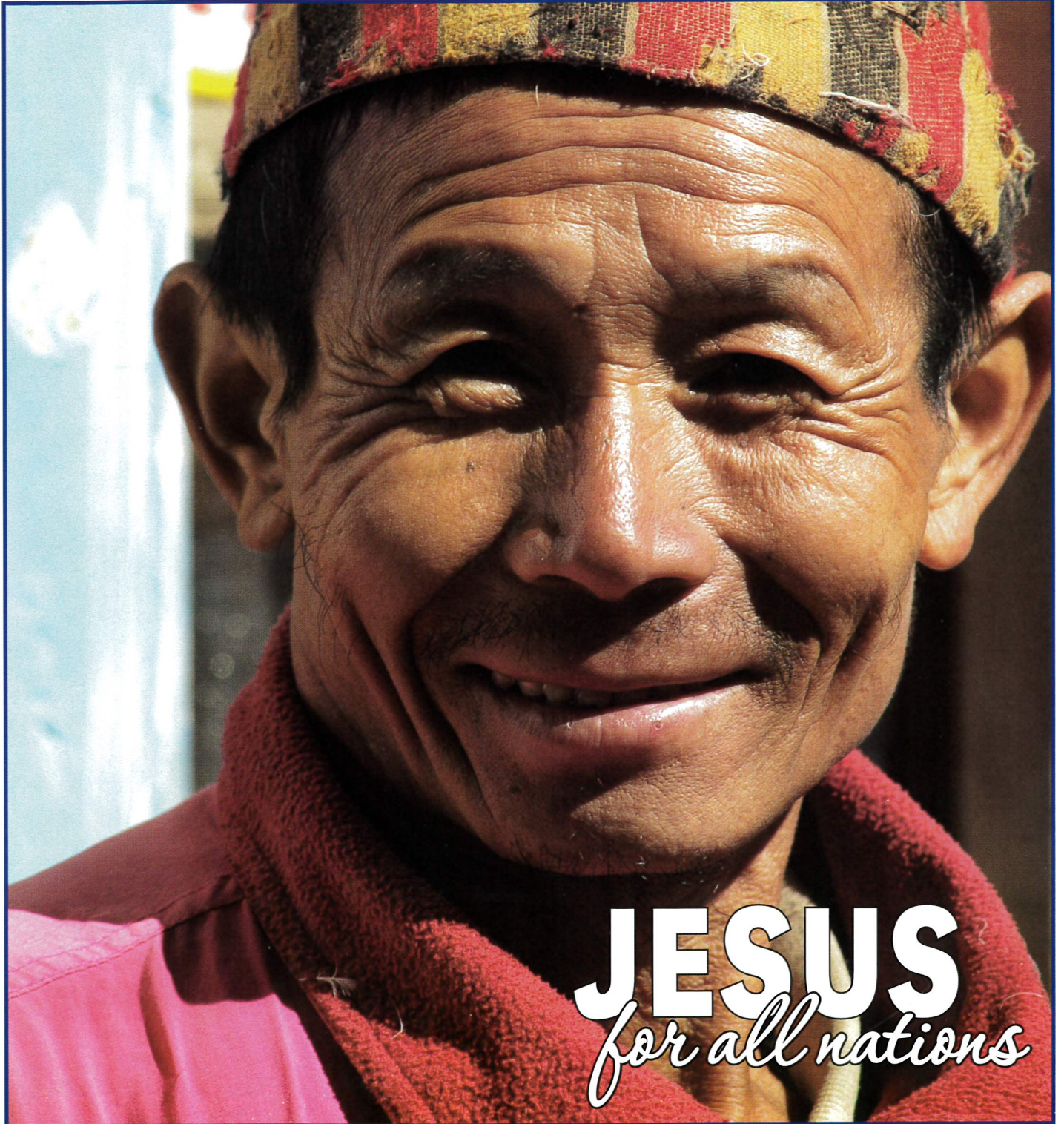


CHANGE IN THE CHURCH • MODERN-DAY PENTECOST

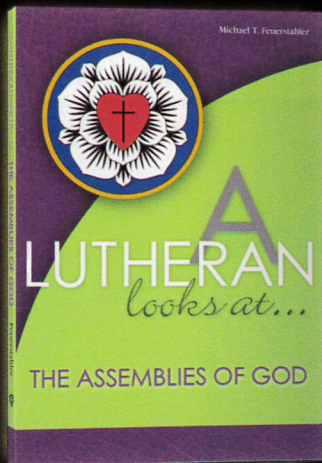
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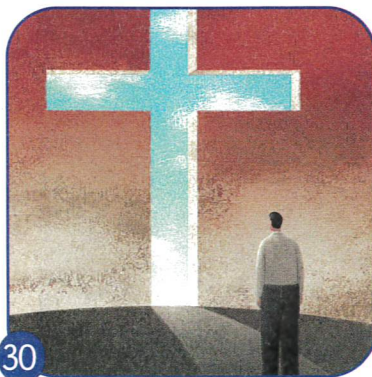
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✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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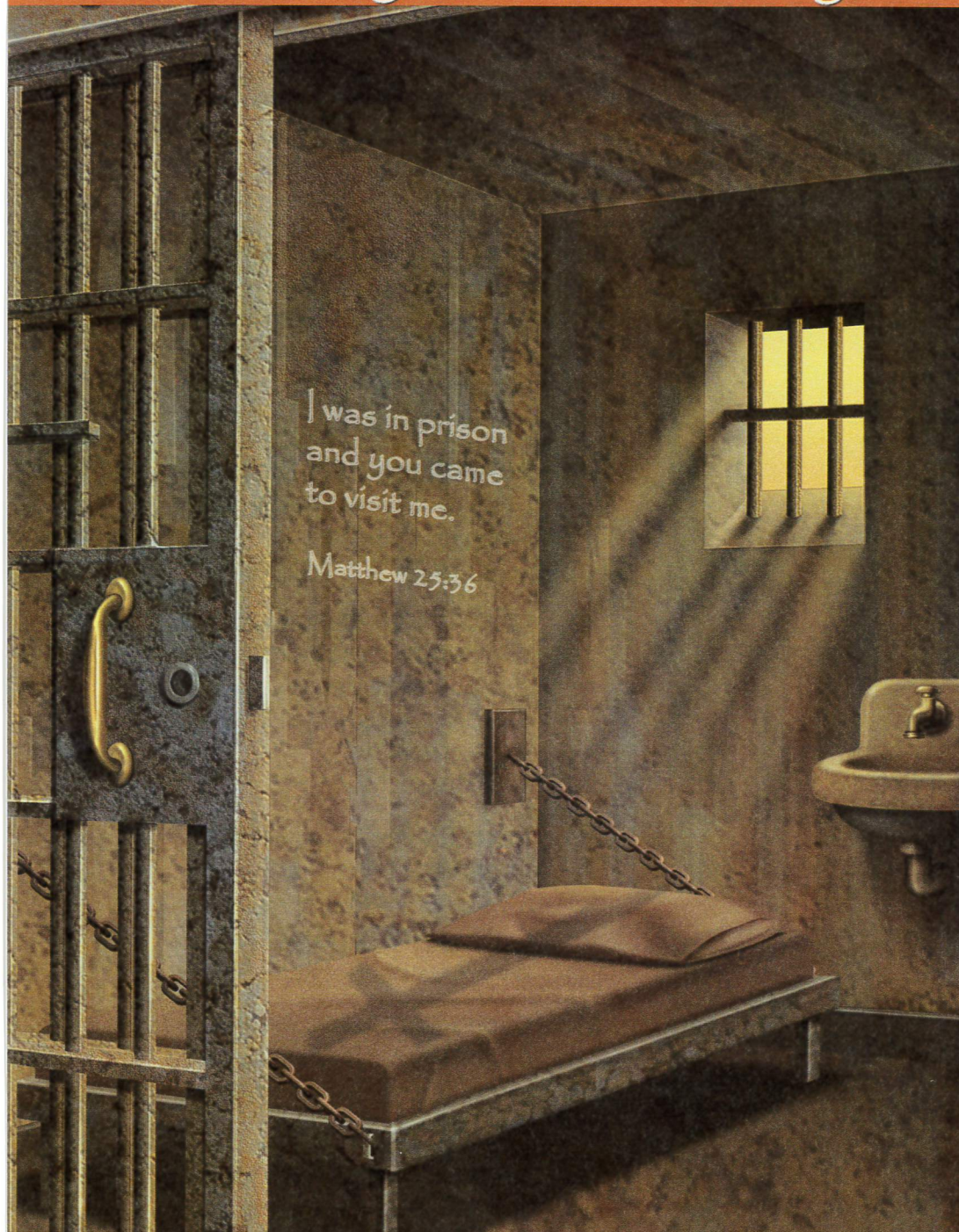
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WITH OUR FATHERS;
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NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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WHAT'S INSIDE by Julie Wietzke

Can you imagine baptizing 3,000 people in one day? I wonder if the disciples expected to do that on that first Pentecost. How they must have smiled as person after person came up to have their sins washed away.

Hearing this Bible story might remind us of the work that still needs to be done. Millions of people still don't know about their Savior. But what can we do about it? Linda Buxa explores how people around the world are reaching out with the gospel to large groups and to individuals (p. 10). She also resolves—and asks you to join her—to use the Spirit's power to do what she can to share that same Word.

A way to start is to look for opportunities to talk about the hope that we have. WELS President Mark Schroeder relates how the simple act of getting a haircut gave him the chance to plant a seed—a seed that may bloom into saving faith (p. 32). A congregation in Minnesota is looking at its fast-growing community and seeing souls that need the promise of salvation (p. 22). Whom do you see in your life who needs a friend, a neighbor, a Savior?

MAY

DEPARTMENTS



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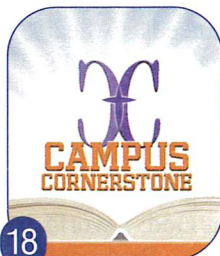
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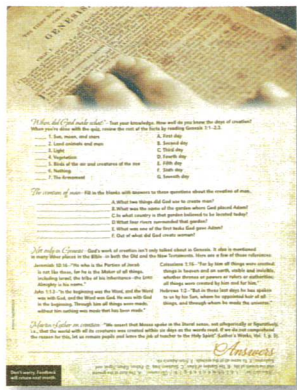
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CREATION Q&A

I just wanted to let you know that I really like the Bible Q&A on page 6 [Feb.]. It is a great way for us to test our knowledge of the Bible. I would love to see this as a recurring article.

*RaeAnne Boldt
Rochester, Minnesota*

TOO MUCH NOISE IN CHURCH

Re: “The Lutheran Way of Worship” [Feb.]. When the time comes to enter the place of sacred worship, Rev. Schulz wrote that some people “sit in prayer and contemplation . . . listen to the preservice music . . . read a Psalm or Scripture verse . . . think of a loved one who recently died . . . read the service folder.” How ideal indeed must be the church that he attends! A reality check throughout synod (or at least here in the Southwest) would show, unfortunately, that another sentence should be added to his analysis: “However, in the headlong rush to be the ‘friendly church,’ far too many—if not the vast majority—destroy a worshipful situation by animatedly talking about the latest sports game, the week’s happenings, or any other secular subject to anyone within earshot.”

*C. T. Aufdemberge
Flagstaff, Arizona*

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

I really appreciated the follow-up article about the spiritual journey of Perry Lawson [Mar.], featured in the Year of Jubilee video sent to every WELS congregation. Especially meaningful were Pastor Guse’s insights into the fact that this story helped his own congregation see the importance of really getting to know each other’s background, faith

journey, spiritual pilgrimage, walk in the Lord, or whatever we choose to call it.

Many other church bodies have always given very high priority to personal testimonies. WELS, on the other hand, has generally frowned upon them. To be sure, such personal testimonies can be abused. On the other hand, it can cause us to rejoice in God’s grace.

While staying focused on Jesus and his cross, I encourage more of our congregations to be willing to share openly and freely how the Holy Spirit has worked in individual hearts. Don’t minimize the objective truths of God’s grace, but at the same time, don’t be afraid to share the subjective reality of those truths either. The rewards of such openness and honesty that Pastor Guse and his congregation are now realizing can be experienced by all our congregations under God’s gracious blessing!

*Carl Henkel
Belvidere, Illinois*

THANKS

My compliments to you and the editorial staff of *Forward in Christ* for the latest issue. Thank you for the many scriptural inspiring and edifying articles on topics of everyday concern. Cristina and I appreciated these articles and can relate to them quite well since they cover topics that every Christian needs to hear and read. Thanks again and God’s blessing to all of you.

Ernie and Cristina Zimdars

SCIENCE AND BELIEVERS

Re: “A world without God; a world with God” [Mar.] by Professor Boehlke.

In his article Professor Boehlke points out the danger in allying ourselves too closely with theories in vogue in the scientific world. There are also dangers in separating our-

selves too far from the scientific world, among them irrelevance and perhaps ridicule in the view of the unbelieving world with whom we are trying to share the gospel. I have taken comfort in the knowledge that many of the greats in science were believers to the end of their lives. Indeed the scientific world has much to teach us about the wonders of the universe and also, regrettably, about its fallen and corrupted nature. Perhaps if more would examine the latter characteristics, the “suffering and cruelty” that disturbed Darwin so could be put into proper context. The “groaning” referred to by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:22 explains much.

*Al Lindner
Vallejo, California*

TAKING CHILDREN TO CHURCH

Re: “Mama’s New Attitude” [Feb.]. I am writing to echo Hartman’s reason for taking her little child to church—to hear God’s Word.

This article reminded me of what happened when our son Dan was two years old. We took him to church every Sunday too. One night when putting him to bed, he started saying the Lord’s Prayer. His dad, Terry, and I shared putting him to bed, so I thought, “Oh, how nice. Terry taught him this.” Sometime later I asked Terry, “When did you teach Dan the Lord’s Prayer?” He gave me a puzzled look and said “I didn’t. I thought you did.”

The only place Dan could have learned the Lord’s Prayer was in church.

*Shirley Schroeder
Mosinee, Wisconsin*

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Whose side is God on?

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"
Joshua 5:13,14

Stephen H. Geiger

The moment had arrived. Forty years of wandering were finished. God's people had their feet firmly planted on the Promised Land.

We need to be on God's side

Joshua had already sent spies ahead to Jericho. They reported that the citizens of that mighty city were scared to death. They knew that the God who parted the Red Sea was now on their doorstep.

Yet before the Israelites stood a mighty roadblock.

