I tell people to look for opportunities to speak with people from their area about Jesus. God wants us to make disciples of all nations, and these nations are in our backyard too.

This year's LWMS convention, "Tell the glory of his kingdom," will be held in Tucson, Ariz., June 26-29. To register, visit www.lwms.org or call the central office at 414-321-6212. Convention registration ends May 15.



Lynnette Hupman during the flag presentation at the 2007 LWMS convention, held in Detroit, Mich.

Pro-life organization builds bridges for the gospel

To educate people about the value of human life and to mobilize Christians to make God-pleasing decisions: this is the mission of Christian Life Resources (CLR), a pro-life, pro-family organization affiliated with WELS. For the past 25 years CLR has provided information and counseling on a wide range of life- and family-related topics for thousands of people.

"CLR uses life and family issues as platforms or bridges to eventually share with people the message of eternal life," says Pastor Robert Fleischmann, national director of CLR. "We do that in many ways: through our pregnancy counseling centers; through our magazine, *Clearly Caring*; through our Christian medical directive statements; through our counseling on life and family issues; and even through our CLR store. We do this because we want to communicate what God has done for us."

The idea for a national pro-life organization came after several small WELS groups opened pregnancy counseling centers in response to the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling to legalize abortion. In 1983 these groups, or chapters, united to form WELS Lutherans for Life (now CLR). "They said, 'We need a unified theme' because there were a lot of disjointed things going on," says Fleischmann.

At the time there were six chapters and four pregnancy centers. Today, that

number has grown to 24 chapters operating 22 pregnancy centers across the United States. In 2007, more than 5,000 clients visited these centers. "CLR is going to continue to strengthen our program of informing people about God's will with life," says Fleischmann. "I think the best thing we can do is teach people the concepts of sacrifice and care. If we can teach people to do that, everything else will fall into place."

According to Fleischmann, CLR is looking at starting a program in which people "adopt" or befriend someone undergoing serious medical care, such as cancer. He also wants to get the organization involved with hospice work and elder care. "I strongly feel that because we're a society that places a greater value on what we call 'quality' life, we kill our children, our elderly, and our disabled—and it's tragic," says Fleischmann. "People forget to ask, 'What would God have me do?' If people ask that question first, then look to God's Word for the answer, things would be different. People would be caring, not killing."

Fleischmann says no matter what the future holds, CLR will continue to build bridges to share the gospel. "If I'm helping you cope with a problem in your family, and in the process of that discussion I connect you with Jesus, that's the most important thing in the world," he says. "At CLR,



Janice Schult cuddles with a baby. She and her husband Pastor Gary Schult are houseparents at New Beginnings, a home for single mothers looking to start a new life. Through this program, CLR provides support and counseling for the mothers as they decide whether to keep their child or place it in an adoptive home.

when we use these life and family issues it's not only about saving lives—it's about somehow connecting you to Jesus."

Christian Life Resources is celebrating its 25th anniversary this November. To learn more about the organization, visit www.christianliferesources.com.

In the news



Steve Witte, pastor at Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wis., was mentioned in the Mar. 17 edition of *Time* magazine. Sports columnist Sean Gregory wrote, "I pulled into the parking lot of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church,

to glean some insight into whether football really is religion in Green Bay, and Favre the Heavenly Father. The avuncular pastor, Steve Witte,

shared some concerns that fans had called a reverse on their priorities. There were the shuffled services and the canceled choir practices to accommodate Packer kickoff times. But Pastor Witte knows whence he serves. On his sill stood two sacred bobbleheads: one of Martin Luther, the other of Brett Favre."

Steve Monroe, member at Eastside, Madison, Wis., was featured in the Jan. 24 issue of the *Sun Prairie Star*. Monroe was selected to go to Glendale,

Ariz., to assist the Arizona Super Bowl XLII Host Committee as an intern. The experience focused on sportsmanship, marketing, media and public relations, security and operations, and community outreach.

Edna Soles, member at Grace, Bisbee, Ariz., was featured in the Feb. 4 issue of the *Bisbee Daily Review*. Soles retired Feb. 3 after playing the organ at Grace off and on for the past 70 years.

Mexico benefits from MLC choir visit

“I won’t hear another concert like that until I’m in heaven.”

“That was the best choir that ever came to Torreón.”

“A once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

These words, spoken by those who attended a Martin Luther College choir concert in Mexico, echo the sentiments of many who came. In March, 52 choir members, directed by Dr. Kermit Moldenhauer, came to Mexico, in part to offer three concerts: two in Torreón and one in Monterrey.

Why Mexico? “We wanted to give the students a taste of world missions,” says Moldenhauer. “We also hoped to help out with evangelism efforts.” Mexico’s relatively close location allowed the choir to schedule three days there during its 2008 tour, which also included singing at congregations in Arizona and Texas.

The choir was able to see congregations and mission efforts in both Torreón and Monterrey. These congregations are part of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church, a sister synod to WELS. Three missionaries and six Mexican pastors serve congregations in various parts of Mexico.

In Monterrey, members of *La Santa Cruz* (Holy Cross) were excited to have

the group come. After the concert, members put on a small program for the choir, including songs and heartfelt words. The reception concluded with a Mexican meal.

The choir gave a small concert during a service at the mission *Divina Gracia* (Divine Grace) in Zaragoza Sur, a low-income neighborhood in Torreón. Approximately 65 people came. Afterward, choir members handed out small gifts to the children.

The second concert given in Torreón served as an evangelism tool. Two WELS Kingdom Workers who teach English classes at *El Redentor* (Redeemer) invited their English students, many of whom do not know their Savior. Before the event, Pastor Esequiel Sánchez told the choir, “Today you are missionaries. Your voices will draw people here, and we will follow up on your efforts.”

