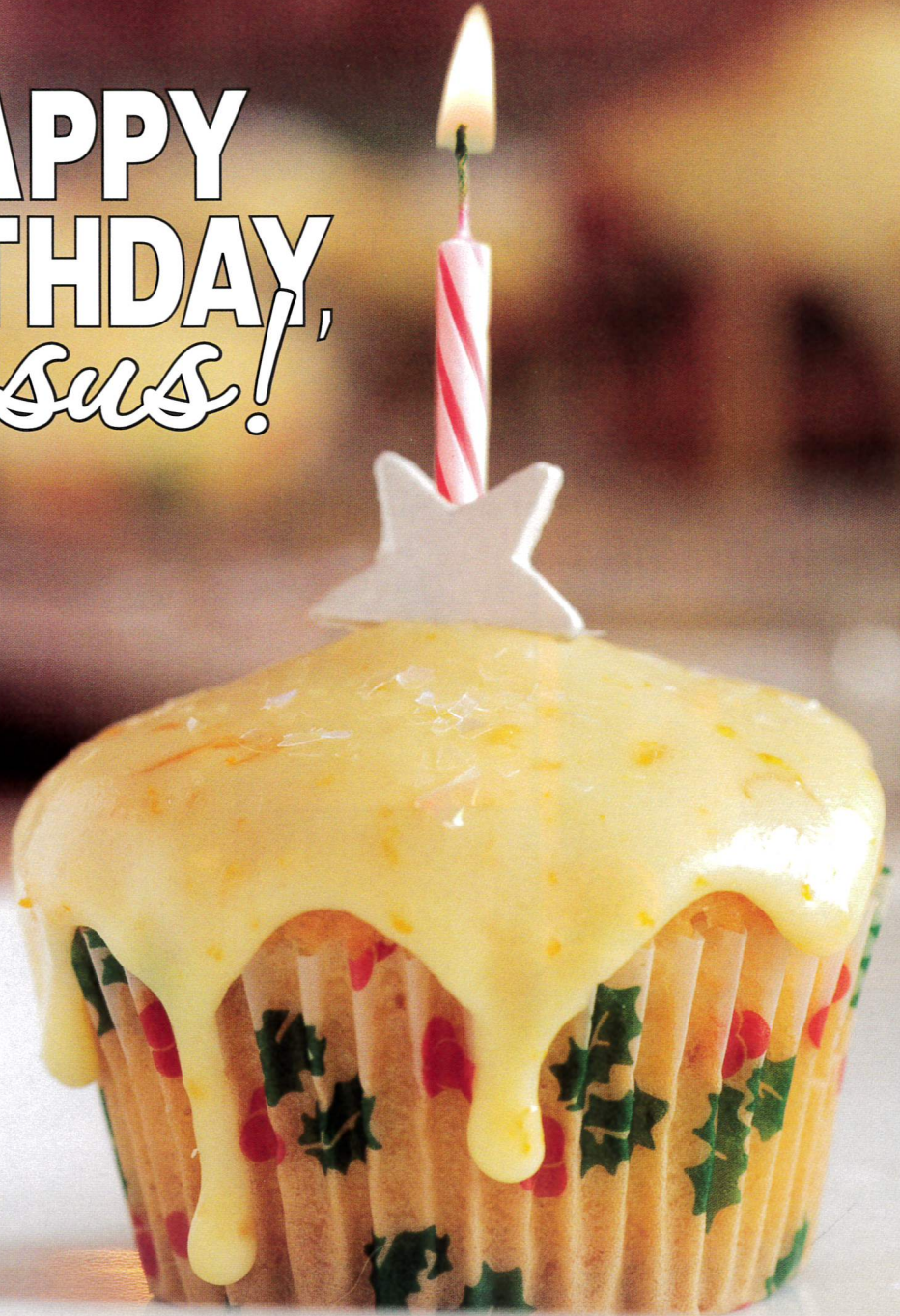


DECEMBER 2009

Forward in Christ

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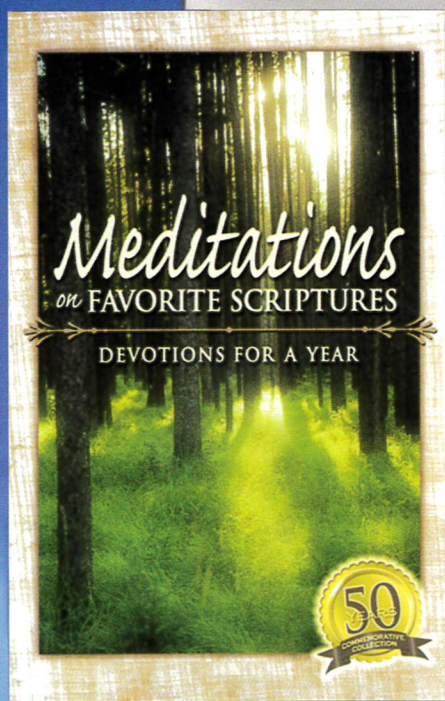
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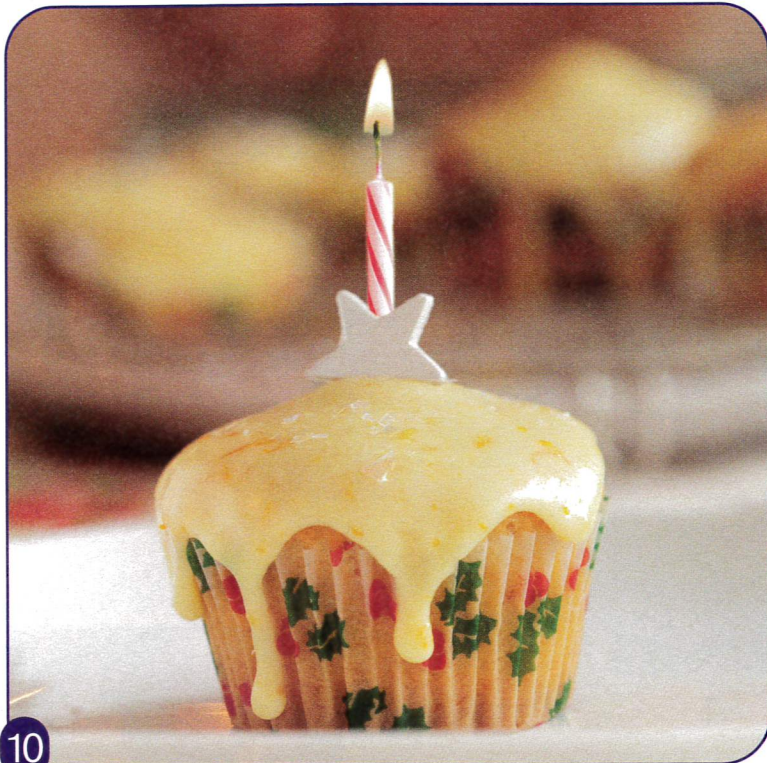
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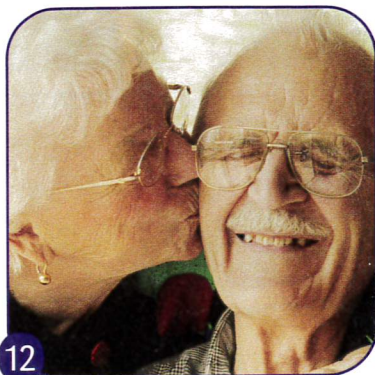
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“I want to keep Christmas as a day to remember his birth.”



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Forward in Christ

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

1 Kings 8:57

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DECEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

A new life is something to behold. Ten little fingers and ten little toes. A tiny bundle of joy for parents to love and take care of.

Can you imagine Jesus as that small bundle? What a miracle—a miracle that we get to celebrate again this Christmas. Executive editor John Braun reminds us that celebrating this birthday—this life—is the true essence of Christmas (p. 10).

Christians also can rejoice in the new life that believers receive through Christ. Our Confessions of Faith series shares examples of this every month. This issue you'll meet Ron Whittaker, who helps ex-offenders adjust to new life outside the jail system as well as learn about the new life they have through their Savior. Ron can relate because in the past he struggled with both the law and his understanding of the Word. Read his story on p. 14. Then turn to p. 30 to hear firsthand from a man who turned away from his Savior, ended up in prison, and there rediscovered the forgiveness—and the life—that he has through Jesus.

New life is something to behold. Let's rejoice this month in the birth of the One who gives that life.