When Joshua looked up, he saw a man with a sword. "Are you for us or for our enemies?" Joshua asked. Whose side are you on?

An innocent enough question. The answer may surprise us.

"Neither," says God. Neither? Wasn't God on the side of Israel?

God's answer to Joshua is not denying the great comfort we find in knowing that "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). God's answer is aimed at helping us remember who is the master and who is the servant.

We may want God to be on *our* side. But what is most important is that we are on *God's* side. It is not we who set the agenda and then give God the chance to decide if he is for us or against us. It is God who sets the agenda.

Joshua fell to his face. He asked the commander of the army of the Lord for his orders.

God sets the agenda

Do we sometimes try to set the agenda and give the orders? Do we then sit back and wonder whether God will be on our side? We have a list of things we want to happen. Then we ask, "Whose side are you on, God?" Somewhere deep inside, we can wonder why God isn't getting on board with our plans. How unintentionally arrogant we can be! How easily we can forget our place. How deserving we are of a harsh reply.

How we treasure the account of Joshua, a man once standing whose face was now on the ground. The ground was holy because the God standing before Joshua is holy. And yet somehow, a sinful human was permitted to remain on that which was holy. Surely the promised Son was the source of survival for Joshua as he is for us as well. We can remain in the presence of the holy not because we have never looked toward God with an agenda of arrogance, but because God humbled himself to be our Savior and took our sin to be his own.

We are forgiven. We have the privilege of being servants of the Most High. And like Joshua, we rejoice to ask, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"



For Joshua, God commanded a march around a city. For you, marching orders include patience, trust, humility, love, contentment, and eternal confidence.

In times of challenge, no longer do we wait for God to get in step with us. Rather, when facing difficulty we long for instruction from him.

Whose side is God on? It is we who are to be on God's side.

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

I'm restricted

Thomas J. Jeske

Standing in the church kitchen, cup of lukewarm coffee in my hand, I glanced at the child-care bulletin board. What I learned in 60 seconds: "Max cannot have milk." "Libby cannot have peanuts." "Carson cannot have chicken nuggets." Scribbled notations—the live voices of parents pleading for attention and help from our staff.

The microwave hummed while a thought played in my mind: "Here are serious, well-intentioned restrictions that apply to the children we care for. What if we typed out a list like that for the members of our congregation?"

Jeff may not have unsupervised Internet time. And that goes for you too, Tara. (Good grief, Tara, what were you thinking?)

Tim and Mary, cut up your credit card. Mildred cannot spend her afternoons at the casino. Memo to Brenna, age 12: you may not have a TV in your bedroom. Brian can't spend summers with his father anymore. Carrie can no longer be trusted to go south on spring break.

Michael must not be left alone with kids. Jackie needs to seek out friends who are nonsmokers.

Caley simply should not be home alone for three hours after school. If Glenn is stopped by the cops once more he goes to prison. James has a little problem saying no to a poker game. Michelle has this idea that Americans have an inalienable right to a new car and a new house at age 26.

Stevie needs to branch out and not spend most of the day in a room by himself with a guitar. Paul should discard the phone number of a sports bookie he keeps in his pocket. Kate should find other friends; her current circle of theater acquaintances is tilted pro-gay. John doesn't do well in the freedom of a quiet house

and cable movie channels. No one may count Sunday's offering by himself anymore. Curtis just needs to be away from firearms.

Remind Ryan to attend church; he's going places . . . too bad church is not one of them. Of all people, it was Marlene who asked whether it would be wrong to share an apartment with her friend Len "to save money and be a good steward." Carlos spends untold hours wrapped up in violent video games. Jenny says, "I am 21 years old. I can't use alcohol. I've had no success drinking in moderation."

Congregational life is like family life. In its ongoing conversation of love, we don't lack for bitter lessons and subsequent prescriptions: "Learned from painful experience." "Not equal to the challenge." "Couldn't handle the responsibility." "Proven herself untrustworthy." "Too much freedom."

You, believer, are an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ (Romans 8:17). You will inherit all

your Father possesses. You do have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. You and I are restricted to what will help our neighbor: Love one another. Be devoted to

one another. Honor one another. Submit to one another. Bear with one another in love. Accept one another. Instruct one another. Encourage one another. Admonish one another. Spur one another on. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Before God, I am free. Before my neighbors, I am restricted. I live in Christ by faith and in my neighbors by love. Modify your behavior to serve your neighbors according to their needs.

You and I are restricted to what will help our neighbor: Love one another.

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

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

I understand these questions occurred to you while you toured a Catholic cathedral in Europe. I commend you for your powers of observation and thank you for asking a question that often surfaces when we talk with Roman Catholics.

Apocrypha—intertestamental books

The additional books included in Roman Catholic Bibles are the so-called Apocrypha, several books written between the time of the Old and New Testaments. Generally considered to be part of the Apocrypha are 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Manasseh, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and additions to Daniel and Esther. In 1546, at the Council of Trent and as part of the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church officially declared the Apocrypha to be part of the biblical canon. Their omission of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh from the list seems to have been a mistake since they are included in later, official editions of Catholic Bibles.

Apocryphal books have been included in various editions of the Bible prior to and beyond Roman Catholic Bibles. They were included in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, although manuscripts of the Septuagint are not consistent about which books are included. St. Jerome included them in his Latin translation, the Vulgate (about 400 A.D.). Luther included them in his German translation of the Bible. Editions of the King James Bible also included them.

Apocrypha—inspired books?

The critical question is whether they are part of the biblical canon and should be regarded as divinely inspired. The Jewish believers prior to Christ did not consider them canonical. The Old Testament at the time of Jesus had three major divisions: the law of Moses, the prophets, and the

Q. Why is the Protestant Bible different from the Catholic Bible? The Catholic Bible has more books, and the translation is different.

psalms—but no apocryphal books. Jesus and the apostles did not consider them inspired or authoritative. Luther said they were beneficial books to read, but they could not be recognized as part of the inspired books of the Bible. Not all Catholics accepted them as part of the Bible until the church hierarchy declared them

to be so and attached a curse on everyone who did not accept their ruling.

Protestants do not count the apocryphal books among inspired ones for two reasons: (1) Jesus did not accept them as canonical, and (2) they contain errors and anti-scriptural teachings (like praying for the dead). In fairness it should be said that false doctrines in Catholicism result more from tradition and misuse of canonical Scripture.

If people are worried that by excluding the Apocrypha from the canon they will miss out on something God wants them to know, they should read these books. I believe that their fears will be quickly laid to rest.

Translation differences

You rightly observe that official Catholic Bible translations differ to a degree from Protestant ones. The main reason for this is that Protestant translations are normally based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments, while Catholic translations are usually based on their official authoritative text—the Latin Vulgate. John Wyclif's pre-Reformation English translation was drawn from the Vulgate, but after the Reformation only Catholic translations continued to lean on that Latin version. This explains most translation differences that prevail despite the fact that all are translations of the Bible text.

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

A Pentecost



Sixty-seven percent of the world does not know that Jesus is the only way. It's time for us to resolve again to tell everyone we can about our Savior. **Linda R. Buxa**

I was feeling comfortable in my spiritual life. I like my church. I read my Bible—not as often as I should, but who does? I pray—again, probably not enough. My kids sing cute Jesus songs. That must be a reflection on me, right? A few times people tease me about going to church, but it doesn't really qualify as persecution. So all in all, I'm not doing too badly.

Then one morning, when my husband and I were doing our Bible study, we read 2 Timothy 1:7,8. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord."

Uh-oh. Those words made me think. Sure I was comfortable, but was it because I was timid? It's so easy for us to settle into a spiritual comfort zone. But do we need to become uncomfortable and set aside our spirit of timidity with the power of God's forgiveness and love?

This May, God's grace prompted me to make a Pentecost resolution. It's time I live more by the spirit of power and resist the timidity to testify. Why May? Because we celebrate again that very first Pentecost. It's time I resolve again to tell everyone I can about the Savior. And I'm hoping you'll join me, because there's more work than I can possibly do on my own.

To win as many as possible

Today, 67 percent of the world does not know that Jesus is the only

way, the only truth, the only life. We have no idea how much time we have left, so we need to speak to as many people as we possibly can, as quickly as we possibly can.

Just as Peter did on Pentecost (Acts 2).

Peter, whose spirit of timidity led him to deny Jesus to a young girl, used the spirit of power to speak to thousands from Asia, Africa, and Europe. He didn't care about race or nationality; he saw them all as sheep who didn't know their Shepherd. Through Peter simply speaking God's words, about 3,000 believed that day.

The same thing is happening today in Nepal, where Christians weren't found until after World War II. Our outreach began when one man contacted WELS for more information. Pastor Harold Essmann, a former missionary to Africa and Bulgaria, started corresponding with him. Working with a small nucleus of believers, Multi-Language Publications distributed 64,000 pieces of literature—God's words—in the Nepali language. The Holy Spirit worked as powerfully as at Pentecost. Now 7,000 people are taking a Bible correspondence course, 45 worship groups are spread throughout half the country, 2,300 people attend 130 Bible study groups, and more than 100 are in a worker-training program.

To win them one by one

As important as it is to reach as many as possible, Jesus also tells the parable of the shepherd who leaves 99

sheep to go look for 1 that is lost (Luke 15:1-7). Every single person is important; angels rejoice over every one. For people throughout the world, there is no way they will ever be able to come to us. We must go to them. We need missionaries and believers to go and patiently sit with one person at a time, read Scripture with them, and answer their questions.

Just as Philip did with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40).

One day the Holy Spirit told Philip to take the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. There Philip met the head of Ethiopia's treasury department. Philip wasn't concerned about this man's nationality and wasn't intimidated by his power and influence. Instead, Philip saw the man as a lost sinner who needed to know that Jesus had fulfilled the words of Isaiah. As Philip explained the Scriptures, using God's words and not his own, the official asked to be baptized.

The same thing is happening today in China. In that country, less than 3 percent of the 1.3 billion people are believers, and persecution of Christians has a well-known history. For Christians there, the amount of work is staggering. Masses of people ride bicycles, busses, and trains each day, having no idea they are actually lost. It would be faster and easier for believers to stand in the center of town, like Peter, and share the gospel with thousands at the same time. But that is against the law. Instead,

U T I O N

like Philip, Christians simply go and work and live among the people. They provide an example of the hope they have. Then, when the opportunities arise, they start with Scripture and explain the good news to one person at a time.

To live as a family of believers

Carrying on the Pentecost spirit starts with knowing what God's Word says and sharing it with others, but it doesn't end there. Once you and I—and the people in Nepal and China—believe, we can't help but live differently.

Just as the believers did after Pentecost. Just as the Ethiopian official did after his baptism.

After his baptism, the Ethiopian official went on his way rejoicing. In Jerusalem, the believers were devoted to the teachings, to the sacraments, to prayer. They willingly sacrificed their possessions when they saw a believer in need. They went to church for worship every day and to each other's homes for dinner every night. They had glad hearts and couldn't stop praising God.

It doesn't mean that their circumstances changed. The official may have gone back to Ethiopia and been mocked by his peers because his new wisdom no longer matched theirs. The followers of the Way found that the Pharisees and Sadducees were unhappy about the conversions, and people would soon be martyred for their faith. Still, they all knew their eternal hope was worth more than any sort of comfortable life on earth.

Keeping my Pentecost resolution to spread God's Word to the world means following the example of the early church. It means that even if my life on earth is not comfortable, I'll devote myself to the

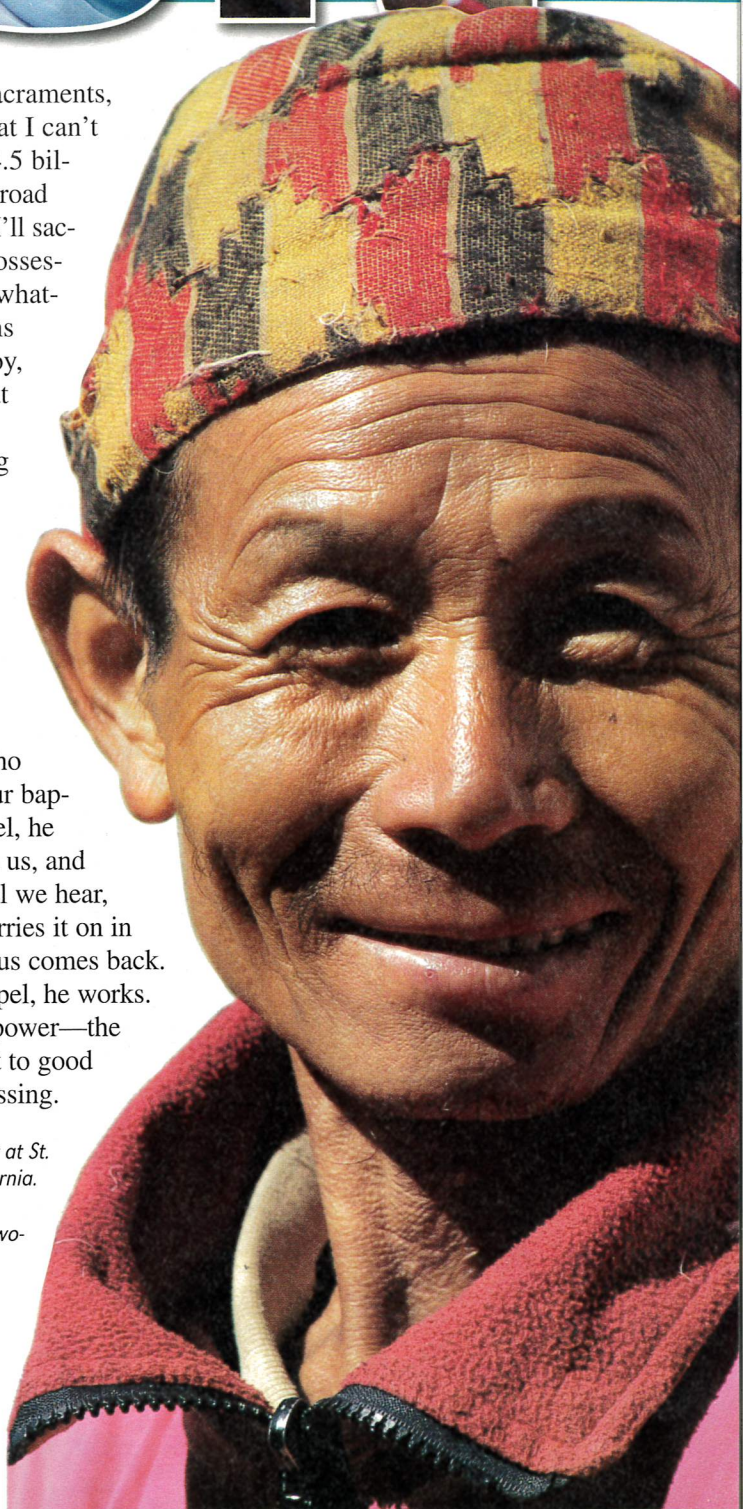
teaching, fellowship, sacraments, and prayer. It means that I can't bear to see more than 4.5 billion people on the wide road to destruction, and that I'll sacrifice myself and my possessions to reach them in whatever way I can. It means that I'll do it all with joy, with a sincere heart that praises God.