The choir reached more than 350 that night. Chairs were set up outside the church to accommodate everyone. After the concert, many people asked about the Lutheran church. The following Sunday, 20 visitors came to church. Sánchez is currently working with 50 new people as a result of the concert.



Caralyn Schmeling (right), a Martin Luther College choir member, shares gifts with children at the mission church in Zaragoza Sur, Torreón, Mexico. The MLC choir sang at this church and two other Mexican churches during its spring choir tour.



Ellen Lueneburg (left) and Christina Lindloff, Martin Luther College choir members, display a poster that advertises the concert the choir gave at *La Santa Cruz*, Monterrey, Mexico.

Catholicism dominates the religious scene in Mexico. In 2007, a religious study reported that out of Mexico’s 100 million people, only 2,501 are Lutheran. “In Mexico, Lutheranism is almost unheard of,” says Mike Hartman, missionary in Mexico. “There are more Buddhists here than Lutherans.” This choir tour gave the Mexican congregations an opportunity to help publicize the Lutheran church in their communities. In both Torreón and Monterrey, ads announcing the concert appeared in newspapers. A television station in Torreón also told of its coming.

The choir’s stay in Mexico was short, but the memories lasting. Members and visitors still talk about hearing the wonderful songs of the gospel. And they ask, “When can the choir come again?”

See how MLC choir members felt about the opportunity to sing in Mexico in the May edition of WELS Connection.

Rachel Hartman

District news

Southeastern Wisconsin

The 2008 **Association of Lutheran High Schools conference** was held in Brookfield, Wis., Feb. 7-8. Representatives from WELS area Lutheran high schools attended the conference, which focused on recruitment for the ministry. Martin Luther College President Mark Zarling was the keynote speaker.

South Atlantic

More than 100 people attended the dedication of **Calvary Academy-**

Florida in Mulberry on Jan. 27. Two staff ministers were installed at the service, and attendees toured the new campus. Originally opened in October 2007, Calvary Academy-Florida offers a Christ-centered ministry of assistance to families with children who are experiencing behavioral difficulties. Since October, enrollment has increased from five to 14 students.

Happy anniversary!

SEW—WELS Lutherans for Life, Metro-Milwaukee, Wis., celebrates 25 years on May 8. This pro-life

organization exists to reach men and women dealing with unplanned pregnancies, offer them alternatives to abortion, and share with them the message of the gospel.

Lighthouse Youth Center, Milwaukee, Wis., celebrates two years in May. This WELS urban outreach mission provides after-school programs where youth can gather for recreation, get help with academics, and participate in Bible study and discussion.

District reporters for this month are: SA—Chris Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

World news

Jehovah's Witnesses numbers increasing—Jehovah's Witnesses—now with more than one million members—reported the largest growth rate (2.25 percent) of churches in the United States and Canada in 2006.

Only the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Catholic Church, Southern Baptists, Mormons, the Assemblies of God, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church reported increases in membership, according to the *2008 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*.

According to the yearbook, the 10 largest church bodies in the United States are the

- Catholic Church (67.5 million),
- Southern Baptist Convention (16.3 million),
- United Methodist Church (7.9 million),
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (5.7 million),
- Church of God in Christ (5.5 million),
- National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (5 million),
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (4.7 million),
- National Baptist Convention of America (3.5 million),
- Presbyterian Church (USA) (3 million), and
- Assemblies of God (2.8 million).

The *2008 Yearbook* contains statistics from 2006 that were reported in 2007.

ELCA releases study on sexuality—In March, a task force of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) released the "Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality."

The statement doesn't touch on the ELCA's current policies, which bar non-celibate homosexual clergy, but explores different aspects of human sexuality. It notes that "this church does not have consensus regarding loving and committed same-gender relationships."

ELCA members can comment on the statement until November 2008. A second draft will be presented to the ELCA's Churchwide Assembly in 2009. If approved by a two-thirds majority, the statement will guide church policy.

Survey: Sin exists but on different levels—The vast majority of Americans (87%) believe that sin exists but they differ on which behaviors are sinful, according to a survey by Ellison Research, Phoenix, Ariz.

Some activities were described as sinful by a majority of Americans, including

- adultery (81%);
- racism (74%);
- using "hard" drugs such as cocaine, heroin, etc. (65%);
- not saying anything if a cashier gives you too much change back (63%);
- having an abortion (56%);
- homosexual activity or sex (52%); and
- not reporting some income on your tax returns (52%).

Fewer people listed other activities as sins, including gossip (47%), swearing (46%), sex before marriage (45%), getting drunk (41%), telling a "little white lie" to avoid hurting someone's feelings (29%), not attending worship on a regular basis (18%), and not giving 10% of your income to a church or charity (16%).

The survey was based on a sample of 1,007 adults with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

Vatican, Muslims establish dialogue—In March, Catholic and Muslim leaders established a new forum to regularize dialogue between the two faiths.

The first forum will be held in November at the Vatican under the theme "Love of God and Love of Neighbor." Twenty-four scholars and leaders from each area—as well as Pope Benedict XVI—will attend.

This initiative was sparked by a controversial speech given by the pope in 2006, in which he seemed to link Islam with violence. In 2007, 138 Muslim scholars sent an open letter to the pope, calling for a dialogue.

Most news reported in this section is derived from Religion News Service. Items do not necessarily reflect the views of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Ehlers, John P., to Grace, South St. Paul, Minn.
Fyffe, Richard, to retirement
Heckendorf, Joel S., to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.
Hillmer, Steven M., to Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, Nev.
Holz, LaVern N., to retirement
Phillips, James A., to retirement
Radloff, James J., to retirement
Schmidt, Daniel R., to St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis.
Schroeder, Allen K., to Cross of Christ, Kingman, Ariz.
Schulz, Paul T., to Living Hope, Peoria, Ill.
Spevacek, Kirby A., to Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Ariz.
Steinberg, Paul S., to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Valleskey, David J., to retirement
Warnecke, Richard H., to Christ, Pewaukee, Wis.
Westendorf, Rolfe R., to St. John, Montello/Emmanuel, Mecan, Wis.