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GOD AND EVIL

For me personally, the case that Prof. Lenz makes for God in his recent article would not hold up in court. ["God & Evil," Sept.]. If the person who is in full control, who also has full knowledge of the harmful evil that is being done, nevertheless fails to stop it, he certainly shares in the guilt. When I consider the horrible things that people are doing to one another all over the planet, as well as the catastrophic "natural" disasters that are taking place, my human reason can only draw some blasphemous conclusions regarding the Person who is in charge. It is only at his Son's cross that I can find the never-failing certainty that the real God actually is a God of love. For the rest, I have to go along with Isaiah who wrote, "His understanding no one can fathom" (Isaiah 40:28).

*Harold John
Fife Lake, Michigan*

HEALTH CARE

In light of our current national debate on health insurance reform, it was most interesting to hear of the WELS convention resolution regarding how the one-month insurance holiday for WELS VEBA subscribers could result in a \$3 million shot in the arm to the synod budget if congregations sent their premium monies to the synod as part of their offerings [Oct.].

This means that if our country had a national health care system paid for by a sales tax, for example, as they do in Ontario with their 7% sales tax, the synod budget would be ahead \$36 million. We could send in our premium monies each month to synod. No more cutbacks, no more worker recalls, no more endless wrangling over the budget. I pray that our politicians would go this route. I lived in Ontario from 1987 to 2006, and it was great. Everybody paid for their health care but in a much less painful way. And I knew not one single Ontarian that wanted any kind of reform to the system.