I've made a pretty big resolution—and I hope you're making one too. Though it may seem daunting, there's one more piece of good news. The same Holy Spirit who powerfully worked on Pentecost is the same Holy Spirit who touched our hearts at our baptism. Through the gospel, he began the good work in us, and through the same gospel we hear, read, and receive, he carries it on in each one of us until Jesus comes back. When we share the gospel, he works. We have the gospel of power—the Spirit's tool. Let's put it to good use and wait for his blessing.

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

This is the first article in a two-part series on the Pentecost spirit in mission work.

For more information on Multi-Language Publications and the materials available in 38 languages, visit www.mlpwels.com.





I have been married to my husband, Allan, for eight years. When we got married, we had a justice of the peace, but we wrote our own vows. The only “spiritual” part of the day was the word *God* in the vows. That was about as close to organized religion as I was going to get at that point.

It took a year and a half of trying, but I finally got pregnant with our son, Andrew. When I got pregnant, I said to my husband, “You do realize, honey, that we are going to *have* to find a church to have this baby baptized in, because you know your mother will flip out if we don’t have him baptized.”

Honestly, my intent was that we’d find a church, preferably close by, that had a mid-week service or at least a late Sunday service so I could still sleep in on Sundays. We’d jump through the hoops to get the baby baptized and then go only at Easter and Christmas until it was time for confirmation class.

God’s plan was different than mine

Al and I looked for churches

around town based on their Web sites (or lack of one). One Lutheran church was *very* close by, and the picture of the pastor on the front page showed him greeting members wearing a cowboy hat and boots. My husband thought that looked promising.

Then my son—from a previous relationship—was invited to a youth group meeting at the Lutheran church by his friend, Jon. I was pregnant at the time and suffering through a bout of the flu. When Ben got home, he was just gushing about how awesome this pastor was. “Mom! You *have* to talk to this guy! He’s so awesome! We had so much fun! Oh, by the way, I have to take three dozen buns for ham sandwiches for the supper that we’re serving before church on Wednesday night. You can come eat too. I have to be there by 5, and then we can go to church. Mom, you really have to talk to this guy!” He handed me the phone! Apparently he’d been dialing while telling me the story.

So I got on the phone and talked to the pastor. I spilled out all my anger and irritation with religion. I must have babbled to this poor man for over an hour. He just kept

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.

Julie Bunt

saying, “Hmm, hmm. Yep, okay then.” And when I was done with my rant, he invited me to come with Ben to the soup and sandwich supper before the Ash Wednesday service that week. My husband was working the second shift, or something, so he couldn’t come with us.

Wednesday rolled around, and I hauled my big ol’ pregnant self down to the church. I was kind of lost once I got there. I knew my son’s friend and his mom, but that was pretty much it. So I was hanging out on the fringes, trying not to get noticed. I didn’t want any of those “churchy” people jumping on me, you know!

Suddenly, this smiling face was in front of me. “You’re new here! My name is Jim. What’s yours?” So I gave him my name and then felt this compulsion to explain why I was there mooching a free supper off of them. Looking back, I must have looked petrified.

Then I met the pastor. He was just not so, well, “pastor looking.” I don’t know how to describe my first impression. I guess I expected him to start spouting math formulas, scientific theories, or, worse yet, Bible passages. He was kind of skinny and “nerdy” looking. Every other pastor I’ve ever met or seen has had this big, imposing demeanor about them. Not this guy! He was just so . . . normal.

Then it was time for the actual church service. I sat way, way in the back so no one would notice me. Then the pastor walked in wearing his white robe, and he started sharing God’s Word. It was not the same little “nerdy” man, but someone who was *obviously* madly in love with God’s Word and all that it meant for us here.



(L to R): Ben Hollberg, Julie Bunt, Andrew Bunt, Allan Bunt

I told my husband he just *had* to come see this guy for himself, but he wasn’t quite ready for that just yet. The next Wednesday, Ben and I went to church again. The part that really hooked me was that this “Jim” person came up to me and said, “Hey! You’re back! Your name is Julie, right? Welcome back!” That blew me away.

God has his way

I literally dragged my husband to church with me the next time I went. He was as bowled over as I was. We talked to the pastor about getting into membership classes and how we could work it for Ben to be baptized and confirmed. We started classes, and Ben was right there with us. Our little boy, Andrew, was born on June 16. On June 23, Ben and Andrew were baptized, Ben was confirmed, and Al and I became members. It was an incredibly emotional day for me.

I had held so many completely wrong beliefs so close to my heart for so very long. I truly believed that if I was just a “good” person, I’d be fine for eternity. And yet, I was scared beyond belief at the possibility of death. Now that I know the truth, it’s such a relief! I don’t

have any desire to die soon. I haven’t seen a lot of God’s beautiful creation yet, and there are so many places I’d like to explore. I’d like to see grandchildren some day. But I’m no longer afraid of dying. Movies like *Armageddon* used to scare the life out of me. Not so much, anymore. The truth has set me free!

In just five short years, I went from this “spiritual” person to someone who truly knows the joy that Jesus Christ can bring to my life! I don’t do things because I need to do them to get into heaven; I do

them because I’m just so grateful to God for all the incredible blessings he has given me and my family! My husband is on the church council. I help with the board of education and the fellowship committee and help in the school office when I can. I do it because I just can’t seem to find adequate words to express my gratitude to this congregation and this synod for welcoming me in a way I’ve never experienced before. My questions are answered in a way that allows me to retain my self-respect, and when I’m acting in a biblically incorrect manner, it is pointed out to me in a loving way. That’s very important. I just can’t help but share my joy with others.

Thank you, God, for all the blessings you’ve bestowed upon me and my family through your Word and sacraments and through the power of the gospel.

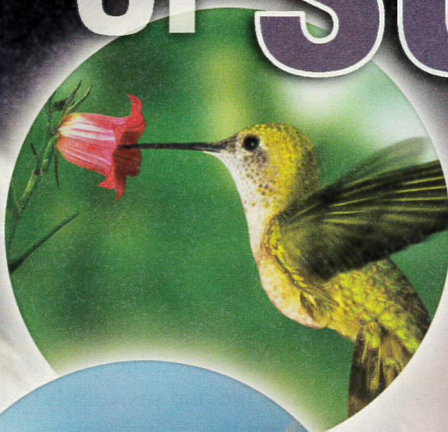
Julie Bunt is a member at Good Shepherd, Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

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

Faith or Science

Can Christian faith in God's
creation and scientific
investigation coexist?

Arnold J. Koelpin



Should we consider how science opposes or supports what God has revealed concerning creation? Scripture reveals the divine origin of the cosmos, and belief in creation is a matter of faith (Hebrews 11:1)—need we go any further? Should Christians be concerned about investigating the workings of the universe, the mechanics of the things round about us?

In posing the question of Christians and science, we raise a question that everyone asks sometime in life. How are we to answer those who do not believe in creation and base their opinions on biological and geological evidence?

Christian perspective

Perhaps we sense that something is wrong with the question itself. The alternatives wrongly separate our Christian faith from the world in which we live. The question implies that our faith has nothing to do with the universe—the study of plants, animals, rocks, oceans, planets, humans, and all things. Posing the question this way suggests that Christians simply bury their heads in blind faith and don't care about the world we inhabit.

True, the knowledge of the visible things of God—the things seen from creation—does not bring us true knowledge of God, who loves us in Christ. The universe reveals God's goodness, not yet God's grace (Romans 1:14-23). But faith in the true God turns these matters around. By grace Christians gain the right relationship with God. By grace through faith, we stand before God the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Now, in this turnabout, God's goodness becomes truly wondrous in the light of God's grace in Christ. Believers echo the psalmist's praise and thanksgiving: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). And "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful" (Psalm 139:14).

Therefore, we must never separate the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed from the First, divorcing Christ's kingdom from Adam's world. Christ's kingdom rightfully restores everything that Adam once received in Paradise when God said: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and of the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26).

What Adam received in Paradise—and then lost—now rests under the feet of Christ Jesus. In this way God destroyed any notion that Christ’s kingdom is so special and different that it has no connection with that of Adam. True, Christ’s kingdom is not of this world. Yet it has everything to do with the world of God’s making. “Where would we Christians go, if this were not so?” Martin Luther asked in a moment of reflection. “If Christ’s kingdom had nothing to do with Adam’s, where else would we live? Where would we eat and drink, if the world was so foreign to us as to deprive us of the ingredients of our bread? Where indeed would we go to receive the daily bread for which we pray? Where would we go for our home, our cattle, and all good things?”

The secret of our life in the world lies hidden in Christ and his work and is perceived in repentance and faith. What makes Christians interested—yes genuinely interested—in the world about them is that they have a new outlook on life (Romans 8:5,6). Jesus’ life-changing work on behalf of his creation moves believers to seek knowledge of God’s good and gracious will, also in his creation.

Christian investigation of God’s world

Set free by Christ, Christians no longer remain in bondage under the elements of the world (Colossians 2:8), in bondage to creation itself. Apart from Christ’s redemption, all people born of Adam’s sperm are subject to the created world. The universe becomes our master, and we are not its lord as God originally intended. The beggarly elements—divide, count, and scientifically enumerate them as we will—are then all we desire for food, drink, shelter, and sex. Human desires and passions are earthbound.

But by faith God releases believers from a life of bondage. By renewing our mindset and attitude, we are united in and with Christ. What our Lord possesses, we possess—unworthy though we remain of such high honor. Christ, King of creation and Lord of lords, rules over the universe. And he shares that lordship with us! “*All things* are yours,” the apostle tells Christians in Corinth, “whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God”

(1 Corinthians 3:21-23). In Christ, we return to our rightful place and calling, not to a life of subjection under nature but as lord over it. Though sinners still, we are called upon to exercise responsible rule over the earth (Genesis 1-3). Is this not a humbling task?

Can Christians pursue science? By all means! Led by God’s Word and Spirit, we will be more than interested in the “visible things of God” as seen, in creation (Romans 1:20; Hebrews 11:3). We are no longer on a quest for origins. By faith we see the universe as a marvelous gift of a good and gracious God, who in love continues to let it rain on the righteous and the unrighteous for the gospel’s sake (Matthew 5:45). Getting

to know the world continues to be tainted by our sinful desires. Yet we strive to use the things of creation—fallen creation as it is—as God intended them to be used. We investigate them and sadly also abuse them because of our wayward ways. Little wonder that the whole creation groans under sin, waiting for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Creation too has been subject to vanity because of our folly (Romans 8:19-22).

Yet we continue seeking knowledge of God’s creation in the spirit of thankfulness for God’s goodness and grace. God’s Word inspires us to the “wow” factor, to stand in awe of God, who prepared this wonderful universe for Adam’s kin. And his Spirit moves us to pursue knowledge of creation, realizing that there is nothing inherently wrong with creation itself. It is God’s work. At the same time we remain fully aware that creation has been made subject to deformity because of sin.

So with God’s Word to guide us, Christians can and will pursue science because this universe is God’s creation, the work of his hands. The heart set free by the secret wisdom of God—revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ as God’s gracious work (1 Corinthians 2:6-10)—turns freely to his visible works seen in creation. Christians join all mankind in investigating the created world and seek to understand the functions of the universe for good reason. They want to use them rightly to God’s glory and for service to mankind. In so doing, we give honor, praise, and thanksgiving to God, for he created everything that is.

Retired professor Arnold Koelpin is a member at St. John, New Ulm, Minnesota.

What makes
Christians interested
in the world about
them is that they have
a new outlook
on life.



LIFE WITHOUT LIFE WITH GOD

OUR USE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY NEEDS TO BE GUIDED

Technology confronts us every day. Discoveries in science allow the development of new technologies. The new technologies allow more scientific discoveries. All of us use the technologies and that drives further production. Science, technology, and society all interact with one another. We are in an age of impressive scientific progress.

For example, scientists when using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) have discovered that blood carrying more oxygen looks different than blood with less oxygen. Blood with oxygen sets up one kind of magnetic field while oxygen-poor blood does the opposite. An MRI, which uses a huge magnet, can image these effects.

We assume that blood flow increases to bring in oxygen and nutrients to the areas of the brain that are being used. Therefore functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) allows investigators to study which areas of the brain become active when particular tasks are performed. Several of my college students have participated in such studies at a nearby medical college. They were presented with tasks while lying inside the MRI chamber. In this case better technology leads to more discoveries about how our brains work. We are all interested in how we function. We want to understand so we can apply that knowledge when there are problems.

When we have problems, we tend to look to science and technology. Fifty years ago who could have dreamed that we would have powerful computers in our homes or wireless handheld devices that act as mobile telephones with e-mail access, text messaging, faxing, paging, and Web browsing. Captain Kirk of *Star Trek* had us dreaming of these devices. The visible successes—especially in technology—have allowed science to claim a high level of authority in modern society.

Certainly, we enjoy the many discoveries and inventions we take for granted today. Technology is not evil in itself. Technology gives us things such as MRI and angioplasty to help fix the effects that sin has had on

creation. Max L. Stackhouse urged Christians to practice what he has called “godly cooking,” which is his term for technology that is used “to reconstruct what is distorted or incomplete in nature in order to more nearly approximate the laws, purposes, and mercies of God.” When we are sick, we look for help. And for us, God hides behind these advances. Luther called them the “masks of God.”

LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

But just as technology cannot tell us how best to use it, science cannot give us ethics. Our use of science and technology needs to be guided by directives that transcend human nature. Without guidance we see that there is an equal possibility for evil. As science moves to a position of authority in society, it can easily exert an influence outside its true limits. Ideally, science is concerned only with knowledge that can be tested and retested by observation and experiment. But what happens when we encounter something that cannot be tested by such a method?