Teachers

Biesterfeld, Timothy M., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Breitkreutz, Timothy A., to Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.
Dorn, Jeffrey O., to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.
Flunker, Sandra L., to Risen Savior, North Mankato, Minn.
Gibson, Jason T., to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.
Krueger, Connie M., to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio
Lecker, Penny J., to Bethany, Saginaw, Mich.
Mangini, Jennifer M., to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
Pederson, Joshua J., to Memorial, Williamston, Mich.
Rathje, Jared, to St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.
Scharp, Greta L., to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Schuetze, Delores H., to Lambs of Christ Learning Center, Pewaukee, Wis.
Schultz, Janette K., to Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga.
Trapp, Peter C., to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Veach, Joy A., to King of Grace, Golden Valley, Minn.

COLLOQUY NOTICE

Dr. Paul Johnston of Norman, Okla., formerly a clergyman in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, successfully completed the final step in the WELS pastoral colloquy program on Feb. 23, 2008. He is thus declared eligible for entry into the WELS ministerium as a retired pastor and as such may participate in part-time service in our pastoral ministries.

Mark Schroeder, WELS president

ANNIVERSARIES

Columbus, Wis.—Zion (150). May 3. Worship, 3 P.M.; dinner and presentation to follow. Daniel Sims, 920-623-4870; revdansims@powercom.net.
Hadar, Neb.—Immanuel (125). June 8. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. Chad Wright, 402-371-6939; pastorchadwright@yahoo.com.
Jenera, Ohio—Trinity (125). June 8, History of our church. July 13, Dedicating your life to serving God. Aug. 10, Outreach in our community. Sept. 14, Celebrating our school. Oct. 12, Looking to the future. Arleen Bolwerk, 419-420-5504; arnjeff@gmail.com.
Clatonia, Neb.—Zion (125). June 22. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP by June 1. 402-989-4775; zion_clatonia@hotmail.com.
Hustisford, Wis.—Bethany (150). June 29. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. Theme: Ministry. Sept. 14. Outdoor worship, 9:30 A.M.; picnic to follow. Theme: Heritage Reunion. Oct. 12. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. Theme: Great Commission Mission. Barb Uecker, buecker@bethanyhustisford.com.

COMING EVENTS

Lutheran Radio Committee annual meeting—May 5, 7 P.M. Fine Arts lecture hall, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Lois Brunner, 262-251-7159.
WELS Lutherans for Life, Metro-Milwaukee 25th anniversary celebration—May 8, 6 P.M. Grace Center, Grace, Milwaukee, Wis. Guest speaker, Gianna Jessen. 414-727-8176; office@welsflmilw.com. Web site, www.welsflmilw.com.
Chapel groundbreaking service—May 16, 4 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. John Scharlemann, 507-354-8221. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.
Commencement events
 • **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 16. Concert, 7:30 P.M. May 17. Graduation service, 10 A.M.; call day service and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.
 • **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 20. Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 22. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; concert, 7:30 P.M. May 23. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
 • **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 23. Concert, 7 P.M. May 24. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
 • **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 23. Concert, 7 P.M. May 24. Graduation service, 10:30 A.M.

Camp Phillip Family Fest—June 13-15. 920-787-3202; office@campphillip.com. Web site, www.campphillip.com.

Camp Phillip summer camps—begin June 15. Theme: "Lights, Camera . . . Action!" Camps for grades K-12. 920-787-3202; office@campphillip.com. Web site, www.campphillip.com.

WELS National School Leadership Conference—June 16-19. Country Springs

Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Single day registration available. 414-256-3222. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/leaderconf.

45th Annual LWMS Convention—June 26-29. Marriott Star Pass Resort, Tucson, Ariz. Hosted by the Grand Canyon Circuit. Registration deadline, May 15. Web site, www.lwms.org

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors Convention—July 15-17. Holiday Inn, St. Cloud, Minn. 507-254-4403; owls@newulmtel.net.

Summer Hebrew Institute—July 21-25. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Prof. Thomas Nass, nasstp@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu/home/administration/offices/specialservices.

Operation Science—July 23-24. Summer training for Wisconsin area Lutheran K-8 teachers and schools. Site, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Beth Weed, bethtweed@operationscience.org. Web site, www.operationscience.org.

Training Camp-A Lutheran Camp for Kids—July 27-Aug. 1. YMCA Camp Duncan, Ingleside, Ill. Web site, www.newlife-wels.org, click "Training Camp."

National Conference on Worship, Music & the Arts—July 28-31. Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/worship-conf.

Retired WELS called worker reunion—Aug. 6. 9:30 A.M. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. J. Fenske, 262-677-2602.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium—Sept. 22-23. Theme: "The Church." 262-242-8100. Web site, www.wls.wels.net.

NAMES WANTED

Western North Carolina (surrounding Asheville area)—John Qualmann, 828-650-0404; lsaviorpastor@bellsouth.net.

WELS musicians—Streams Radio, http://streams.wels.net/radio, is looking for religious music by WELS musicians. The music needs to be original, public domain for text or tune, or under a music license agreement with BMI, ASCAP, or SESAC to be played on Streams Radio. Submit information online at www.wels.net/jump/artistintake; 414-256-3210.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Preschool teacher—Bethany, North Fort Myers, Fla., seeks a WELS or ELS member to serve as part of a team of four teachers in a classroom of 30 children, ages 3 to 5. Janis Visaggio, 239-995-5437; JanisRuth@embarqmail.com.

Organist and music coordinator—Good Shepherd, Plymouth, Wis. Year round, part-time position. Charles Heup, 920-893-0207; pastor@goodshepherdplymouth.com.