*Thomas Haar
Stratford, Wisconsin*

ADOPTION

The adoption story ["Heartache and joy," Oct.] left me with mixed and powerful emotions: frustration over

laws that allow irresponsible birth parents to crush the hope of adoptive parents at the last minute; sympathy for the birth mother who suffered the pain of separation from the fruit of her womb while the labor pains are still lingering. Deep hurt and disappointment that would be unnecessary if we followed the command of a loving God, "You shall not commit adultery."

But lust and the resulting pregnancy will be with us until judgment day. So I also rejoice over the adoption, not only for the happy couple who become parents but also for the child who through Baptism becomes a child of God.

*Rolfe Westendorf
Dalton, Wisconsin*

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Rest in the Savior

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. . . . In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.” Isaiah 11:1,10

Peter A. Panitzke

Christmas is a time of joy and light for many. But for others, it is a time to remember what has been lost over the past year. It might be a lost job. A lifetime of investments may have fallen apart. This year you may have lost your ability to live independently. It could be the year that you lost your parents, your spouse, or your child. For those who carry the burden of depression or addiction, the weight gets especially heavy at this time of year. Joy and hope are lost.

The stump of Jesse

Isaiah’s Christmas prophecies were given to God’s people living in this kind of darkness. The prophet wrote of “the stump of Jesse.” Jesse was the father of King David. Three hundred years before Isaiah’s day, King David had ruled a powerful kingdom that influenced the territory from the Euphrates River in northern Iraq to the borders of Egypt. His sons reigned after him in Jerusalem.

But that mighty line of David was humbled. The “kingdom” that David’s descendants ruled was reduced at times to little more than the immediate vicinity around Jerusalem. In Isaiah’s day, King Ahaz hoped the Assyrians would save his people. Instead, the Assyrians became the rod that God used to punish Judah for its sins. The prophet uses graphic language to describe the advance of Assyria. Use a Bible atlas to track the advance recorded in Isaiah 10:28-32. Closer and closer they came. The destruction of Jerusalem and David’s line seemed certain.

A Branch will bear fruit

But at the darkest hour, the Lord spoke a Christmas promise. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

The Lord would not allow the Assyrians to destroy the line of David. Yes, Judah would be cut down. It would be humbled. But a shoot would come forth. God’s gracious plan would not be thwarted by the sinfulness of David’s descendants or the rapacious power of the Assyrians.

At Christmas we celebrate that David’s greater Son was born from his humbled line. A shoot sprang from the stump of a once glorious and powerful tree. The tender shoot would become more important than David or any of his other descendants. David’s great descendant has become the Branch that has borne fruit.

He stands as a banner for the people—not just David, Judah, and Israel but also for the nations. For you. For me. A banner was lifted up in war as a place to which the troops would rally. In our times of darkness, look to the Banner and rally to him. Rally to him when you feel all alone and overwhelmed with the cares of the day. Rally to him when the burdens of guilt crush you to the ground. He won the battle over sin by his own death on the cross. Rally to him when the pain of death pierces your heart. He has overcome



death not only for himself but also for us.

If you are struggling this Christmas season, this message is especially for you. All is not hopeless. Our God has allowed his people to be humbled, but they will not be defeated. Find rest and hope in your victorious Savior.

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

Everything else is an asterisk

Joel V. Petermann

Forty years ago a dramatic event took place on the time line of human history. Those who were alive and glued to their televisions at the time will forever remember those storied words: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” With those words Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins became instant household names in America and throughout the world. Man had walked on the moon.

Even before the *Eagle* landed, history was already in the making. As soon as *Apollo 11* lifted off from Kennedy Space Center, there was a sense that something huge was happening, something that would change the world forever. Walter Cronkite of CBS watched the impressive launch of the Saturn V rocket with the tiny capsule perched like an arrowhead at the tip and said, “Everything else that has happened in our time is going to be an asterisk” (excerpted by *Reader’s Digest* from Craig Nelson’s *Rocket Men*, July 2009, p. 153).

There are events in history that change the world—events like World War II or the Reformation. In the Old Testament there is no doubt that the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt was such an event. That event defined Israel.

Then centuries later another event became even greater—the return from exile in Babylon. Jeremiah foretold it. “‘However, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when men will no longer say, “As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,” but they will say, “As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.” For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers’ ” (Jeremiah 16:14,15).

But only one event causes everything else to become an asterisk in the annals of history. Luke

recorded it: “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:6,7). The apostle Paul further described the impact of this event: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4,5).

Another generation or so probably won’t remember much about World War II and the names of the three astronauts of *Apollo 11*. No one counts our time as BA (Before Apollo) or AWWII (After World War II). But our time is counted as B.C. (“Before Christ”) and A.D. (*Anno Domini* “In the year of our Lord”). Christ’s advent established time*. The worldwide calendar chronicles his birth. His name has become associated with a holiday celebrated globally—Christmas. Jesus’ birth—along with

Jesus’ birth—along with his life, death and resurrection—was not just another historical event.

his life, death and resurrection—was not just another historical event. These events can never be brushed aside or deleted from the pages of history because they forever define the fate of every person who has lived, lives, and will live. Those who believe in him will be saved. Those who do not will be condemned. Events that impact not just the

present but also eternity can never be an asterisk. They are God’s exclamation point. It is, after all, His-story!