Some certainly do not see science as limited to questions that can be tested. Some say science is the only way to know anything at all. They would expand this discipline into something that it is not. In that spirit the atheists have become more and more aggressive. “God is a delusion,” claims atheist Richard Dawkins. The soul does not exist according to Francis Crick in *The Astonishing Hypothesis*; when your brain stops working, you are gone. Evolutionary psychologists evaluate the sinful condition of humanity as nothing more than a natural development in the process of evolution. As such, our practice of warfare and violence allows those who are more fit to survive. Doing good to others (altruism) is a particular problem for evolutionists because the individual is giving up resources that would help him to survive. In response, evolutionary thought suggests that showing love to your neighbor cannot be as selfless as it appears. That means, while

T GUIDANCE; D'S GUIDANCE

BY DIRECTIVES THAT TRANSCEND HUMAN NATURE. Paul R. Boehlke

the individual may sacrifice resources, he or she must sense some long-term better chance of survival and reproduction.

Evolutionary thought grants the individual no purpose in life and no responsibility. If we are here, it is because of natural selection and chance. Steven Jay Gould (1941–2002) often said that if somehow evolution could be done over, humans may not have evolved. He claimed that there are too many possible turns that evolution might have taken. We need to recognize that these are all claims outside of what can be tested and are products of philosophical naturalism. God's Word is the only source that can give us purpose and meaning for our lives.

AGE OF THE EARTH

We could say more but let us jump to a particular issue that impacts faith. The age of the Earth is a major issue for Christians. Darwin was impressed with the writings of his contemporary Charles Lyell (1797–1875). In *Principles of Geology*, Lyell argued that the present is the key to the past. He said that the geological deposits should be explained by the processes we now observe (uniformitarianism). His conclusion was that geology is the result of a steady and slow accumulation of small changes over long periods of time. Lyell thought that the world was much older than the Scriptures seemed to indicate. Darwin had Lyell's books with him as he traveled around the world. As Darwin developed the theory of natural selection, the idea of an older Earth fit well.

While Scripture does not say exactly when the Earth was created, its genealogies indicate an Earth too young to explain the geological deposits.

Now some Christians attack the observations and claim that what we see could occur much faster under particular conditions. One could claim that the Flood must have had massive effects on the geology of Earth. Of course it did, but these arguments involve much speculation.

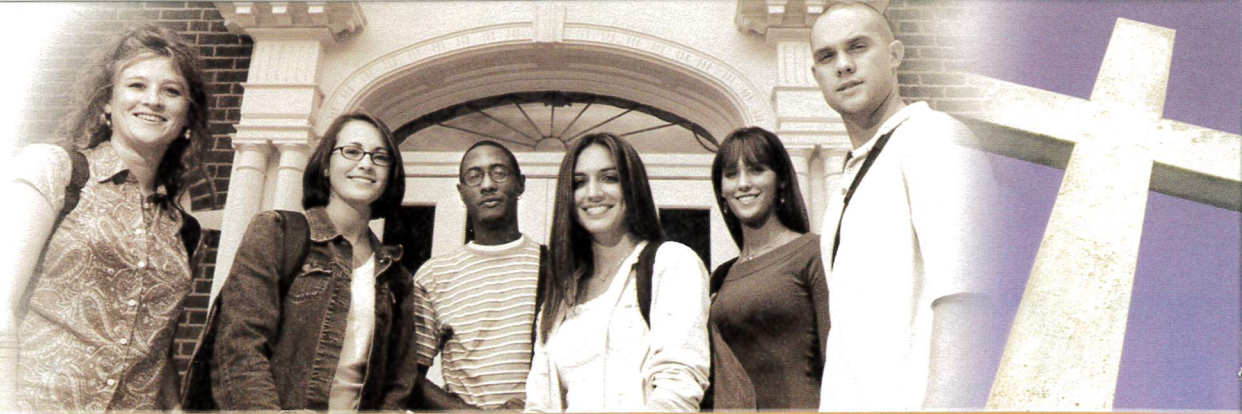
Another contemporary of Darwin, Philip Gosse (1810–1888) put forth a powerful alternative idea. Gosse suggested that God in his wisdom created a mature, working Earth. In fact, we should note that it is impossible to create anything without an appearance of a virtual history. For example, Adam and Eve ate fruit from trees that never grew, never flowered, were never fertilized, and never developed their fruit in real time. The fruit was created ready to eat. Adam and Eve themselves had the appearance of age on the very day God made them. Eve's ovaries had eggs in them that normally are set aside when a female is still developing within her mother. However, she did not have a mother, even though the eggs in her ovaries indicated otherwise. Gosse's book *Omphalos* (Greek for "bellybutton") is filled with examples of things that would had to be created with age.

Steven Jay Gould, an arch evolutionist, commented that one cannot disprove Gosse's argument, so it is not science. But that does not mean that it is wrong.

Does Gosse's mature creation argument solve everything? No, it is an interesting idea and shows us a possibility, but questions will still remain. Many questions. But we should never tie our faith to any human reasoning. We know partially; God knows completely. We know one thing after the other; God knows all things at the same time. We need to approach these questions with humility. There are "things too wonderful" for us (Job 42:3). When we get to heaven, we will know.

Paul Boehlke, a member at Salem (East Side), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, teaches biology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

This is the last article in a four-part series on creation and evolution.



Sara Stigen

Walk of faith on campus

The answer to problems in college is the same as the answer when you're out of college—put your faith in God.

Many children are brought up in loving Christian families with positive influences in their lives every day. But what happens when the water wings are taken away and that child is sent off to float alone at a public college? As a Christian in a public college setting, you not only have to worry about the academic challenges but also have to steer clear of many potentially threatening situations such as new relationships, parties, and secular worldviews.

As a WELS college student, I have been faced with many of those challenges. I was brought up in a strong Christian household and attended a small WELS K-8 school. I did go to the public high school in town and therefore have had more time to adjust to the lifestyle of a secular setting. I fervently looked for a small private Christian college. Unfortunately, I could not afford to attend a private school and chose to attend a public university.

I was given all the essentials to lead a strong Christian life. I was not worried when it came down to the decisions I would make in college.

Of course, one of the first roadblocks was partying. I was raised to use discernment when making decisions—if it felt wrong, it most likely was. I cannot say that I completely avoided potentially

harmful situations because going out to parties is obviously a part of social life on public or Christian campuses. As part of the party scene, I have found that drinking to excess is often done to forget stress or solve life problems.

Unfortunately, neither of these are the outcomes of getting

drunk. Instead of putting in the effort to help themselves, many college students turn to hazardous situations. But the answer to problems in college is the same as the answer when you're out of college—put your faith in God instead of making questionable choices.

The academic aspect of college life did not come as much of a shock to me. As a high school student, I strove to do my best with the thought that if I have been blessed with the talent and opportunity to do well, I shouldn't take that for granted. The only major change in college for me is possibly a personality glitch. I am a vocal and sociable person, so going into classes where everyone seems ashamed to talk is uncomfortable for me. When that happens, I just talk more. I like that because the professor usually remembers me.

One important part of campus life is campus ministry. We have been blessed with a talented staff member from the local congregation who brings Bible study to us, on campus, every Thursday night. At this gathering, we have a brief worship service and then conclude with pizza and a Bible study or game. The family of faith we have formed through this weekly gathering is irreplaceable to me because it gives the sense of what any congregation is supposed to feel—unity through Christ.

College life is undeniably a big transition for every student, but as a Christian living among unbelievers, it all comes down to how people perceive you and how you perceive others. It is just another step on your individual walk with Christ. The opportunities are there for Christians on a public campus. It may just have to be a personal priority to seek out the resources to help you continue your walk of faith.

Sara Stigen, a freshman at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, is a member at St. John, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Obituaries

Gertrude Mittelstaedt 1919–2008

Gertrude Mittelstaedt (nee Lutz) was born Feb. 6, 1919, in Mauston, Wis. She died Aug. 20, 2008, in Oshkosh, Wis.

She taught at St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Theodore; one son; one brother; and one sister. She is survived by 6 sons, 3 daughters, 18 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren.

Francis Luther Schubkegel 1932–2009

Francis Schubkegel was born June 19, 1932, in Ada, Minn. He died Feb. 9, 2009, in New Ulm, Minn.

He taught at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.; Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is preceded in death by two brothers and one sister. He is survived by his wife, Joyce; 2 sons; 2 daughters; 11 grandchildren; 1 brother; and 3 sisters.

Emma W. Wenzel 1922–2009

Emma Wenzel (nee Tiefel) was born Aug. 6, 1922, in Hadar, Neb. She died Feb. 9, 2009, in Baraboo, Wis.

She taught at St. John, Bay City, Mich.; Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.; and Bethel, Menasha, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Ray; three brothers; and one sister. She is survived by 2 sons, 1 daughter, 15 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren, and 2 brothers.

William Henry Allwardt 1941–2009

William Allwardt was born March 23, 1941, in Detroit, Mich. He died Feb. 14, 2009, in Watertown, S.D.

After being accepted by colloquy into the Wisconsin Synod, he served at Trinity, Hendricks, Minn.; First, Gary, S.D.; St. Paul, Valley City, N.D.; James Valley, Jamestown, N.D.; St. John, Witten, S.D.; Trinity, Winner, S.D.; Our Savior, South Shore, S.D.; and St. Peter, Goodwin, S.D.

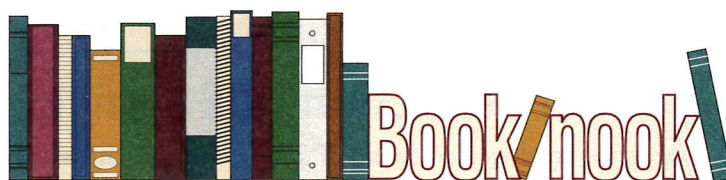
He is survived by his wife, Arlene; three daughters; and one sister.

Henry F. Krenz 1918–2009

Henry Krenz was born July 31, 1918, in Truman, Minn. He died Feb. 14, 2009, in Port Charlotte, Fla.

He taught at Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.; St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.; St. John-St. James, Reedsville, Wis.; St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.; St. Mark, Watertown, Wis.; and St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

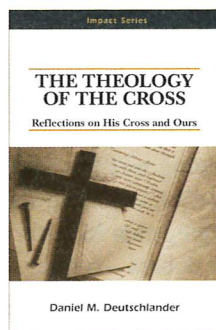
He is preceded in death by his wife, Ruth; brothers; and a sister. He is survived by two daughters, three grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren.



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

Carrying one's cross

In his book *The Theology of the Cross*, Professor Daniel Deutschlander explains in detail the real meaning of the cross Christ bore for us and our daily struggle in denial of self as we carry our cross for him. Christ did everything for us on the cross in winning the forgiveness for all of our sins. Although we live in a sin-filled world, we are called to willingly and joyfully carry the cross that Christ in love gives to us.



\$17.99

This scholarly work is rich in examples and explanation with scriptural documentation. References include the writings of Luther on the theology of the cross. The book is appropriate for pastors, teachers, and lay leaders in congregations.

According to Deutschlander, suffering and joy are two sides of the same coin for Christians. Carrying one's cross is equal to self-denial. The Christian struggles daily under the cross of self. The law can show us how difficult the struggle will be, but it cannot motivate us to carry on the struggle, much less to rejoice in it. That is reserved for the gospel. The knowledge and joy of the victory we have through Christ's cross is delivered to us through the means of grace. The gospel creates faith in Christ's cross and gives us the desire to bear the cross—even rejoice in it.

Examples and dangers of cross-bearing by the Christian are given for the young, the middle-aged, and those in their golden years. Notes are given for pastors, who also have special crosses to bear in all stages of their ministry.

Dan Schmal, St. John's, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Through my Bible

IN 3 YEARS

06/2009

1. Judges 3:7-31
2. Jdg. 4
3. Jdg. 5
4. Jdg. 6
5. Jdg. 7:1-23
6. Jdg. 7:24-8:35
7. Jdg. 9:1-10:5
8. Jdg. 10:6-11:28
9. Jdg. 11:29-12:15
10. Jdg. 13
11. Jdg. 14, 15
12. Jdg. 16
13. Jdg. 17, 18
14. Jdg. 19
15. Jdg. 20

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

Budget reduction of \$8 million forces ministry cuts

Due to the continued downturn of the global economy, WELS is looking at an \$8 million reduction in its operating budget—from \$38 million to \$30 million or about 25 percent—in each year of the next biennium 2009–2011.

The reduction was the result of several factors related to the current economic conditions, including

- a more than 50 percent decrease in gifts over the biennium from a significant foundation donor;
- the loss, due to economic conditions, of an expected gift of \$3 million a year for the remaining four years of a pledge from a WELS donor; and
- a slight decrease in commitments from congregations for 2009 Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO). According to Todd Poppe, chief financial officer of WELS, a 4 to 5 percent increase in CMO is needed every year just to maintain current ministry.

“We are thankful that the congregations’ commitments were at the level they were given the state of the economy and the financial challenges that congregations themselves are facing,” says WELS President Mark Schroeder.

In April, Schroeder and his advisory council presented an initial budget proposal for the upcoming biennium—including a picture of how the cuts will affect each area of ministry—to the Synodical Council for consideration.* To prepare for this proposal, all areas of ministry were asked to make cuts to their administrative and support levels and then look at reductions to the size and scope of their ministries.

According to Schroeder, hard choices had to be made while creating the budget, as synod leaders weighed the decisions from past conventions with the realities of the current economic climate and the opportunities for ministry in upcoming years.

“The last two conventions have identified the primary priorities of the synod as being world missions

and home missions and ministerial education,” he says, “but they’ve also acknowledged that other ministry carried out by the synod is important. The challenge is to honor the priorities but preserve as much of our valuable ministry as possible.”

The Synodical Council is then responsible for sending a final balanced budget proposal to the synod convention in July.

The council also has adopted a plan to stabilize future budgets and minimize the impact of sudden changes in one-time gifts. As a result, WELS budget planning will be mainly based on the synod’s most stable source of income—Congregation Mission Offerings. One-time dollars—bequests, grants, specific gifts—will be used only in the years after they are received. Currently WELS uses congregation offerings as well as anticipated gifts to plan its yearly budget.

“As we plan synodical ministry we’ve concluded that we need to have the money on hand before we actually

spend it,” says Schroeder. “It’s kind of like saving up for it first instead of buying on credit.”

This means WELS global ministry will be based on what congregations are able to give and on financial resources that are already on hand. If cuts do need to be made due to reduced offerings, there should be a year’s warning to adjust the ministry program.