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.

ANSWERS

Below are answers to the quiz on p. 10. Score four points for each correct answer.

Are you as smart as a 5th grader?

- c.** 66. The Old Testament has 39 books, and the New Testament has 27 books.
- a.** Law and gospel. The law tells us what we should or should not do, and the gospel tells us what God has done for us.
- c.** His donkey (Numbers 22:27-31). Seeing the Angel of the Lord blocking their path, Balaam's donkey refused to continue, prompting Balaam to whip her. The donkey verbally chided Balaam for the beatings.
- a.** Luke (Acts 1:1; Luke 1:3,4). Luke addressed both books to Theophilus, a Gentile Christian.
- b.** "What is it?" (Exodus 16:15). At first, the Israelites were not sure what this special and miraculous food was.
- b.** Faith. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).
- b.** One (Luke 17:15-17).
- a.** Obstacle. God's law serves as a mirror, as a curb, and as a guide.
- c.** Job. In the midst of many troubles, Job gives this beautiful and confident confession of the promised Savior: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25).
- b.** Paul (Acts 28:3-5).
- c.** The gospel in both the Word and the sacraments. Through these, God brings the blessings of his grace to our hearts.
- b.** God killed his favorite plant (Jonah 4:5-10). God killed off Jonah's only source of shade in a blistering sun to teach him an object lesson about caring and forgiveness.
- a.** Jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15). The Spirit of the Lord equipped Samson with the power to single-handedly fight against the Israelites' enemy, the Philistines.
- a.** High priest, prophet, king. God sent Jesus to accomplish these three areas of work.
- c.** Moses. God inspired Moses to write the first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch.
- a.** Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:20).
- b.** Omega (Revelation 1:8). The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus is the beginning and the end.
- b.** A hand writing on the wall (Daniel 5:1-5). The writing was God's warning that the king had been judged by God, and that his kingdom (Babylon) would be destroyed.
- c.** Both a and b (Acts 22:16; Colossians 1:12; Mark 16:16; Ephesians 5:25,26).
- c.** We don't know (Matthew 2:1,11). Many speculate that there were three wise men due to the bringing of three gifts, but the Bible doesn't give us a definitive number.
- a.** Faith (Hebrews 11:1).
- c.** Israel (Genesis 32:28). Jacob wrestled all night with God, refusing to quit until the Lord blessed him. God renamed him "Israel," which means "he struggles with God."
- c.** Into all the world (Mark 16:15).
- b.** Love. Paul uses many examples to help us understand true love in Christ.
- c.** Amen (Revelation 22:21). So shall it be!



HOW DID YOU DO?

100 points: Congratulations, you are as smart as a fifth-grader!

90-99 points: You could go head-to-head with a fifth-grader anytime.

80-89 points: A fifth-grader might give you a run for your money.

70-79 points: Those fifth-graders are looking pretty smart right now.

60-69 points: You might not be as smart as a fifth-grader after all.

Below 60 points: Hit the Book because you just got "schooled."

A lasting legacy

A recently found confirmation confession written more than 70 years ago reminds us of the importance of our confirmation promises.

Janice Schlomer Nelson

Mother's Day was bittersweet last year because we were celebrating it for the first time without the physical presence of my mother. God had called her home to spend eternity with him on Valentine's Day at the age of 87. We rejoiced for her, but we missed her.

The following Sunday was another special family celebration for us—the confirmation of our oldest granddaughter. It's the celebration of this event that really radiates the treasure that Mom left for future generations of her family, and, through this sharing, to countless others as well.

When we were planning Mom's funeral and looking through her important papers to find baptism and confirmation dates, we found her original certificates. When I picked up her confirmation certificate, out of it fell a small six-page document, held together by a stick pin in the corner. It was written in 1937 by a teenage Myrtle as part of her confirmation preparation. The little document became a confession by which she lived, with God's help, to her dying day. Mom had left us with her "sermon" on the importance of and the responsibilities that go with taking confirmation vows.

Myrtle Hanson Schlomer (back row, second from left) and the 1937 confirmation class of Norway Lutheran Church.

Page 29: Myrtle's original confirmation booklet.

My responsibilities

Written by Myrtle Hanson Schlomer

I realize that in confirmation I renew my baptismal covenant, and, of my own responsibility, make the confession and promise made for me by my sponsors in baptism. I understand that while confirmation is not directly commanded, what we do in confirmation is required of all believing Christians, namely, to make confession of Christ and to definitely renounce Satan and sin and take up the cross and follow Jesus.

I realize that confirmation is not simply a matter of form through which I must pass in order to please my pastor, my parents, and friends, but, that in confirmation I am dealing with the God Triune, making my confession of faith in him and a promise to serve him in love because he has saved me. I have this joyful assurance that when I confess my Savior here on earth, he confesses me in heaven, before the Father and the holy angels.

I understand that in promising to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways, I am not thereby promising never to commit a sin, but, that I am promising not to live in any sin, and to repent of all sin in heart or life, and constantly to seek God's grace to know and to do his will in all things.

I realize that I cannot make this confession and promise without, at the same time, having this steadfast purpose:



Our lives are busy now and somewhat different too, but examination and confirmation services are always a good time for all of us to reflect on our own confirmation vows and to ask these questions:

1. Do we still take confirmation vows so seriously today?
2. Is confirmation just a matter of memorizing a bunch of answers to questions so that we can go through the ceremony, have a party, and then be “graduated” from the study of God’s Word?
3. Do our pastors have our young confirmands take time to write down what confirmation means to them personally?

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves some additional questions. How many of us still take seriously

the responsibilities that go along with making this public promise, or vow? How faithful have we remained to these vows in the years after our confirmation? Will we plan to be faithful, attend church, receive the Lord’s

Supper, pray, go to Bible class, and contribute to the work of the church as we promised?