Contributing editor Joel Petermann is pastor at St. Paul, Amherst, New Hampshire.

**Even different designations (BCE—Before the Common Era and CE—Common Era) still mark time with the coming of Christ.*



Forrest L. Bivens

You ask an excellent question, one that thoughtful and observant Bible readers have asked for generations. So many Bible passages repeatedly emphasize that our salvation is a gift received through divine grace. But passages like the ones you mention appear to contradict that truth.

“The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27).

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism” (Colossians 3:23-25).

We owe ourselves and others an adequate answer.

A paradox resolved by law and gospel?

One possible solution to the apparent contradiction is to note these statements are divine law that lead us to understand that we are sinners. They are designed to lead us to an accurate unpleasant conclusion: we deserve nothing but divine anger and punishment as wages or “reward” for sin. That truth paves the way for the unconditional gospel to bring us comfort and joy. We receive the Last Day verdict of “Not guilty!” through Christ’s obedience. And this we obtain only through faith by grace.

A paradox resolved through language study?

Another answer considers challenges of our English translations. The Greek words have wider meanings than the word *reward* does in English, so it is hard for translators to give a fully accurate translation without using a phrase or several words.

Q. The Bible clearly speaks of believers being “rewarded” on the Last Day for things they have done. How do we reconcile this with the message of “by grace through faith alone”?

One of the meanings of the words used here is certainly that of a reward or recompense for something earned or deserved. If we understand the words that way, the apparent contradiction with other Bible passages results.

But the same words in Greek could also mean to give something that was promised on oath or something you *owe* people because you previously gave your word to give it. The

giver is obligated because he gave a promise and took an oath on it, whether or not the recipients deserve it. Understanding the verses in this way is in keeping with the rest of Scripture and therefore quite acceptable.

Incidentally, previous generations of Bible scholars and theologians coined the phrase “rewards of grace” or “gracious rewards” in an attempt to clarify the Bible truths involved here. They used the term *reward* but wanted to confess that such a reward is not something we earn or merit. In faithfulness to his own promises, God gives us what he owes us because he promised.

Finally, a different word is used in Colossians 3:25 to tell us the wicked will be repaid for their wrongs. That word in Greek definitely points us to a recompense or reward that may be seen as earned or deserved. Consistent with all Bible teaching, we are here reminded that believers receive undeserved gifts while unbelievers receive deserved wages. “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

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

It's his birthday

We may be frustrated with all the secular emphasis on Christmas—even as a holiday without Jesus. But we cling to the essence of Christmas—the birthday of Jesus.

John A. Braun

I groan quietly but audibly. It's mid September, and the Christmas merchandise is on the shelves already. It seems that Christmas makes a sales appearance earlier and earlier in stores. I haven't seen any ads on TV yet, but they can't be far behind. A big advance toy sale will come quickly.

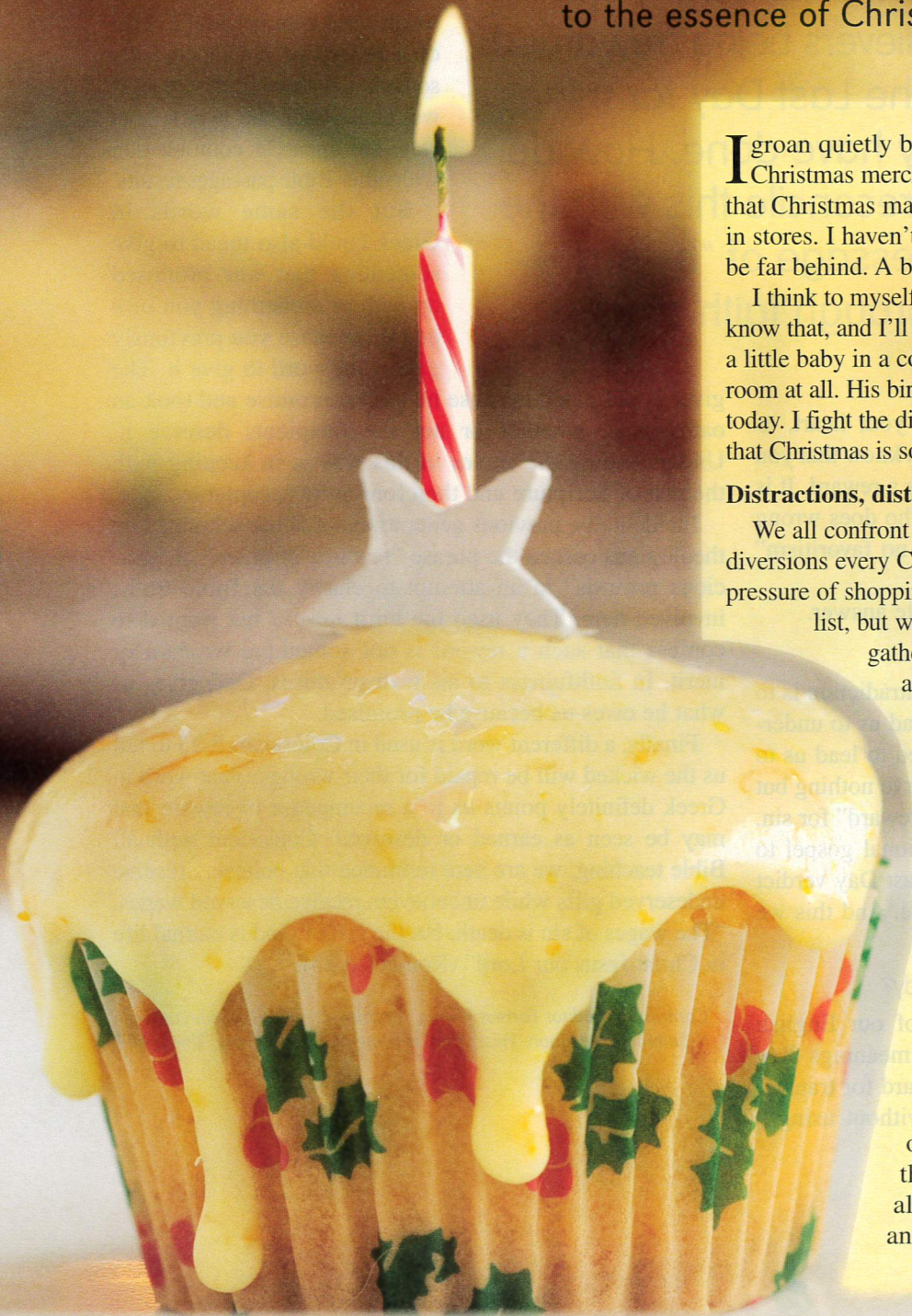
I think to myself, "Christmas is a birthday. His birthday!" I know that, and I'll celebrate Christmas thinking of the birth of a little baby in a cold and crude delivery room that wasn't a room at all. His birth is important to me and to thousands even today. I fight the din of advertising that beats away at the idea that Christmas is something different than a birthday.