“We need to base our level of ministry primarily on what our members and congregations are willing and able to provide,” says Schroeder. “If our congregations only can provide support at a reduced level, then we need to reflect that in our planning. At the same time we still will encourage our congregations to increase their support for an expanded mission effort.”

Even with these difficult realities, Schroeder says WELS members can help by staying informed, praying for synod leaders, and practicing faithful personal stewardship. He also stresses looking to God’s promises.

“The problems we face may look large to us. But none of them are so large that God can’t help us to overcome them—and not only overcome them, but as a result become a stronger and a more focused church body,” says Schroeder. “Finally our mission is to take the gospel to as many people as possible. If we keep that in mind that will naturally bring people to support what the synod does in their prayers and in their offerings.”

Budget numbers and the ramifications these have on the areas of ministry will be included in the 2009 Book of Reports and Memorials, the official report to the synod convention that will go online in late May. For current synod news, subscribe to the “Together” e-newsletter at <http://together.wels.net/subscribe>.

*The budget proposal was not available at the time of this writing.

CURRENT YEAR

The WELS budget was also affected for the current fiscal year (July 1, 2008–June 30, 2009) because of reduced foundation grants, loss of a significant gift, and declining individual contributions. However, WELS was able to balance this year’s budget without significant cuts to ministry through

- a buffer fund that was created from a surplus in 2007–2008;
- a \$1 million grant from WELS Church Extension Fund to Home Missions, which frees up budget money for other uses;
- a carry forward of \$1 million of available unrestricted bequest funds; and
- underspending by areas of ministry.

Encouraging new believers in the Red Dirt Village

When another soul comes to know Jesus, it is always a joyful occasion—especially for the members of Immanuel congregation, located in the Red Dirt Village in northern Thailand. This spring two local shamans—people who claim to be able to cure illness, foretell the future, or control spiritual forces through magic—denounced their beliefs and confessed their faith in Jesus Christ.

“Praise God for he has saved more souls into his kingdom,” says Pastor Dewid Lor, who serves as professor and mission developer at the ministry center in nearby Chiang Rai. “This ministry is an essential for the Hmong who are still under the control of the devil.”

Lor says in the past three years, the group in the Red Dirt Village has grown from approximately 30 to 120 souls—a great blessing, especially since many people in the region still hold to the Hmong culture’s traditional religious practices, which include animism and belief in spirits.

“The biggest challenges when I bring the gospel out to people are, first, opposition from the unbelievers, and worse than that the leader of the villages,” says Lor. “Other is persecution. As you know, the communist government of [a neighboring country] hates Christianity. . . . So the risk of being capture or kill is something that you have to face and live with it 24/7.”

But despite the challenges, the gospel is being proclaimed in Thailand—and the Holy Spirit is working in peoples’ hearts. “The Hmong people who worship evil spirit now begin to understand about Christianity, and many have put their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior,” says Lor.

Lor says some of the new believers are sharing their faith with family and



Pictured is a woman who denounced her former shaman beliefs this spring. After she confessed her faith in the Lord Jesus, the spirit altar was removed from her home and burned to emphasize the total separation from the past beliefs and practice.

friends in nearby villages; others have expressed interest in training for the public ministry. In Chiang Rai, five men are currently studying to be pastors through Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) so they can serve in the field’s three congregations and six preaching stations.

“Addition to that, we are planning to recruit more Hmong to come to join the PSI program so they can be pastors and evangelists to do outreach to the Hmong in the rural areas in the future, with God willing,” says Lor, who also studied to be a pastor through the PSI program. In addition to raising up leaders, Lor says another future goal is to create projects that will help the churches become self-supporting.

“There are many people here lost in the darkness of the evil spirit, and they are still hunger for the gospel,” he says. “And this ministry just began. It is like a child that just learn how to walk, and still need someone to hold or support it. So my hope and prayer is that the brothers and sisters in the United States would help this ministry bring the good news of Christ to more people.”

In the news



The March issue of *Wisconsin Interest* featured an article on **Henry Tyson**, the superintendent of St. Marcus Lutheran School, Milwaukee. The article shared how Tyson became involved with inner-city schools in general, how he started out at St. Marcus, and how St. Marcus is doing today. The article highlighted the importance of “the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ” to Tyson, the school, its faculty, and its students.

The Mar. 2 issue of Milwaukee’s *Journal Sentinel* featured an article about the construction of a new \$3.27 million building by **Hope Christian Schools**, a network of three north side schools in Milwaukee affiliated



RENDERING BY KORB TREDO ARCHITECTS

with WELS. The new building will allow Hope Middle School to be restructured as a kindergarten through eighth-grade program. Together the three schools currently have more than 500 students.

The Mar. 5 issue of New Ulm’s *The Journal* reported how **St. Paul’s Lutheran School, New Ulm, Minn.**, celebrated Lutheran Schools Week, Mar. 1-6. Besides other special events, the students worked to collect funds for the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The April 1 issue of the *Smyrna A.M.* featured an article on the 10th anniversary of **Abiding Faith, Smyrna, Tenn.** Started in 1998, Abiding Faith has grown from a 15-member ministry that met at local businesses and community facilities to a church with about 160 members who meet in a 5,000-square-foot sanctuary.

Minnesota congregation reaches out to growing community

“Are you the church that gave me the free bottled water at the parade last summer?” You’d be surprised how fondly people remember getting a drink of water on a hot summer day. That simple good deed is just one of the ways that members of Bethlehem, Lakeville, Minn., have invited many neighbors to hear about the Water of Life—Jesus—at their church.

Bethlehem is located in Lakeville, a growing community about 20 miles south of downtown Minneapolis. The community is expected to grow from 50,000 to 100,000 by the year 2025. “The top-notch public school system,

to congregations for a limited period of time—three years for Bethlehem. These mission dollars helped fund Bethlehem’s second pastor, seminary graduate Steve Abramowski, in 2008.

Having Abramowski on board has allowed Blumer to spend more time with the evangelism chairman discussing strategies and recruiting members to help with outreach efforts. One way to describe their strategy is “invest and invite.” As Blumer explains, “We encourage our members to invest in the relationships that they have with the unchurched around them. Then Bethlehem creates opportunities for

community members learn that the church cares about them. An annual premarital seminar for couples in the community gives the congregation an opportunity to share the gospel at a critical time in young peoples’ lives.

According to Blumer, Bethlehem uses a style of worship that focuses attendees on the Word through the use of multimedia and music of various genres. “Our prayer is that this enables us to connect with people who may not otherwise be comfortable in a worship service,” Blumer says. “Attention during the service is given to the ‘how and why’ of what we do so that visitors to worship feel comfortable. We’ve also found explanation to be a good reminder for longtime members.”

He continues, “Bethlehem sees worship as the key to communicating the Good News in a way that relates to people, engages them, and keeps them coming back to be nourished by God’s Word.”



Bethlehem, Lakeville, Minn.

low crime rate, and wide range of community activities are drawing many families to the community,” says Benjamin Blumer, pastor at Bethlehem. “These families are often looking for a church home.”

Bethlehem’s membership—as well as its worship attendance—has more than doubled in the past six years. More than half of Bethlehem’s church family have been members for less than three years. “As Bethlehem continued to be blessed with growth, of increasing concern was the ability of a single pastor to continue focusing on outreach, while working on the integration of newer members and still serving as shepherd to long-time members,” Blumer reflects.

Since the congregation was still under the auspices of Home Missions, it was able to seek assistance through the Mission Enhancement program, where financial assistance is provided



McKenzie Franke shows kids how to make sandals at Bethlehem’s Christmas event called “A Night in Bethlehem.”

them to invite those friends to hear about Jesus.”

Blumer says his members are comfortable inviting others to church knowing that there will be visitor-friendly events where their acquaintances will be noticed and welcomed. From vacation Bible school and Christmas and Easter for Kids to seminars on relevant topics like in vitro fertilization, stem cell research, and raising teens, com-

WELS Home Missions is excited to be helping this established congregation reach out into its community. Pastor Harold Hagedorn, administrator for WELS Home Missions, says, “We give thanks for opportunities to use moneys provided by God’s people to partner with congregations at different stages—from brand-new starts to outreach ministries like Bethlehem’s—to work in the fields that are ripe for harvest.”

WHAT'S NEW ON STREAMS

Check out the upcoming events being streamed live in May.

- Martin Luther College (MLC) concert, 7:30 P.M., May 15
- MLC graduation, 10 A.M., May 16
- MLC call service, 2 P.M., May 16
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) vicar call service, 7 P.M., May 19
- WLS call service, 10 A.M., May 21
- WLS concert, 7 P.M., May 21
- WLS graduation, 10 A.M., May 22

Other live-streaming events on the docket include the WELS synod convention, July 27-31.

Watch all events live at <http://streams.wels.net/site/live>.

de·fin·ing re·li·gion

Son of God —
Son of Man —

Son of God – the second person of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19) who is of one being with the Father (John 10:30) and the true God over all (1 John 5:20, Romans 9:5). God the Son became man to redeem the world (Galatians 4:4,5, John 3:16-18).

Son of Man – a messianic title (Daniel 7:13) that Jesus applied to himself indicating that he was the Son of God who became fully human in order to redeem the world (Matthew 16:13-16, Mark 2:28, Luke 9:22, Luke 19:10, Matthew 26:63,64).

Overseeing WELS future commitment

“There’s nothing I dislike about being president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary,” says Paul Prange, the school’s current president. “I especially love the student interaction, both inside and outside of the classroom. Watching young people realize how the gospel applies to their lives is a daily thrill.”

With that in mind, it’s not hard to understand why Prange returned the call to serve as Board for Ministerial Education (BME) administrator when it was first extended to him in October 2008. In addition, Prange says, “When

school year. As BME administrator, Prange coordinates the work of the four schools that prepare WELS called workers—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw.

God has blessed Prange with many gifts that will serve him well in this new call. As Donald Sutton, BME chairman and pastor at St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn., says, “Paul Prange has a love for ministry, a passion for and experience in min-



Pastor Paul Prange, former president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, recently took the call to be the administrator for the Board for Ministerial Education

I received the call last fall, there were some areas of Michigan Lutheran Seminary that I thought still needed attention from me, especially recruitment and mission advancement. In the passing months, those things have become more stable and secure. During those same months, the synod budgeting process became more urgent.” That led Prange to accept the BME’s second call to be its administrator, filling a position that was vacant since August 2008 when its former administrator, Pastor Peter Kruschel, transitioned into his new call as a home mission counselor.

Prange began his work as BME administrator in March, although he will also serve as president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary until the end of this

isterial education, and a keen intellect. He also understands the WELS ministerial education system as well as anyone in our synod.”

These gifts will help Prange as he faces tough decisions in his first months as BME administrator. With the projected synod shortfall (see p. 20), all areas of ministry are reevaluating how they can serve God with fewer resources.

Regardless of shrinking budgets, Prange believes that “the congregations, schools, and missions of our synod need a steady supply of well-trained, reliable workers. Our ministerial education schools are our investment in the future of our church, and everyone in the synod has a stake in the success of our ministerial education schools.”

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Evaluating your congregation's confirmation practices —

For years WELS churches have struggled to engage and retain teens once they are confirmed. With that in mind, the Confirmation Ministry Task Force was created in 2001 to help the Commission on Youth Discipleship research why this might be a problem and how it could be fixed.

“God has blessed WELS churches tremendously over the years through our confirmation practices. Of that there can be no question, and for that we continue to thank God,” says Rik Krahn, Confirmation Ministry Task Force chairman and pastor at Martin Luther, Neenah, Wis. “But at the same time, confirmation is purely a human invention. It is nowhere commanded by God. As a human invention—even one that has produced rich fruits—it is important to periodically review what we do and why we do it, otherwise we run the risk of a rich tradition turning into hollow formalism. Confirmation can easily become something that we do just ‘because we’ve always done it.’ That’s not a good enough reason.”

The task force conducted a survey and a follow-up study that focused on WELS congregations’ confirmation practices. The results helped the task force to create confirmation self-study materials that congregations can use to examine their confirmation practices.

The self-study has two components. The DVD encourages evaluation of confirmation practices, showcases new approaches to confirmation used around WELS, and provides helps for using the self-study materials. A CD contains the directions, worksheets, and templates needed to conduct the self-study.

Krahn encourages all congregations to consider conducting the self-study. “Nearly all of our members will be touched in some way by confirmation,” he explains. “That means it has tremendous value and importance, and it means we should always strive to do it as well as we can. If we just ask the question, ‘Are we doing the best we can?’ then we will be better for it, even if we make no changes.”

To order Confirmation Ministry Self-Study: A Process to Help Congregations Reflect, Evaluate, and Improve, contact Northwestern Publishing House at 800-662-6022 or visit www.nph.net.

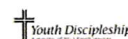


Kurt and Inge Adams, members at Morning Star, Jackson, Wis., help their daughter, Andrea, with her catechism lesson. Morning Star, one of the congregations featured in the new confirmation self-study DVD, uses a team-teaching model for catechism instruction.

CONFIRMATION MINISTRY SELF-STUDY



*A process to help congregations
reflect, evaluate, and improve*



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cyd@sab.wels.net www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship
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INVOLVING PARENTS in catechism instruction

Martin Luther created the Small Catechism to help parents teach God's Word to their children. Some WELS congregations are using that model to involve parents more deeply in their children's confirmation lessons. The *Confirmation Ministry Self-Study* DVD highlights a variety of ways that churches can involve parents in catechism instruction.

- **Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.**, uses a team-teaching model. The pastor or staff minister teaches students at church twice a week and parents teach their children at home twice a week.
- **At Resurrection, Verona, Wis.**, the pastor leads the lessons, but parents are encouraged to teach some lessons based on their Bible knowledge and comfort level.
- **New Hope, Melbourne, Fla.**, creates opportunities for parents to participate with their children during particular catechism lessons.
- **Christ, North St. Paul, Minn.**, requires parents to attend in the fall of the first year of confirmation instruction. Around Christmas, parents are to start pulling out, encouraging their children to take more responsibility for their spiritual growth. The second year of classes the students come alone.

WELS news briefs

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

WELS Military Services, a division of Special Ministries, has developed a **spiritual deployment kit** for U.S. military personnel separated from their family and home congregation for long periods of time. The kit includes a pocket-sized New Testament Bible, two devotional books, and an inspirational letter from the WELS national civilian chaplain. Individuals may purchase these kits for military members, or military personnel can receive one free if they register with WELS Military Services at www.wels.net/jump/refer.