My mother’s clear, concise message made long ago when she was a teenager reminded me of my own confirmation. I hope it reminds us all of the promises we made at our confirmation and encourages us

to daily and continually go to the source of strength and empowerment to keep these vows—to God the Holy Spirit, who renews us through Word and sacrament, and to God the Son, our Savior, who kept God’s will perfectly for us and promised to be with us always, calling us back when we fall.

May our legacy to future generations continue to be the treasure of “the one thing needful.”

Janice Schlomer Nelson is a member at Salem, Greenfield, Minnesota.

Mom had left us with her “sermon” on the importance of and the responsibilities that go with taking confirmation vows.

To live a daily life of prayer.

To read the Word of God in private.

To hear the Word of God faithfully in public worship.

To attend regularly the Lord’s Supper.

To support, by my prayers and by my gifts, the church in its work.

To affiliate myself now with the Bible classes and the other organizations of the church, and thereby serve my Savior.

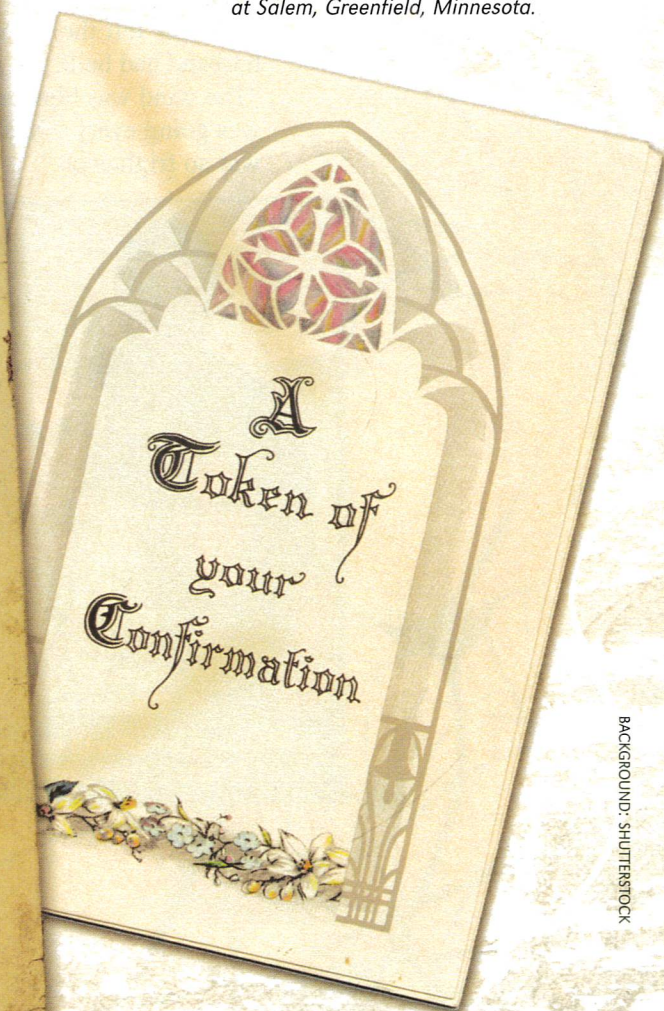
In every possible way, in daily life, to live for the Christ who has bought me with his blood, and by a holy life to testify of his power to save.

I call on my Savior to help me in all this for I know that only through Christ can I have power to remain faithful until death in my baptismal covenant; faithful to him as my Savior and King, who has by his Holy Spirit, through water and the Word, called me out of darkness into his marvelous light; faithful to him who has promised to bless me in Word and sacrament, to go with me all the way, “till traveling days be ended.”

Let us be true to thee, thou God of love and truth,

As we here dedicate to thee our life and youth.

Thine own are we, and thou thy sheep will guide and keep eternally.



I count my *blessings*

The past four years, June Miller has faced trials and challenges. Still, she firmly believes she has nothing to complain about.

Linda R. Buxa

The fire started on a Sunday. June Miller saw the smoke coming from the other side of the hill and knew she better be ready. "I had gone to early church and had the house packed," she says. On Monday morning, Oct. 22, 2007, she saw it was coming toward her property. "I felt it was coming too fast," she says. "So before the evacuation order was given, I said, 'I have to get out now. And I was out.'"

As she left the home that she and her husband had built, she could see the flames. "The wind was blowing so bad that the fire was going every which way," she says. "I was so frightened."



June Miller (center) with her three grandchildren: (l to r) Amanda, Derek, and Aaron.

Blessings in good times

This isn't how June pictured her life turning out when she moved to California in 1950. Having just graduated from Ohio State's nursing school, she headed west for a job at Long Beach Veteran's Hospital. One day, during a game of water basketball between staff and patients, "I got socked in the eye and got a shiner," says June. "Shortly after that I got a bouquet of flowers."

That apology came from Harry Miller, an outpatient at the hospital. A few years before, Harry was involved in an oil rig accident that broke his back and left him in a wheelchair. The flowers he sent led to a first date, and then a second. June and Harry married in 1952.

The following years were filled with blessings. "He was an exceptional person," says June. "He didn't let his handicap stop him." Harry had received a business degree and started his own tax service. He also served in local politics on the city council and the planning commission. After they had been married for a couple of years, they welcomed an unexpected blessing—a son. "He was truly a miracle," says June.

They faced a few challenges too. In 1974, June was diagnosed with uterine cancer and went through radiation and surgery. When she was declared cancer free, June returned to work as a school nurse.

In 1986, Harry and June moved to Silverado, Calif., and they joined Living

Word, Mission Viejo. They quickly became a blessing to the congregation. "Harry was the financial secretary and was an inspiration to all of us. He never complained," says Dr. Allen Beyersdorf, pastor at Living Word. "June worked with him. She is a very energetic, faithful member."