Distractions, distortions, diversions, and denial

We all confront so many distractions, distortions, and diversions every Christmas season. Not only do we feel the pressure of shopping for gifts for everyone on our Christmas list, but we also must put up the tree, plan family gatherings, wrap the presents, do the cooking, and make travel plans to visit distant family and friends.

I enjoy those things. I admit it. The excitement of children and grandchildren at this time of year brings a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. I think that's true for almost everyone. I get a genuine warm glow from being with family and friends over a tasty Christmas dinner. The list of special holiday events does go on, not just for me but for others.

But Christmas is still a birthday, and at the center of it all is Jesus. I'll see reminders to keep Christ in Christmas on front lawns again this year. Of course, they may seem to be in the minority alongside the Santa Claus decorations and Rudolph reindeer lights. How many



distractions, distortions, and diversions are there? The list is longer than I care to think about. So many seem content to mark the season with nothing more than gifts, decorations, and family gatherings.

I feel the tension to let these things spoil Christmas—to rob me of Mary, Joseph, and the baby in the manger. I begin to understand what it's like to be in the world—enjoying the secular Christmas festivities—but not of the world because I know Christmas is more. It's his birthday.

Being in the world but not of the world reminds me of the list of diversions, distortions, and distractions. But, I think, denial should be added to the list. Denial comes in many different forms. Some simply ignore the birth of Jesus or at least the part of Christmas that marks his birth. They have little difficulty having a pleasant time with gifts, gatherings, and good food. But aside from a holiday, nothing else registers. They want to celebrate happy holidays rather than Christmas.

Still others actually deny Luke's precious record. At the beginning of his gospel, Luke says that he "investigated everything from the beginning" (1:3). He talked with the eyewitnesses and was a kind of in-depth reporter for the first-century world. Without TV to report the events or radio to broadcast them, he wrote "an orderly account." Some simply deny Luke's record as a fabrication and an embellishment of writers long after Christ finished his ministry. I will not let these denials spoil my Christmas. Luke wrote so that thousands like us "may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (1:4).

For some, denial goes even deeper. They deny the birth of Jesus altogether, or they are offended at the inclusion of Christ's name in the celebration. They contend that it is just a legend somewhat like that of Superman coming from the planet Krypton to fight for truth and justice with his super powers.

Our Christmas is not spoiled

Yes, I am more than a little disturbed by the denials, distractions, distortions, and diversions; but for me and for thousands, Christmas is essentially the celebration of his birth. I want to keep Christmas as a day to remember his birth. That's important. For so many in our world, our faith in Jesus is only so much foolishness, but the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes to see it as the wisdom of God.

I want to keep Christmas as a day to remember his birth.

We know why this birth is so important. This baby is God come to earth. The Bible calls him Immanuel—God with us (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). We sing because he is God and has come to be with us. We sing because God loves us so much that he came to rescue us from our own sins and from the world of death, depravity, and devastation. Without Jesus the world cannot escape its own destruction. It will be separated from God—damned. This baby Jesus brought forgiveness, life, salvation, and real hope. That brings joy to our hearts and songs to our lips: "Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come!" And frankly, nothing can spoil those blessings because they come from God himself.