Ad Hoc Commission

937-434-9876; revjrvoss@aol.com

The final report of the Ad Hoc Commission is now available online at www.wels.net/jump/adhoc. The commission was authorized by the 2007 synod convention to analyze the way the synod works and to propose comprehensive, long-term

strategies to help the synod carry out its mission. This report will be a major item of business at the synod convention in July.

Ministry of Christian Giving

414-256-3208; mcg@sab.wels.net

Total gifts received for the synod's Year of Jubilee offering have passed the \$3 million mark (as of March 31). The goal of the offering, authorized by the 2007 synod convention, is to reduce the synod's \$22.4 million debt and free up dollars for other ministry. While the Year of Jubilee celebration was designed to be observed in congregations primarily in November and December 2008, congregations still can participate until the synod convention at the end of July. Find out more about Year of Jubilee at www.wels.net/jump/jubilee.

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

District news

Minnesota

Prof. James Pope and **Dr. Mark Lenz** of Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., are the newest hosts of the *Lutheran Chapel Service*, one of the longest continually broadcast radio worship services in Minnesota. Lenz and Pope join Professor Emeritus Darwin Raddatz and Dr. John Nolte, both of MLC. For the past 60 years, Martin Luther College professors have helped produce the *Lutheran Chapel Service*, which airs each Sunday morning on KNUJ-860 AM.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Mr. Craig Hirschmann, teacher at St. John Lutheran Elementary School, Milwaukee, Wis., performed on the famed Flentrop Organ in Harvard University's Adolphus Busch Hall on Mar. 5. Hirschmann was just one of the organists from around the world invited to be part of the Harvard Organ Society's Thursday Lunchtime Recital Series, which run in October, November, March, and April.

Happy anniversary!

SEW—**Arlene Pastorek** and **Laura Martin**, teachers at Our Savior, Grafton, Wis., celebrated 25 years in the teaching ministry on April 12.

WW—**Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.**, is celebrating its 50th anniversary during the 2008–2009 school year.

First, La Crosse, Wis., celebrated its 150th anniversary April 18–19.

The district reporters for this month are: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

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



In a recent trip to Nepal, Dan Koelpin, administrator for the Board for World Missions, and Pastor Mike Duncan, new mission outreach coordinator for Nepal and Pakistan, observed a Bible study workshop (pictured), in which native church leaders are taught basic Bible stories with a gospel emphasis. Koelpin brought along 100 solar-powered audio recorders so that native leaders can share God's Word with the illiterate. The recorders contain the entire New Testament in Nepalese, along with a Nepalese version of *The Promise*, a booklet published by WELS Multi-Language Publications that focuses on teaching basic biblical truths. "We are already working with the Pastoral Studies Institute at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to prepare top leadership [in Nepal] for further training through technology," says Koelpin. "Perhaps this church can be a paradigm for other less accessible countries."

CORRECTION

We misspelled the name of Thomas Lindaman, the author of the "Confessions of Faith" article, in the April issue. We apologize for the error.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Christenson, Christian, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

Ernest, David E., to Gloria Dei, Tinley Park, Ill.

Fischer, David A., to retirement

Fritz, Loren D., to retirement

Grunewald, Matthew C., to St. John, Saint Clair, Minn.

Koester, Larry N., to retirement

Mau, Kevin R., to Our Savior, Arlington, Texas

Prange, Paul T., to administrator for Ministerial Education, Milwaukee, Wis.

Sims, Snowden G., to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio

Woller, Roger E., to retirement

Zimpelmann, Matthew J., to Cross of Christ, Boise, Idaho

Teachers

Baxter, Emily J., to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

Brands, Daniel S., to Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.

Elseth, Mandy, to Little Lambs Christian, West Fargo, N.D.

Fischer, Christopher D., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Gut, Kyle P., to Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wis.

Hackmann, Tricia A., to Peace Little Lambs Preschool, Eagle River, Alaska

Hahm, James A., to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Hartwig, Aaron M., to St. Paul, North Fond du Lac, Wis.

Hoffman, Kathy, to St. Paul, Saint James, Minn.

Holmes, Amber, to Loving Arms Child Care Center, Wichita, Kan.

Horton, Jacqueline I., to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.

Hulse, Ryan M., to St. Croix Middle School, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Kallies, Nathaniel D., to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.

Kruschel, Christine S., to Beautiful Savior, Las Vegas, Nev.

Moldenhauer, Mark R., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.

Nelson, Julie A., to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.

Paggi, Megan, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.

Poppy, Melissa J., to The Shepherd's Lambs Child Care, New Hope, Minn.

Rathje, Ryan J., to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.

Schulz, David R., to St. John, Goodhue, Minn.

Sell, Jeffrey R., to Prince of Peace, Taylorville, Utah

Wasser, Alicia A., to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

Wenzel, Melodie L., to Good Shepherd Little Lambs, St. Peter, Mo.

Wilson, Kip D., to Zion, Denver, Colo.

ANNIVERSARIES

Milwaukee, Wis.—Christ (125). May 10. Song service and senior choir reunion, 10 A.M. June 14. Charles Bonow concert, 10 A.M. June 21. Anniversary worship, 10 A.M.; dinner to follow. Joel Jaeger, 414-645-5138.

Rockford, Ill.—New Life (20). May 10. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 815-227-0855; office@newliferockford.org.

Hayward, Wis.—Peace (25). May 17. Worship, 2:30 P.M.; light luncheon to follow. RSVP by Apr. 30. Emory Steinke, 715-634-8785.

Waukesha, WI—Grace (100). May 23. Worship, 5:30 P.M. May 24. Worship, 10 A.M.; luncheon following at Country Springs Banquet Center at noon. RSVP requested. 262-547-3688, 100@gracewaukesha.org. Web site, www.gracewaukesha.org

Raymond, S.D.—Bethlehem (125). June 21. Worship, 10:45 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 605-532-3766; pheasant@itctel.com.

Valentine, Neb.—Zion (75). July 18. Worship, 11 A.M. & 5 P.M. Site, Cherry County Fairgrounds. Meal at noon. July 19. Worship, 10 A.M. at Zion. Matt Krenke, mskrenke@hotmail.com.

Balaton, Minn.—St. Peter (125). July 19. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. Mark Zander, 507-734-2309.

COMING EVENTS

The Lutheran Choral of Milwaukee choral concert—May 3. 3 P.M., Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.; 7 P.M., St. John's, Wauwatosa, Wis. Mary Prange, mjprange@aol.com.

Lutheran Radio Committee annual meeting—May 4, 7 P.M. Fine Arts Building lecture hall, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Lois Brunner, 262-251-7159.

An evening for life—May 7, 6 P.M., Grace Center, Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by WELS Lutherans for Life-Milwaukee Chapter. 414-727-8176. Web site, www.welsflmilw.com.

Friendship evangelism workshop—May 9, 3 P.M. New Life, Rockford, Ill. 815-227-0855; office@newliferockford.org.

Upcoming live events—Wish you could be there? Now you can. Watch events live on Streams, <http://streams.wels.net/site/live>.

- May 15, 7:30-9 P.M. Martin Luther College commencement concert.
- May 16, 10-11:30 A.M. Martin Luther College graduation service.
- May 16, 2-3 P.M. Martin Luther College call service.
- May 19, 7-8:30 P.M. Wisconsin Luther seminary vicar call service.
- May 21, 10-11:30 A.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary call service.
- May 21, 7-8:30 P.M. Wisconsin Luther seminary graduation concert.
- May 22, 10-11:30 A.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduation service.

National Campus Ministry Retreat—May 18-21. Metropolis Hotel, Action City, and Florian Gardens, Eau Claire, Wis. Hosted by UW-Eau Claire. Web site, www.campusministryrally.com.

Women of WELS Retreat—May 29-31. Cannon Beach Christian Conference Center, Cannon Beach, Ore. Brenda Dowdery, 503-848-6761.

Northwestern Publishing House music reading workshops—Cheryl Nolte, 800-662-6093 ext. 5763, 414-615-5763; noltecd@nph.wels.net. Web site, www.nph.net/music/workshop.

- June 13, Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.
- June 20, St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.
- June 27, Trinity, Bay City, Mich.
- July 11, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.
- July 12, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
- Aug. 8, 9 a.m. Choral music only. NPH, Milwaukee, Wis.

Soul ride—June 20. Salem (107th), Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by WELS Lutherans for Life-Milwaukee Chapter and WELS Riders. 414-727-8176, office@welsflmilw.com. Web site, www.welsflmilw.com.

46th annual LWMS convention—June 25-28. Sheraton Denver Hotel, Denver, Colo. Hosted by the Rocky Mountain Circuit. Theme: "Mission with an altitude." Web site, www.lwms.org.

2009 WELS International Youth Rally—July 8-11. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Theme: "Follow the path; lead the way." Web site, www.welsyouthrally.net.

Operation Science Summer Teacher Training—July 22-23. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. bethtweed@operationscience.org. Web site, www.operation-science.org.

Martin Luther College Ladies Auxiliary annual meeting—Oct. 14. Registration, 9 A.M. Meeting, 9:30 A.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.

NAMES WANTED

Beaumont/Banning/Palm Springs, Calif.—Sunday worship at 9 A.M. Holiday Inn Express, Oak Valley Room, 1864 Oak Valley Village Circle, Beaumont, Calif. Rick Johnson, 951-660-3774.

Bakersfield/Taft/Maricopa/Tehachapi, Calif.—David Warskow, 661-943-1025; dmwarskow6@verizon.net.

PREACHER NEEDED

Olympia, Wash.—Messiah is looking for a pastor to preach Aug. 9, 16, and 23, in exchange for the use of a home in the area. Joel Nitz, 360-923-1961; reviiiver@juno.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.

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES

The faith of a little child was evidenced in our two-year-old grandson, Stevie, when we were enjoying the fireworks over Mt. Rushmore this past summer. Over everyone's "oohs and aahs," we heard him wondrously exclaim, "Oh, thank you Jesus!" He certainly believes God makes all things and gives him all things.

Deborah Haar, Stratford, Wisconsin

Picture this



Pictured are students who attend Lighthouse Youth Center, which provides after school programs for kids living in Milwaukee's inner city. Students, volunteers, neighborhood representatives, and past board members all celebrated a milestone in February: since Lighthouse Youth Center began in April 2006, there have been 10,000 opportunities to share the gospel. Pastor James Buske, executive director, explains, "We currently have programming five days a week, Monday through Friday. We have been open 437 nights, and have had 103 different volunteers and 473 different students in our building—and if you add up our nightly attendance, we hit the 10,000 mark!" Another part of the celebration was the penny challenge: during the week, students worked to collect 10,000 pennies. The goal was not only met but also surpassed, and students were able to submit suggestions on how to use the pennies to share the gospel with others. "It was a great way to celebrate God's grace," says Buske.

Submitted by James Buske

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

Let your light shine

How many opportunities have you had to share the gospel? As you involve yourself in your home, church, and community, you will discover more opportunities to share the reason for the hope that you have. But how do you let your Christianity shine through so people will approach you?

Wear a cross necklace or a T-shirt with a Christian saying next time you go to the gym or the doctor's office.

Listen to a Christian radio station or have Christian screensavers on your computer at work.

Be a good listener. When people talk about their lives—and problems in their lives—tell them about God's promises and how they help you through your hard times.

Be forgiving. Let's face it: shaking your fist at the driver who cuts you off does not display Christian love. Neither does holding a grudge against a coworker.

Be aware of your words and actions. People are watching. They notice when you aren't living as a Christian should.

A child's sin.

A Father's forgiveness.

Just as the scorch mark remained on the side of the outlet, the damage of sin is still in our faces. But sin can never be a match for the forgiveness won by Christ's victory over death.

Stephen L. Merten

Sometime during my schooling, around the age of seven, I was introduced to some simple biographies of the great men of our era. Among those stories of our history's greats were those of the inventors Henry Ford and Thomas Edison. I thought long and hard about the great things they had already accomplished by the time they were my age. I realized that if there was ever any hope that a child prodigy was hibernating in my young body, it would have to get going! But what to invent?

A fallen prodigy, a father's fix

One night, I contemplated the challenge Edison met while inventing the light bulb—keeping a filament glowing without it burning up. His problem, as my young mind interpreted it, was that the man always wound up using filaments that were too thin and would quickly melt when the electricity ran through them. I pondered this dilemma as I held a paper clip in my hand and stared at the outlet on the side of the light fixture above the sink in my bathroom. A few twists of the

clip brought it into a semblance of a filament. I reasoned that if I could insert this answer to Edison's enigma into the outlet quickly enough, I would avoid electrocution and create a glowing light bulb. This looked like the solution to two major problems—Edison's difficulty in making a light shine and mine of letting the inner prodigy make a surprise appearance.

Fortunately there was no water in the sink in which I stood to reach the outlet. As one prong of the clip was inserted, the other was too wide for the slot in the outlet and shorted out on the side of the fixture, leaving a scorch mark and sending me to the floor. For some reason the room grew dark. I soon learned the switch on the wall no longer turned on the paper clip-enhanced light fixture. To my horror I realized I would have to confess to my father that I had broken the house!

As I approached Dad, I saw my older sister was next to him. Having to tell your father that part of the house was likely broken beyond hope of recovery is bad enough. But to give your dad the news in front of your older sibling could lead to no good thing. I pictured a difficult future.



She would continuously remind me about who caused part of our house to cease functioning for all time.

Dad walked down the stairs with the two of us in tow and tried the switch.

He then went into the basement and did something I had never seen before. A gray metal box of mystery was opened, and he moved a little black switch sideways. On returning upstairs I saw that none of my earlier activities would ever need to come to light as the switch was flipped and the pool of light in the bathroom showed that the house was no longer broken.

My heart sank as my dad turned to me wondering what could have caused the circuit breaker to pop. The shrug of my shoulders, the sign long recognized as indicating we had stumbled upon one of the great perpetual mysteries of man best left uninvestigated, was ineffective. I could see by his expression that he had quickly connected the half-inserted paper clip next to the fresh scorch mark with his son. My peripheral vision showed a smile that revealed my sister was making the same deduction.

To both of our surprises, Dad simply used a handkerchief to remove the clip and suggested that the paper clip adventure was not the best of ideas. There was no lecture for me. My sister would not relate this particular crime to the ages marking how this was certainly the first chapter of the sad history of her fallen brother.

A fallen sinner, a Father's forgiveness

I wonder how often God must shake his head as he sees his children who think they have broken something that cannot be repaired. You know that moment of realization just after sin? That moment when the depth of our

offense appears as a canyon that can only separate us from God's love? The way we handle the moments after the initial "What have I done?" can reveal volumes of our relationship to our heavenly Father. Two common responses are "It's too little to care about" or "It's too big to take care of." Both are a problem.