Blessings in trials

Counting their blessings was easy during the good times. But they inspired the congregation even more when they counted their blessings during a string of challenges.

In 2004, June was feeling the effects of cancer treatment from 30 years before. "The radiation had destroyed my bladder," she said. Two partial bladder reconstructions failed, and then she suffered complications from a third surgery to completely reconstruct her bladder. "I was in the hospital on and off for four months while Harry had to get by on his own," she says.

Once she returned home, "I got better while Harry got worse," she says. In 2006, after being on dialysis for several months, Harry died of kidney failure and congestive heart failure at age 79. "His body was worn out," says June. "That's a long life for a paraplegic."

Even during the sadness that came from losing her husband of 54 years, June counted her blessings. "She handled his death well because she knew he was with the Lord," says Beyersdorf.

Six months after Harry died, June was driving through the canyon at noon on a weekday. Coming around a curve, she thought she saw an animal in the road. She swerved and crashed into a concrete ditch. "I totaled the car," she says. "I almost totaled me."

Arriving at the hospital, June was put through a series of x-rays. When she asked the doctor how many bones were broken, he answered, "We quit counting at 10." Her injuries included broken vertebrae, broken rib and pelvic bones, stress fractures, and a fractured right eye socket. Her mouth also had to be wired shut.

When Beyersdorf went to visit her, he walked into the room, walked back out, and asked, "Where's June Miller?" It turns out he had been in the right room. "I couldn't even recognize her," he says. "We didn't know if she'd pull through."

She didn't know if she'd pull through, either. "I said, 'Oh God, I don't know why I'm alive.' Everything was a mess." Yet she knew God had a plan. "I didn't really know what it was, but there must have been a reason why. I had something left to do."

This time June stayed in the hospital for three weeks and then went to rehab until she could function independently. The accident forced her to close the business she had begun—testing children's eyes and ears in local schools. But it did allow her time to focus on upgrading her home, which included clearing out the vegetation around her home and putting on a new roof. When the repairs were complete, it looked as if she might be able to relax.

Two weeks later, the fires came. June evacuated and lived with her son and his family for eight days, not knowing if her home was spared. "I had everyone praying for me to still have a house," she says. "And by golly, I did."

Barely. When June returned, she found that the fire came within 10 feet of her back door. "God does work miracles," she says. "I didn't even have smoke damage." Knowing that the houses behind hers were completely burned, she says, "I was really, really lucky." Then she pauses to correct herself, "Well, blessed."

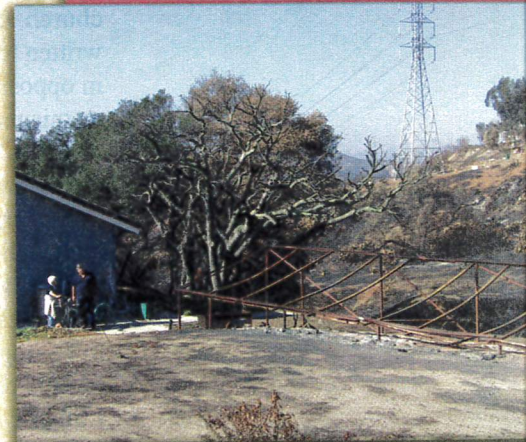
This focus on her blessings is why Beyersdorf emphasizes the positive influence June has had on the congregation. "If she wanted to look for reasons to be a crabby lady, she could. But she doesn't. She always has a word of encouragement."

That encouragement comes from a faith that has undergone trials by fire, accidents, and illness. "I can feel the results of old injuries and the passage of time. The body is almost worn out. But when I start complaining, I think, 'Oh my, I've had a great life, great family, great friends, a great husband who never complained. I have a miracle son and three grandchildren I adore. I don't have time to complain. I count my blessings.'"

Linda Buxa is a member of St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, California.

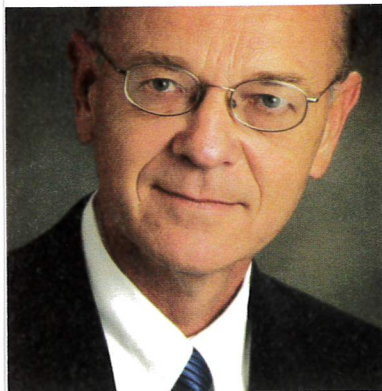
The FIRE

The Santiago fire that threatened June Miller's home was deliberately set. It was one of 18 fires that consumed Southern California in October 2007. The fires raged for three weeks, forcing almost one million people to evacuate from their homes—the largest displacement in the history of California. More than 1,500 homes were destroyed, leaving thousands homeless. Nine people died and 85 were injured, including 61 firefighters.



The Santiago fire in California in October 2007 came within 10 feet of June Miller's home, but her home suffered no damage.





Mark Schweden

We are a confessional Lutheran synod

We normally think of the word “confession” as a sincere admission of sin or guilt. Every Sunday we confess our sins publicly to God and to each other.

But there is another important way to understand and use the word “confession.” As Christians, we confess our faith when we state publicly what we believe. Early Christians confessed their faith boldly in the face of fierce opposition and even persecution. Throughout the centuries, as false teachers attempted to distort the truth of God’s Word, Christians carefully and prayerfully confessed what they believed.

In the early centuries of the Christian church, confessions—or creeds—were written to summarize the truth of Scripture in opposition to those who were distorting or misunderstanding biblical truth. The Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds were developed for this purpose.

Martin Luther did not intend to begin a new church; he wanted to reform the church by returning its teachings to the teachings of the Bible. When that proved to be impossible, Lutherans saw the need to state clearly what they believed. During Luther’s life and in the decades after his death, he and others wrote what have come to be known as the Lutheran Confessions. Some of these confessions, such as Luther’s Large and Small Catechism, were intended as summaries of Christian doctrine for instructional purposes. Others, such as the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, were written to state clearly the scriptural teachings of the Lutheran church in contrast to the false teachings of other churches at the time.