Expectations

One thing the Christmas decorations do underscore for me—expectation. Each retailer must anticipate making sales at Christmastime. They prepare because they expect Christmas to come. Almost everyone expects Christmas. I look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus again. I also look forward to all that Christmas has meant for me and my little family. For a short time before each Christmas, I live in expectation of those things and expect another chance to celebrate his birthday.

Expectation lived in the hearts of Mary and Joseph too. Mary grew larger day by day as Jesus, true God and true man, developed within her. Joseph had his expectations altered by an angel of the Lord. He no longer expected Mary to give birth to an illegitimate child. Instead, he came to expect the birth of Jesus—the promised Immanuel. Along the road to Bethlehem, they expected a precious son. Zechariah and Elizabeth expected things too—their own son.

But along with thousands in Israel they were waiting for a more important birth—the Messiah's. Their expectations were satisfied.

I'm not waiting for the Messiah to come again as a little baby. This Christmas I will celebrate that he has come and that he has completed the tasks given him by his heavenly Father. He has rescued us, made us his, and claimed us as his own dear children.

But I do expect him to return. Each Christmas celebration marks another year closer to his return. I wait for him to come not as a baby but as the glorious Lord of lords and King of kings. I expect it with joyful anticipation. He will put an end to the denials, death, destruction, and distractions. He will fulfill his promises of great glory, grace, and goodness for all believers.

You may celebrate Christmas like everyone else, expecting gifts and family gatherings. I will too. But don't let those things rob you of the real Christmas, the celebration of his birth.

Then expect him to return. Look up. "Lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.

THE SECRET

of living happily married



The Savior's great love for us unworthy creatures is the perfect blueprint or guideline for every love story.

Lance A. Hoff

What is the greatest love story you have ever heard? I remember a story that comes from Africa. In a certain village, one young lady was considered unmarriageable. No one seemed willing to pay the average dowry of one cow to marry this woman. But unexpectedly a man came to this woman's father and insisted on giving ten cows to purchase the right to marry her. Wow! No bride beamed more brightly than she did on her wedding day. She instantly went from being a nobody to being the most distinguished woman in the village. She was a ten-cow bride!

This story reminds me of the greatest love story ever told. It's the story of our Bridegroom, Jesus, and his bride, the church. That's us. We were blind, rebellious, unfaithful, and utterly incapable by ourselves to do anything of value—undesirable. Yet Jesus loved us deeply and unconditionally. No dowry compares to the price he willingly paid for us—his very life! The apostle Paul reminds us, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The Savior's great love for us unworthy creatures is the perfect blueprint or guideline for every love story. It also becomes a model for each of our marriages. Christ's love gives us the secret of living happily married.

Husbands love with sacrificial love

First, Paul provides some principles for husbands: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is

the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. . . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body" (Ephesians 5:23,25,28-30).

Let's immediately deal with this "headship" thing. Some have tried to downplay it and say that Paul is merely saying man was created first and was the source of the woman. Others have tried to make Paul mean that the husband is the boss, the sole authority, the master over his wife.

But for a husband, to be the head means loving in such a way as to give himself up for his wife. Remember Jesus' words, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" (Matthew 20:25-27). Jesus understands headship as taking the lead in loving and giving up oneself for another.

In addition, a husband is one with his wife. Her body is his body; her needs, his needs; her spirit, his spirit; her concerns, his concerns. That is the God-given role for husbands. Every wife needs to know that her husband is willing to give all for her, even his life—just as Jesus did for his bride, the church. To fail to take

that “headship” role will leave a wife empty. She needs to know that she is the ten-cow bride of her husband.

Wives respect with submissive love

Paul does not exclude wives from his instructions: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

We will not understand these words correctly unless we are in love with the Lord Jesus. Is Jesus our master and lord? Of course. Do we want to submit to him? Of course. We follow him, serve him, submit our will to his.

But maybe now you’re thinking, “I know where you are going with this, but believe me my husband is not Jesus Christ.” That may be true. In fact, I know it is. But a wife’s God-given role is to treat her husband as if he were! If a wife constantly nags and belittles her husband because he’s not everything she wants, she hurts her spouse. Every husband needs to know that his wife believes in him. He needs her respect, and he needs to believe that his wife looks up to him as her God-given man.

Paul sums up these two roles of husband and wife in this way, “Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Husbands love with Jesus’ sacrificial love. Wives respect like they respect Jesus. Each has a unique role. Yet all our relationships flow from the same attitude as Paul reminds us: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).



Reverence for Christ

When a husband takes the lead and gives of himself entirely for his wife, it is not so difficult for the wife to submit to him. And when a wife treats her husband as if he were Jesus himself—looking up to him, respecting him, believing in him—that is a most powerful incentive for a husband to be the very best he can be.

But it’s often not so easy. No husband is Jesus Christ, and no wife is a respectful saint. Giving completely for another is contrary to the sinful nature we still possess.

We often find excuses to do what we want and not what God wants. We are imperfect people trying to live in God’s perfect model. All too often the smooth running machine God wants squeaks, rumbles, and even grinds to a halt.