Do not underestimate sin. Sin is an awful thing. All sin is an extension of humanity's first rebellion against God. A sin breaks more than a commandment. The first sin broke the trust between the Creator and his chil-

Christ's righteousness covers the scorch marks of our sin.

dren; it broke the flow of love from the children to their father; it broke the perfection of the flawless universe; it broke a Father's heart. Every sin since then has been no less a damnable offense. Each sin is a slap in the face of the loving Father by a rebellious child. The feeling that something is broken every time we sin is warranted. Do not underestimate the damage of sin.

But how can the sins of the children be greater than the power of the Creator? The cure for sin was not as easy as flipping a switch in the basement, but it was

no less effective. The words of John, "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), show the depth of the repair needed for children broken by sin. The words "blood of Jesus" show us how costly it was. "Purifies us" show us how powerful. "From all sin" show us how complete. The feeling that sin breaks things beyond repair is unwarranted.

Yet the signs of sin's damage remain. Just as the scorch mark remained for years on the side of the outlet, the damage of sin is still in our faces. The pain of childbirth, the drudgery of work, and death itself are the aftermath of sin (Genesis 3). But no matter how dreadful, despicable, or deadly our sin, it can never be a match for the forgiveness won by Christ's victory over death. None of the damage extends beyond this life for all who have faith in their Father's forgiveness. Christ's righteousness covers the scorch marks of our sin.

Sin does not get to win. We cannot break the house beyond what our Father can repair. No one gets to delight in the idea of our taking an eternal fall from grace.

Did the world ever get to see the emergence of a prodigy? This Edison wannabe remains without an invention to his name. Since then I've realized my legacy would not be a stack of patents or the infamy of being the one whose curiosity killed the house. My legacy is the same as yours. We share the real legacy—not an eternal legacy of sin and death but one of forgiveness and unbreakable love.

Stephen Merten, a member of Mount Olive, Delano, Minnesota, is a teacher at West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minnesota.

complicated LIFE

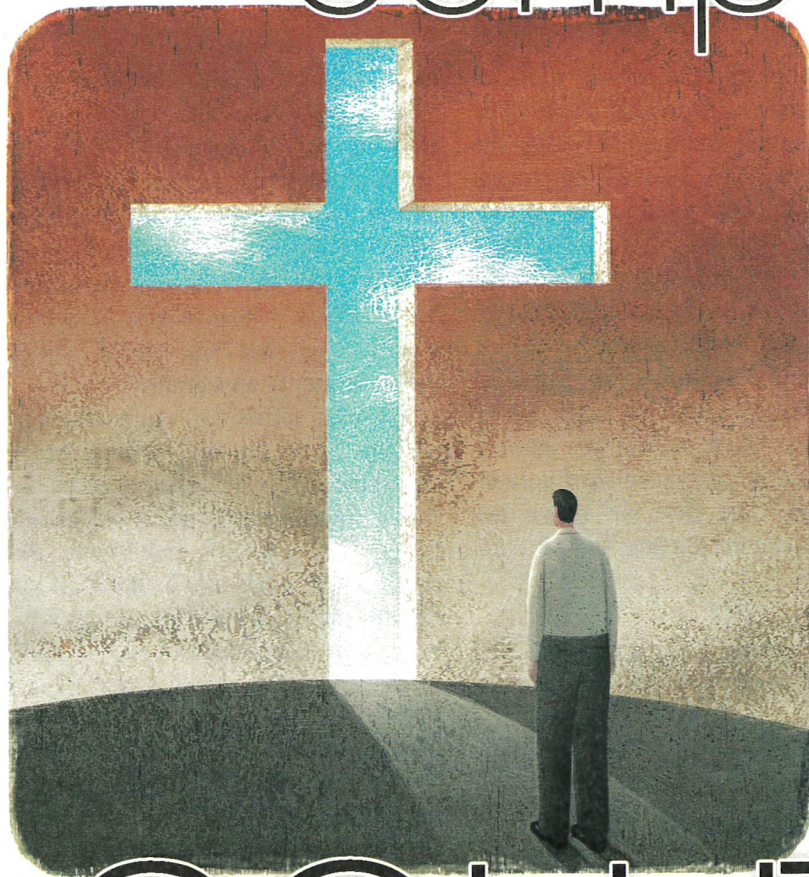


ILLUSTRATION: GOODSALT

Beaten down by her earthly struggles, a woman finds peace through her Savior.

simple SOLUTION

On Feb. 16, 1952, I was born into a family of four—my mother, father, and two brothers. My father had been baptized and confirmed in a Lutheran church. My mother was an adult confirmand in the same church.

Rough beginning

Regular church attendance was not a part of our family life. My younger brother was the only child baptized. He had been admitted to the hospital with severe dehydration, from vomiting and diarrhea. The doctor didn't think he was going to make it, so they baptized him. He did make it, but neither my older brother nor I was ever baptized.

My father was an alcoholic. When he had his times of trying not to drink, we attended church. But when he started to drink again, my mother would make my brothers and me go to a non-denominational church, which she preferred. We

made a fuss because we didn't want to go to any church. Eventually, she gave up trying to make us go.

I remember attending a summer vacation Bible school at a neighborhood Baptist church. I was about eight years old, and going was my own idea. The second day, as I sat around a table with several other children, the teacher started to impress upon us the need to accept Christ into our lives. Very quickly it became apparent that she was not going to let us go until we verbally accepted Christ. I became uncomfortable and didn't want to say what she wanted me to say. Under duress, I gave in, even though I didn't believe in or feel right about what I was saying.

I grew up confused about religion. It seemed to be very complicated. I tried not to think too much about it and convinced myself that I was, after all, a pretty good person. I knew something was missing in my life, but I didn't want to deal with whatever it was. Church and religion were not a part of most of my adult life. I believed in God, but I couldn't quite swallow those Bible stories. I wondered how they could be true.

Continued difficulties

At age 18, I married for the first time in a Methodist Church. My parents weren't pleased with my choice in a husband. They were right. After four years, I had to get out. He was lying and embezzling from the business he managed. We divorced.

At age 23, I met my second husband. He was eight years older than me, and my parents liked him. But 14 years of marriage and two children later, I learned he had been unfaithful with two different women. Another divorce. I vowed to never marry again. I felt like such a failure in life. I wondered why God was punishing me this way. What terrible wrongdoing had I done?

When I least expected it—never say never—I met my third husband. He seemed too good to be true at the time. I was looking through my rose-colored glasses. He had been baptized and confirmed in a WELS church. He had transferred his membership to a different WELS church closer to his home, at his former wife's insistence. After a bitter divorce, he had stopped attending church.

Early in our marriage, I realized that he was probably an alcoholic, just like my father. Our marriage was a nightmare most of the time. I began to drink, trying to numb how unhappy and empty and defeated I felt. Emotionally, I couldn't endure another divorce.

One evening, after another argument, he went out drinking. I was as low as I've ever been in my life. I could see no future and no happiness. I wanted to give up and die. I didn't know what to do. On my knees, I cried out to God to help me. I had heard others talk about being born again, and I wanted the joy and fulfillment they seemed to have by "having the Holy Spirit in them." I cried myself to sleep, unaware that God was already starting to answer my prayer.

Answered prayers

The next day, I told my husband that I thought he was an alcoholic. I told him I couldn't go through another divorce. I said we would live in the same house but go our separate ways. I believed that there would never be any more happiness in my life.

To my astonishment, my husband confessed that he thought he was an alcoholic too. He said he wasn't happy either. Then he asked me what he had to do to straighten things out. He said he did not want to lose me. I told him the drinking had to stop. Then I suggested we start going to church. The couples I knew who had been married a long time and seemed to be happy all had one thing in common—religion.

We began to discuss which church to go to. Since he had been raised WELS and I had some exposure to the Lutheran religion as a child, we decided to attend the nearby WELS church. His sister and her husband were members, and we knew a few other people who attended that church.

As I walked into that church, for the first time in my life I had a feeling of belonging. I felt that this was the right place to be. I was comfortable there, and I spoke with the pastor about becoming a member. As I went through the instruction class, I knew that God had indeed answered my cry for help. A feeling of peace, such as I have never known in my life, came over me. I found that I could believe the Bible stories; the Holy Spirit was doing his work.

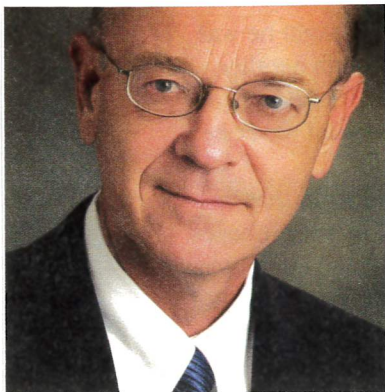
In instruction class, I learned that the WELS "religion" was very simple—Christ died on the cross for my sins and the sins of all people, and because of that, we're all forgiven and heaven is our gift. How much simpler can it get! WELS lets the Bible speak for itself. The pastor doesn't try to interpret the Bible—add or detract from it. It's very black and white. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. There's no sugarcoating. I like that! It's easy to understand—not complicated.

On June 10, 2001, I was confirmed and baptized as a WELS member. My parents, husband, and children were some of the witnesses to this amazing event. It came as an answer to prayer from a cry for help. My husband also gave his profession of faith.

Since then my husband and I still have some rough waters in our marriage, but with regular church attendance, prayer, and the belief that all things are done for our good, we have peace in knowing God will help us persevere. He will not give us more than we can bear.

I finally know what I was missing, and I have peace and happiness like I've never known in my lifetime. Thank-you, Jesus!

Due to the personal nature of this article, the author wishes to remain anonymous.



Mark Schweden

Just bring one

Her name was Sandra. I had gone to the mall to get my hair cut. Sandra was the only person on duty, and she ushered me to the chair. As she began to snip away, the typical and somewhat awkward small talk began. She asked what I did for a living. I told her that I worked just up the street for something called the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. She didn't respond.

So I said to her, as she wielded her scissors, "The fact that you didn't ask what a Lutheran is means you probably know something about the Lutheran church."

She said, "I was baptized as a Lutheran."

More silence. So I said, "You spoke about that as if it were only in the past. Not Lutheran anymore?"

She spoke very quietly now. Her voice, previously perky and upbeat, took on a tone of frustration, even anguish. "My parents never really got us involved much in church. But my life is a mess right now. I've been thinking I need to get back to church somehow. I know I need to do something because nothing in my life is working right now."

When I was about to say more, the hair dryer switched on. Finished with that, she asked if the cut was short enough and removed the plastic sheet. Other customers were waiting. I said to her as I left, "I would really like to help you if I can," and I offered her the phone number at my office. She seemed a little embarrassed that she had opened up to this total stranger. She thanked me and said she'd think about calling.

I don't know if Sandra will call. I don't know if she will be there when it comes time for the next haircut. I can only pray that our brief, interrupted conversation

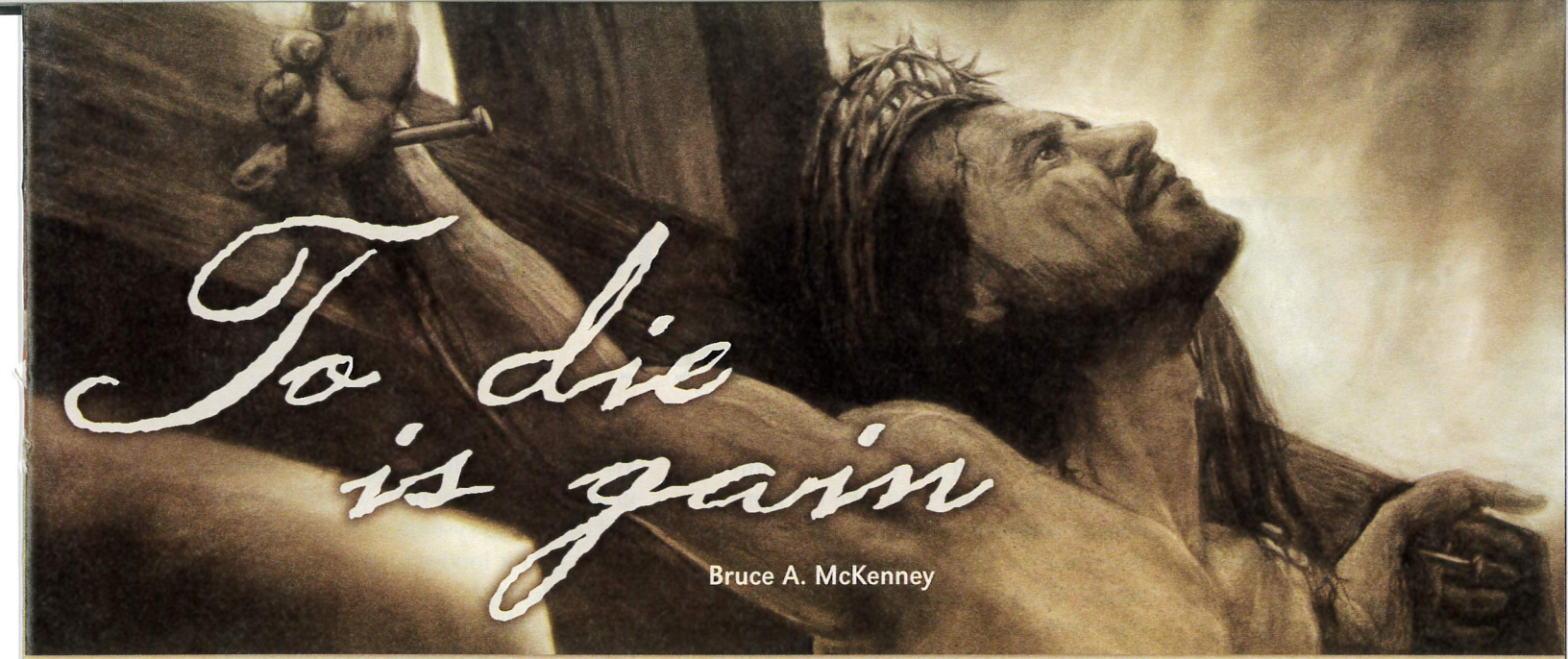
will move her to get the help she needs and that someone will be able to lead her to the forgiveness and love of the Savior.

God has a reason for encouraging each of us to be ready at all times to give the reason for the hope that we have. Opportunities to share Christ are not something that we can manufacture or anticipate. God himself creates those opportunities and places them before us. And he gives us the words to say.