Our Wisconsin Synod is a confessional Lutheran church. Every pastor and teacher in our synod publicly vows to remain faithful, without reservation, to the teachings of Scripture as summarized in the three

ecumenical creeds and in the six Lutheran confessions. New confirmands do the same.

What makes a Lutheran synod confessional? It does the following:

- Believes that the truth of God’s Word, as revealed in Scripture and summarized in the confessions, does not change.
- Stands on the Bible’s foundational teaching that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. It recognizes that the blessings of faith come only by the Holy Spirit’s working through the gospel proclaimed in God’s Word and in the sacraments.
- Understands and applies the clear distinction between law and gospel. A confessional Lutheran church proclaims God’s law in all its stark bluntness and God’s gospel in all its amazing beauty.
- Values the rich heritage of doctrine and worship that God has preserved to us through the wisdom, courage, and creativity of those who have gone before us.
- Celebrates the freedom that God has given us in the gospel. It is careful to avoid any hint of legalism that imposes rules where God has not. It avoids misusing the freedom in a way that does not show Christian love for the other members of the body of Christ. It recognizes that often the most faithful exercise of our Christian freedom is when we willingly choose not to exercise that freedom out of love and concern for others.

Not every Lutheran church body today is a confessional Lutheran church. Some have chosen not to be. Others claim to be confessional, but their teachings and practices do not reflect it. By God’s grace, WELS is still a confessional Lutheran church. It’s who we are. It is, by God’s grace, what we will remain.

Next month: We are a synod that values Christ-centered and gospel-proclaiming worship.

*I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6*

Okay, I admit it, I watch Judge Judy. If you don't know her, she is one of the many TV judges.

On the show, at the beginning of the trial, the baliff swears the witnesses in: "Do you promise to tell the truth in this matter." No more hand on the Bible. No more, "So help me, God." As Judge Judy questions the witness, he says to her, "Well, Judge, to tell you the truth . . ." Judge Judy interrupts, "What have you been telling me all this time?"

What is truth?

It's a good question. A better question might be, "Why do you have to take an oath to tell the truth in the first place?" Maybe it is because truth is rare. Truth is not natural anymore.

Way back in the Garden of Eden, Satan, the father of lies, started it all. "Did God really say . . .?" he asked Eve (Genesis 3:1). Centuries later a very modern sounding Pontius Pilate would chime in, "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

Like Pilate, a lot of people today don't believe there is such a thing as the absolute truth. To them, truth is a moving target. Truth is how you

see it. The question is not "What is truth?" but "What is truth to me?" So you actually have people saying, "That may be your truth but that isn't my truth." What does that mean? Should the baliff ask, "Do you promise to tell your truth, the truth as you see it and nothing but the truth even if that might be different from my truth?" Stop it! We need some place to start fresh.

Jesus is the truth

Jesus said, "I am the truth." He is going beyond saying, "I tell you the truth." He actually *is* the truth. There is such a thing as "the truth," and Jesus is it. So if you want to know the truth you have to go to him. He knows the truth about everything. He knows how many stars are in the sky. He knows how DNA works. He knows what happens to the other sock in the dryer. He knows the truth about everything, though he may not choose to tell us.

Yet he has told us the important truth about him and us. We are sinners. It may not be a convenient truth, but it is the truth. And the truth is that because we are sinners we deserve

eternal punishment. But here is another truth: Jesus loves us. He has paid for our sins and has given us eternal life. Satan may try to convince us otherwise, but that's the truth. And as Jesus says, "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

It is easy to see how this truth sets us free from sin, death, and guilt to live joyful, powerful, and confident lives. But the truth always sets us free. If you base any part of your life on a falsehood, that part of your life is a slave to a lie. And nothing good can come from that. Instead go to the source of all truth—Jesus. Rest your heart and your life on him and his Word. Live the truth. Live free.

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

This is the fifth 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 truth

David D. Sternhagen

In a world where many believe that truth isn't absolute, we need to remember that there is such a thing as "the truth," and Jesus is it.



John A. Barna

Relevant witnesses

Ascension and Pentecost focus our attention on the growth of the Christian church. Jesus told his disciples they were to be his witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Then on Pentecost the Holy Spirit demonstrated what could be done through their witness: 3,000 were added to the church.

But in our own age, the growth of the church seems to have ground to a slow crawl or even stopped. We note our own membership losses and wonder if we are doing something wrong. So we read books about growing the church and attend seminars hoping to find the cure to our membership malaise.

I admit to reading some of the books. I read one entitled *Grow your Church from the Outside In* by George Barna, a prolific evangelical writer and researcher. I found a couple of interesting insights.

First, Barna suggests that the unchurched will “resist highly-polished marketing efforts” (p. 25). Among other reasons, the unchurched are skeptical of institutions. That’s not surprising when you consider how many aggressive marketing strategies are used by corporate America. Those strategies are not all bad, but most of them promise things that the product or company cannot deliver. Often the church falls into the same category.

One commentator went so far as to suggest that the church lies to people when it promises a happier life for believers. I thought that was interesting since Paul confirmed the Christians in Galatia with a message that was exactly opposite Madison Avenue hype. He and Barnabas said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Jesus himself told his disciples to take up their crosses; he didn’t welcome them to easy street. We must always be careful not to promise something different from what the gospel promises: forgiveness, life, and salvation. The gospel of

forgiveness in Jesus—not fellowship, programs, or family values—builds the church.

Second, the churches that are growing are not necessarily the ones that have seeker services, a dynamic pastor, or even a large staff dedicated to outreach. Instead, the churches that grow are those whose members speak well of their church and build relationships with the unchurched. Those members invite the people they know and invite them repeatedly.