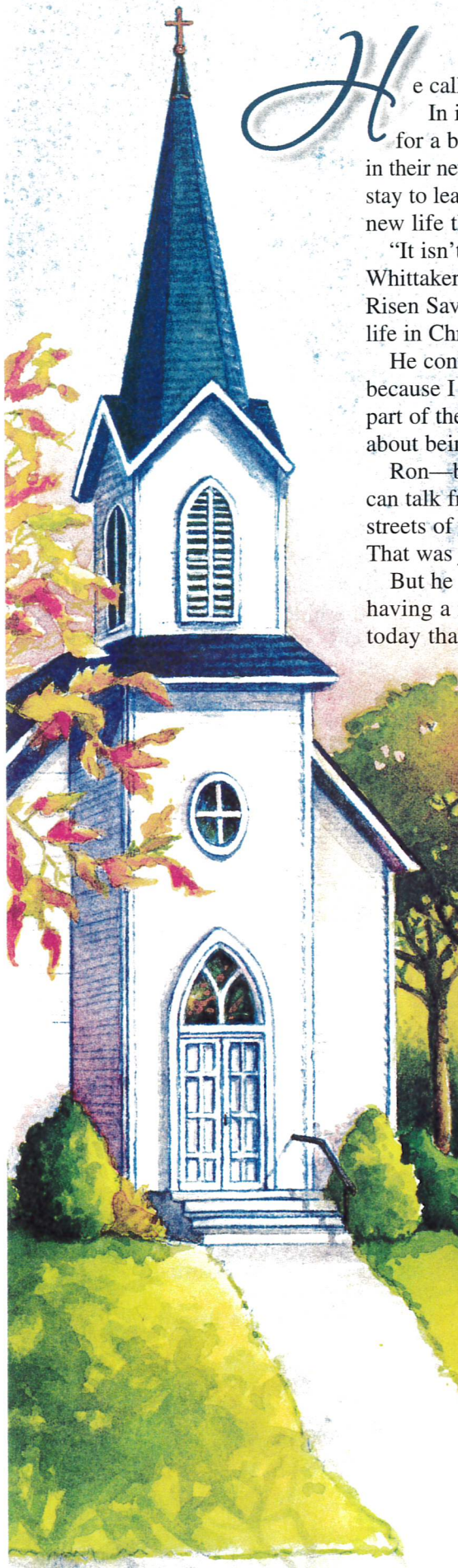
How can it run smoothly? The apostle suggests the only answer, “Out of reverence for Christ.” We know what Jesus has done for us. He has made each one of us far more than a ten-cow bride. His love has forgiven us and destined us for heaven. His forgiveness empowers us to forgive others, especially our spouses. His love empowers us to love. In his love we find the strength to love, respect, and sacrifice for others—

especially our spouses. Jesus has given us everything. His love moves us to freely give everything for our spouses.

In short, Jesus is the secret of living happily married.

Lance Hoff is pastor at St. Peter, Helenville, Wisconsin.

This is the last article in a six-part series on marriage. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and search by the author’s first and last name.



He calls the program New Life Ministries. In it, ex-offenders come to the church for a backpack of materials to help them in their new life out of the jail system. But they stay to learn more about their Savior and the new life they have through him.

"It isn't about the old," says Ron Whittaker, coordinator of the program at Risen Savior, Milwaukee. "You have a new life in Christ. You have a new foundation."

He continues, "I don't talk about prison because I want them to forget that. That's part of their past. Throw that away. This is about being a new man of God."

Ron—born and raised in Detroit, Mich.—can talk from experience. "I come from the streets of hard knocks. I got into trouble too. That was just a way of life."

But he also knows about redemption and having a new life through Jesus. "I know today that nothing's possible—I couldn't accomplish anything—without the love of my Savior," he says.

Although Ron was raised in a church-going family, he struggled in his understanding of the Word as he grew up. "I was raised in an African Methodist Episcopal Church, where at the service we went down to the basement and smoked cigarettes in the church," he says. "I thought that I knew the Bible backwards and forwards. Yeah, I read it, but did I understand it? No."

When he was 21, he began searching for a new church because he wanted to grow in his faith. He tried Catholic and Baptist. He even went to see a televangelist faith healer. He says, "I found out that wasn't real. I thought, *There are so many people out here playing with religion, playing with God. God sees all of that.*"

When Ron attended a church called the Apostolic Way, he says he thought he had found the truth—even when the pastor told him he needed to be baptized again. This time Ron had to be completely submerged and come out of the water speaking in tongues.

Ron's best friend went first. When he came out speaking in tongues, Ron was flabbergasted. "I looked and said 'Holy moly. I gotta get me some of that right away. I'm ready, Lord,'" says

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 K. Wietzke

Ron. "So I got in the water and came up, and I looked around, and I ain't speaking in tongues. I ain't nothing. You know what the preacher told me? I hadn't surrendered enough. It was something I hadn't done. I didn't do it right."