Perhaps the most frequent opportunities for sharing the gospel come simply every day. The opportunity is there when we wave at our unchurched neighbor mowing his lawn on Sunday morning as we drive off to church. The opportunity comes at the family get-together when we sit on the sofa next to our young nephew who has not been to church since he went off to college. God brings us into contact with people every day—people we already know personally—who desperately need what God has given us. So the mission of the church is *my* mission. Personally. Face to face. Wherever and whenever God might give that unexpected, momentary opportunity to change someone's life forever with the power of the gospel.

Imagine what God could do if each of us, during this next year, would bring just one person to church or help one person to enroll in a Bible information class. Just one. God's church would grow in the right way and for the right reason, as the joy and power of the gospel touches thousands of lives.

God will bring you into contact with a stranger like Sandra. He will also work through you among the people you know. Be ready for that mission—one soul at a time.



To die is gain

Bruce A. McKenney

It just didn't seem right! I was standing at the casket of my Uncle Bill in the front of church. As I looked at his dead body and saw all the bouquets of flowers ornately placed around the casket, all I could smell was baked beans! The ladies in the church basement were getting things ready for the meal to be served after we came back from the cemetery. As is customary in the Midwest, that meal included baked beans, ham sandwiches, and potato salad. But it just didn't seem right to smell food at the time of death!

Funeral banquets

Did you ever wonder why we have a funeral meal after the committal service? Although food might be the last thing on the minds of mourners, it makes sense to have a meal for family and friends who have traveled far to come to the funeral service. It also gives family and friends an opportunity to visit, reminisce, and enjoy one another's company before they have to return to their daily routine. Life goes on after a funeral. But, as a little boy, it still didn't seem right to me to think about eating food as I stood at my uncle's casket.

Over the years and after leading many families back to church after the committal service at the cemetery, I've come to appreciate the funeral meal as a picture of heaven. Why would I say that? Think of what happens. When we come back from the graveyard, the mourners gather, and the food is served. After a while, the silence begins to break as people visit, and soon it is not uncommon to hear people laughing and enjoying one another's company. It actually becomes a happy time after a family leaves the cemetery.

Heaven's banquet

Isn't that what God says heaven will be like? After Jesus comes to get his people from the graveyard, he will take his believers to heaven. There a banquet will be served where they will feast on the finest of fare, and there will be laughter and joy in the presence of the Lord.

Listen to how Isaiah describes what God's people will enjoy in his kingdom: "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth" (Isaiah 25:6-8).

Already in this life, in the kingdom of grace, God's people enjoy the precious banquet of salvation. Every time they hear the gospel promises of forgiveness and eternal life through Word and sacrament, they enjoy the finest spiritual food for their souls. The ultimate fulfillment of this picture of the joyful banquet of salvation will take place in heaven where God says about his people, "Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst. . . . And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:16,17).

I don't know if baked beans and ham sandwiches will be part of the fine fare served in heaven, but for now, they give us a little taste of heaven at funeral meals!

Contributing editor Bruce McKenney is pastor at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a ten-part series on death and dying.

Why do we have a funeral meal after the committal service? The funeral meal can be a picture of heaven, where all believers will enjoy a heavenly banquet in the presence of the Lord.



A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "John A. Bran".

Should the church change? Part 2

The task of the church is to teach all nations what the Lord has commanded. For those who take the Lord's charter seriously, change is not possible wherever the Lord has spoken. In our series "Confessions of faith," those who have come to our church have almost invariably appreciated one thing about us. We teach the Word of God. That should not change. So the first answer to the question about change is no. The church should not change its teaching as long as that teaching is based on the Bible.

But the church has changed over the centuries. We don't speak Greek in our gatherings as the early church did. Nor do we read the New Testament in Greek, the language God used in the process of inspiration. Pentecost changed that when the Holy Spirit came and used other languages so that people could hear and learn about Jesus. Yes, the church changed. Latin, used for so many centuries, has also disappeared.

We don't even speak German. We speak English, and even English has changed. We don't use the King's English any longer. Some may not prefer to speak the Lord's Prayer in a new version. Instead, they continue to use the older familiar form. But we do make changes.

Some changes occurred quickly after Jesus ascended. The early church in Jerusalem grew, but its growth created problems. The Grecian converts complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The church instituted a change that helped solve the problem. They chose seven men to take care of the problem so that the 12 apostles could concentrate on "prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:1-7).

We've changed in many ways since then. We drive cars. We communicate by e-mail, cell phones, and satellites with

people all over the world in an instant. We use electric lights, heat our churches in the winter, cool them in the summer, and use sound systems to make the voice of the pastor louder so people will hear God's message.

The architecture of our church buildings is not commanded either. God gave specific directions for the building of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, but New Testament Christians are free to build in various styles. Some churches are Gothic, others Romanesque, still others contemporary. And in some of our mission settings God's people meet in public schools, banks, or union halls.

Even worship forms change. We are a liturgical church, and the way we worship has been developed over long centuries. Luther did not abandon the Roman Catholic forms. Instead, he removed what was contrary to the Scriptures. Our worship forms still intend to preserve what was used long ago and to keep God's Word and the sacraments as the center of our worship focus. Some of the forms we use in worship were used by God's people long before the Reformation. But they are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. They are indifferent things, or *adiaphora*, and can be changed.

But we must be careful about change. Just because things are indifferent does not mean that it doesn't matter whether or not one changes them. Sometimes changes can lead us in the wrong direction. That suggests that there is one more answer to the question. Should the church change? Well, maybe.

Yes, the church changes, but one thing must remain—the truth of God's Word. The gospel was and is the power of God. The sacraments must remain as Jesus instituted them. Without these things, we lose what builds the church.

THE APOSTLES

St. Matthew: Chosen by grace

Hated as a collaborator with the Romans by his countrymen, despised as the worst of sinners by the religious leaders, hounded by his conscience, Matthew sat at his booth to collect his taxes. Then this teacher, this Jesus, came and said, "Follow me!" For a man despised and rejected by so many, it was an amazing moment: chosen by Jesus to be a follower, a friend, a confidant. Jesus walked to his booth and chose him by grace.

READ MATTHEW 9:9-13

⁹As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. Look up Luke 18:9-12. How did the people of Israel categorize tax collectors? Give some modern examples of people society regards in similar fashion?
2. What reasons would the other disciples have given for Matthew not to be included in their number? What reasons might Matthew have given?
3. The disciple Philip lived a life devoted to the Hope of Israel. Matthew lived among the "sinners." Compare the way Jesus called each one (cf. John 1:43). What insight about Jesus does this give you? What comfort does it give you?

4. What did Jesus mean by saying he had not come to call the righteous, but the sick and sinners?
5. Jesus chose Matthew by grace alone, and then he washed away his guilt and sin. Look up the other gospel writers' lists of the 12 apostles (Mark 3:16-19 and Luke 6:12-16). What do they call this disciple? Matthew describes himself as "Matthew, the tax collector" (Matthew 10:3). What does that tell you about the other disciples? about Matthew?
6. The author of the hymn "Amazing Grace" was a pastor with a dark past. On his gravestone he put this epitaph:

JOHN NEWTON, clerk, once an Infidel and Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich Mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy.

People chosen by grace never forget their past . . . but God does. "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).

How does memory of our past sins hinder our growth in faith? How does it motivate us?

MORE ABOUT ST. MATTHEW

We know little about Matthew's later ministry. He wrote the gospel that bears his name, and the church historian Eusebius (c. 300) tells us that he served the people of Israel for 15 years. In Christian art St. Matthew is depicted as one of the four gospel symbols: the lion (Mark), ox (Luke), eagle (John), and a man (Matthew). The church celebrates the Feast of St. Matthew on Sept. 21. The Gospel for that festival is Matthew 9:9-13.

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

This is the seventh article in a 12-part series on Jesus' apostles. Find this study and answers online after May 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net



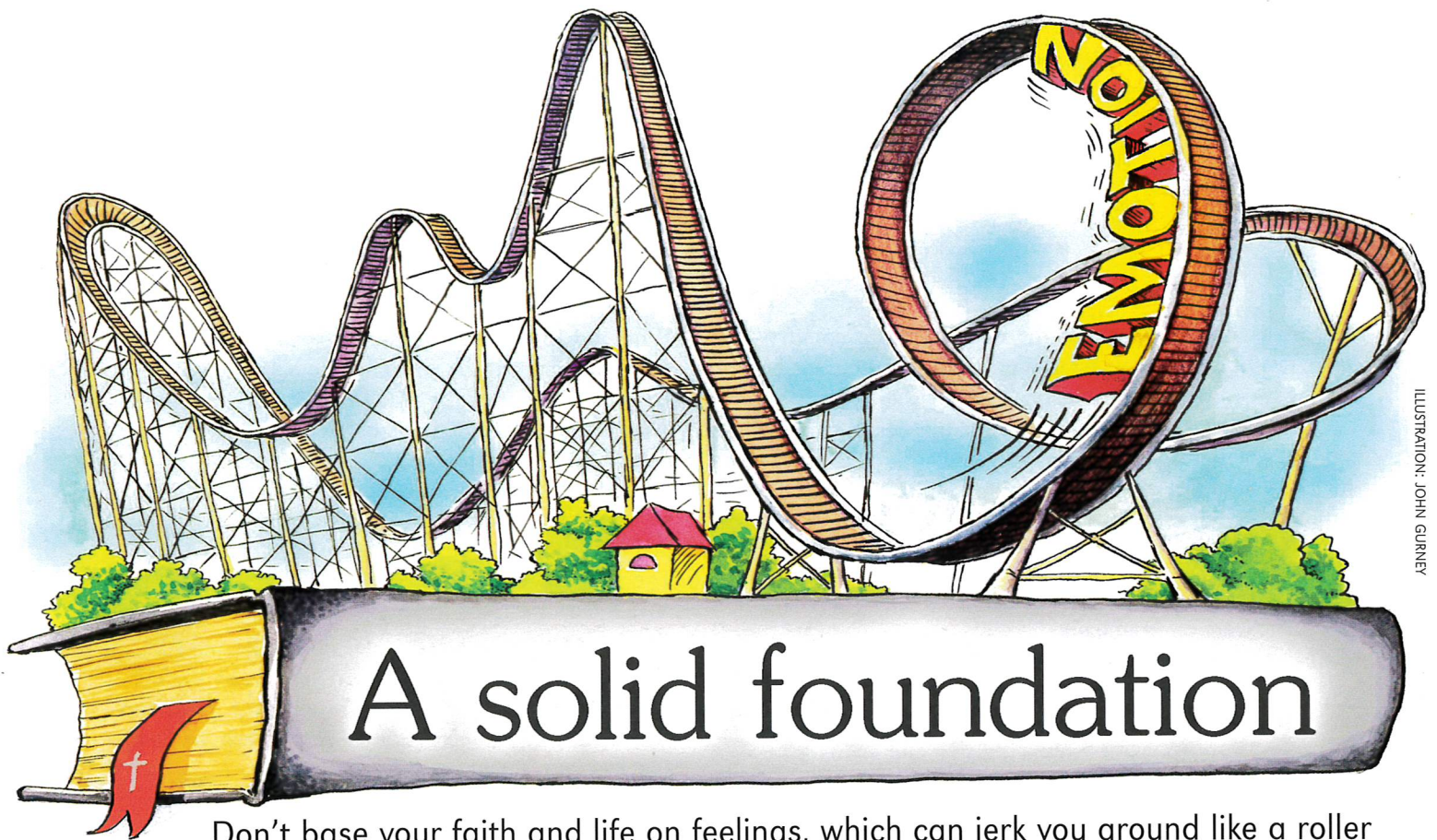


ILLUSTRATION: JOHN GURNEY

A solid foundation

Don't base your faith and life on feelings, which can jerk you around like a roller coaster. God's rock-solid truth is the foundation to build on. **Andrew C. Schroer**

“Stretch out with your feelings . . . Let go of your conscious self and act on instinct.”

That was the encouragement that wise, old Obi-Wan Kenobi gave to young Luke Skywalker in the movie *Star Wars*. The force would be with Luke and all would be well.

“Let your feelings be your guide. Do what feels right.”

That is also the mantra of our world today. How do you know what is the right job, right spouse, right church for you? Let go of all your questions about what is right. Simply go with your feelings. Do it because it feels right.

In a world where many believe that absolute truth no longer exists, our feelings become our guide. Books, videos, seminars, and television talk shows proclaim the same message. But is that such a good idea?

My feelings change from day to day. Some days I feel happy. Some days I feel sad. Some days I feel like pizza. Some days I feel like hamburgers. Sometimes I'm depressed and don't feel like making any kind of decision. As fickle humans, our feelings are always changing. As sinful humans, our feelings are stained with selfishness and doubt.

A woman once came to me in tears. “I don't *feel* God's presence in my heart anymore,” she said. “I am going to hell. God must have deserted me.” I asked if she knew that Jesus died for her sins. She said, “Yes.” I asked if she was sorry for her sins and trusted that God had forgiven her because of Jesus' sacrifice. She replied, “Yes.” “Then you are saved,” I told her, “no matter what you *feel*.”

Our feelings do not change anything that God has already done. As an old seminary professor once told me, “To hell with your feelings.”

Our feelings can betray us. Sometimes we truly feel the overwhelming joy of salvation and the warming presence of our God. But some days, God feels far off. He seems to hide his face, and we feel the dark stare of the world around us. Thankfully, my roller coaster of emotions—how I feel—does not change the fact that Jesus died for me, that God is with me, and that I have heaven.

Faith is the knowledge and trust in Jesus as my Savior. Faith is not a feeling. At times my faith produces the feelings of sorrow, regret, joy, and satisfaction. But as a sinful human being, my feelings cannot always be trusted.

And there's one more thing. Just because I feel something is right doesn't make it right. Sadly, many today make decisions about such important things as what church to attend or how they live their lives based on how they feel in their hearts. God's directions are tucked neatly away where they don't interfere with feelings.

Don't base your faith and life on the quicksand of feelings. Rather, base them on the rock of God's never-changing Word. Base them on the absolute truth inspired by a God who doesn't change like the shifting shadows.

Our world today is always changing. Fads and fashion change with the blink of an eye. Politicians flip-flop with every opinion poll. Even economic times change from boom to bust in a twinkle of the eye. Our feelings jerk us around like a roller coaster. In such an ever-changing environment, what a comfort to stand on the never-changing, absolute truth of the Bible.

Andrew Schroer is pastor at Redeemer, Edna, Texas.