Now that gives one pause, doesn’t it? Church growth is in the hands of the members of the church—an idea as old as Pentecost. What do you think the believers did during the weeks after Pentecost? Luke tells us that people were daily added to their number (Acts 2:47). Did the apostles bring them all in or did the members? When believers left Jerusalem because of persecution they carried the Word with them and proclaimed it wherever they went (Acts 8:4). Yes, other factors are important, but church growth is still members sharing their faith, sincerely and genuinely. It’s hard work—slow and one-on-one usually—but it works.

Consider this illustration from the religious press. One news story announced that the Jehovah’s Witnesses was the fastest growing “church” in the United States. Think how many times you have had a Jehovah’s Witness knock on your door. Think how persistent they are in the face of repeated rejection.

Finally, a Southern Baptist study discovered that 78 percent of the unchurched people would be willing to listen to what someone would tell them about their faith. Eighty-nine percent of the unchurched have at least one Christian friend. Our witness becomes relevant when we speak the message of Jesus to those that we know and care about. They know us, and the Holy Spirit still uses the gospel spoken by ordinary people to bring others to faith.



GOD'S tool belt for unity

Donald W. Patterson

What needs to be fixed? Insincerity in the way we love one another.

Have you ever been “rushed” by a fraternity or sorority? I have. It was fun for the first few days. They showered attention on me and listened with interest to all my little stories and concerns. But then, right after I pledged to their organization, it seemed like they turned the love switch off. I immediately heard a lot more about duty, dues, and responsibilities. Something just didn't seem right about the whole thing, and so I de-pledged. After that, whenever I saw those fellows in the college hallways, things never were quite the same. It turns out that the encouragement and attention I had received from them was on the condition that I pledge to their organization.

The same thing can happen in our churches. We can “rush” a newcomer and make them feel so welcome that they finally settle into membership. Then while we move on to other newcomers those first folks hear more about duty, offerings, and responsibility. Sometimes if people in our flocks are not ready to be as involved as we are, we secretly judge them as less committed Christians. It's like we turn into “organizational Pharisees.” People feel isolated and unloved if we only warm up to them when they are complying with our organizational agendas. We disunite God's flock when we insincerely love one another.

On the positive side, I know a pastor who frequently drops in on the folks that have left his congregation—just to encourage them in their faith. That's sincere love.

Below you will find two passages from God's Word that help you pursue sincere, unconditional love. Familiarize yourself with these tools and see how you can use them in the body of Christ.

²²Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).

⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:9,10).

Familiarize yourself with the tool

- Peter says that we have purified ourselves by obeying the truth. What are some of the sinful motives that get purified from our hearts when we come to faith in Jesus?
- What are the marks of someone loving another person deeply from the heart?
- In Romans, Paul says that love must be sincere. What are the marks of sincere love?
- When Paul says to love each other with brotherly love, he is telling us to love each other as family members. What does family love look like?
- How does studying the life of Christ in the gospels help us to love one another?

Use the tool

- Think of someone that you have grown weary in loving. Picture that person as your sibling. Sit down and write that person a letter or e-mail expressing your love for him/her.
- Think of someone you haven't seen in worship for several weeks. Drop in on him with a dozen doughnuts and tell him how much you appreciate his friendship.
- Ask your pastor if there is a “shut in” you can start visiting with a devotion to read.

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

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

Christ's ascension continues to bring joy, just as it did almost 2,000 years ago.

The church I serve looks a lot like many other churches. On the outside there is a bell tower with a steeple on top. On the inside there is an altar, a pulpit, and pews.

One architectural feature that makes our sanctuary unique is its beautiful stained-glass windows. One window literally stands above the rest. Soaring above the balcony is a masterpiece that depicts the ascension of Jesus.

Why the ascension?

When our forefathers built the church where we still worship some 80 years later, they had a decision to make. They had to decide what Bible story that marvelous window would tell. They had plenty of stories to choose from: the parting of the Red Sea, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the birth of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, just to name a few.

With so many stories to choose from, why did they finally settle on Jesus' ascension? I don't know. The artist and the architect aren't around anymore to answer that question. I have resigned myself to that fact that I will never solve this mystery, but I do have an idea. Perhaps our forefathers chose that scene to remind future generations how important the ascension of Jesus is. This festival may go unnoticed by the rest of the world, but for Christians the Ascension brings us nothing but pure joy.

Why it makes us joyful

We can be joyful today because Jesus' work on earth is done. When the Lord led his disciples to the vicinity of Bethany for the last time, he did so with a sense of accomplishment. He had obeyed his Father's will. He had completed his soul-saving work. There was nothing left for him to say. There was nothing left for him

to do, except lift up his hands and give his disciples one last blessing.

We can be joyful today because our ascended Lord continues to work on our behalf. Just before he left his disciples, Jesus gave them a promise: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Even though he has ascended into heaven, nothing has changed. Jesus is still with us, and nothing can separate us from his love. He is sitting at God's right hand, and he fills the whole universe. He is ruling over all things, and he intercedes for us before God's throne of grace.

We can be joyful today because we know that Jesus is coming back. "What goes up must come down" is more than a law of gravity. It is our Savior's solemn promise.

"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3), he assured his disciples. Those words continue to bring hope to followers of Jesus today.

He ascended to remind us that he has prepared our places in heaven. And when the Lord comes back—not if, when—when he descends from the clouds in glory, he will take us to live with him forever.

In our Ascension window the disciples appear to be confused, maybe even afraid. Even if Jesus' sudden departure caught them by surprise, even if Jesus' ascension left them bewildered and confused, those feelings didn't last long. The gospel of Luke reports that after Jesus ascended his disciples "worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (24:52). Two thousand years later we worship the same Lord. Two thousand years later we are filled with the same joy.

Steven Pagels is pastor at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.



Nothing but pure joy

Steven J. Pagels