The pastor had Ron come back the next day to pray. For three straight days, Ron prayed at the church for hours, but nothing happened. Finally he had enough. "I thought, *I am going to be part of this church. I want to. They seem to be all right.* I spoke and said, 'Afjadslkfjasl.' They looked at me and said, 'You're not speaking in tongues.' Right there I knew that wasn't the place for me."

Now Ron knows why. "I knew that I loved Jesus with all my heart. I did everything that I could, but it wasn't anything that I could do. All I had to do was go back to John 3:16, to believe that God sent his one and only Son to the cross for forgiveness of my sins. They didn't tell me that. No, that was too easy."

At the time, though, this experience caused Ron to struggle. In the mid 1970s, he started getting into trouble, including committing armed robberies to pay his way through college. Twenty-three robberies later, the police caught him.

Here Ron learned about grace in a tangible way. The judge on Ron's case sentenced him for three years of probation and only about a month in jail. "That judge looked at me and saw that I'm not your typical armed robber," says Ron. "He told me in my sentencing, 'Never in the history of Michigan law has anyone received such a light sentence.' I took that as an opportunity to turn my life around and to give back."

Ron began getting back into the Word and became involved in a non-denominational church. He started working for the city of Detroit, first as a lifeguard, then as an assistant golf course attendant, and finally as the golf course supervisor. He stayed



Ron Whittaker

out of trouble and was growing in his faith.

Eventually Ron moved to Milwaukee. He started church shopping. At a community meeting, he met Ken Fisher, pastor at Risen Savior, Milwaukee. "There was just something about him," says Ron. "He invited me out, gave me his business card, and invited me to a service. Little did he know that he would never get rid of me."

Now Ron has been a member at Risen Savior for nine years. "I love the doctrine of the Lutheran organization. They don't fly away from the Word," says Ron. "A lot of pastors and ministers sit up in the pulpit and say this and say that, but that's not necessarily Scripture. So I was looking for a good scriptural based church."

Although Ron now has a new life—both physically and spiritually—that doesn't mean that all his troubles went away. He has struggled through sickness in his family, troubled marriages, and job cutbacks. "In my darkest moments, I had thought, *Why me, Lord?*" says Ron. "But he also tells me that he will not put more on me than I can bear. And this was used to strengthen me, to strengthen my faith."

One of the most trying times was in 2002 when doctors told Ron that they couldn't continue doing blood transfu-



Ron (seated) and his five children: (l to r) Lindell, Dominique, Latonya, Tamara, and Amanda.

sions on his nine-year-old daughter, Amanda, who has a rare blood disorder. "I knew that I couldn't let my daughter die," says Ron. "So I wore my knees out talking to my Savior."

God answered his prayers. Doctors conducted an experimental treatment on Amanda. "My daughter lost all of her hair, her fingernails; she was miserable," says Ron. But the treatment worked. Amanda hasn't needed a blood transfusion for seven years.

Ron knows that he couldn't have gotten through this or any of his other problems without his Savior. "Without my faith, I probably would have been in a bottle somewhere," he says. He also is thankful for the people that God put into his life along the way—including the judge in Detroit and the members at Risen Savior.

Now Ron wants to give back, to help others have a new life. "I definitely want to do God's work," says Ron. "I continue to tell people, 'You know if God did this for me, he can do it for you.' And you keep on opening up the Word, studying with them, and the Holy Spirit kicks in and takes it from there."

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ.

Learn more about New Life Ministries and the backpack program on p. 23.

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@wels.net.

What Do Kids Think About When You Say the Word Christmas?

Alicia A. Neumann

Last Christmas, my husband and I were home in southeastern Minnesota to kick off the holiday season. I stayed busy enjoying the snow, cutting a tree, decorating the house, doing some baking, and spending quality time with my family.

Before heading back to Wisconsin, I stopped by the small Lutheran elementary school I'd attended as a child. My mission: to find out what the kids were looking forward to this Christmas season.

Armed with my pen, paper, and recorder, I got out of my car and headed inside. Along the way I enjoyed the familiar sights: the old playground, the softball field, and the big tree by the sidewalk that always got covered with ladybugs in the spring.

Once I stepped through the front doors, I discovered a flurry of activity. The little school only has four classrooms so the kids shuffled back and forth throughout the day. My sights were set on the first and second graders who were being herded into their classroom by Mrs. Jonas, who had also been my teacher.

I'd forgotten how elementary classrooms always seem to be in a state of controlled chaos. The kids were like busy little bees, working and talking and fumbling through their papers. Mrs. Jonas was trying to round up papers from the students. Some were searching for their assignments in a dramatic frenzy; some were scrambling to finish up the last few questions; others were filing to the front of the room to deposit their work on the growing pile.

Finally the students got situated in their seats, and Mrs. Jonas introduced me to the class. Since my hometown is so small, I knew some of the children and recognized the last names of others. They all looked at me expectantly. I told them I was writing a story and wanted to know why they were so excited about Christmas.

No sooner had those words left my mouth than the kids began squiggling in their seats; I could feel the excitement in the room and saw the joy spread across their faces.

I gave them each a piece of paper and said, "You can draw a picture, write a story, or do whatever you want—I just want to know what you are looking forward to this Christmas. And no peeking at your neighbor's paper!"

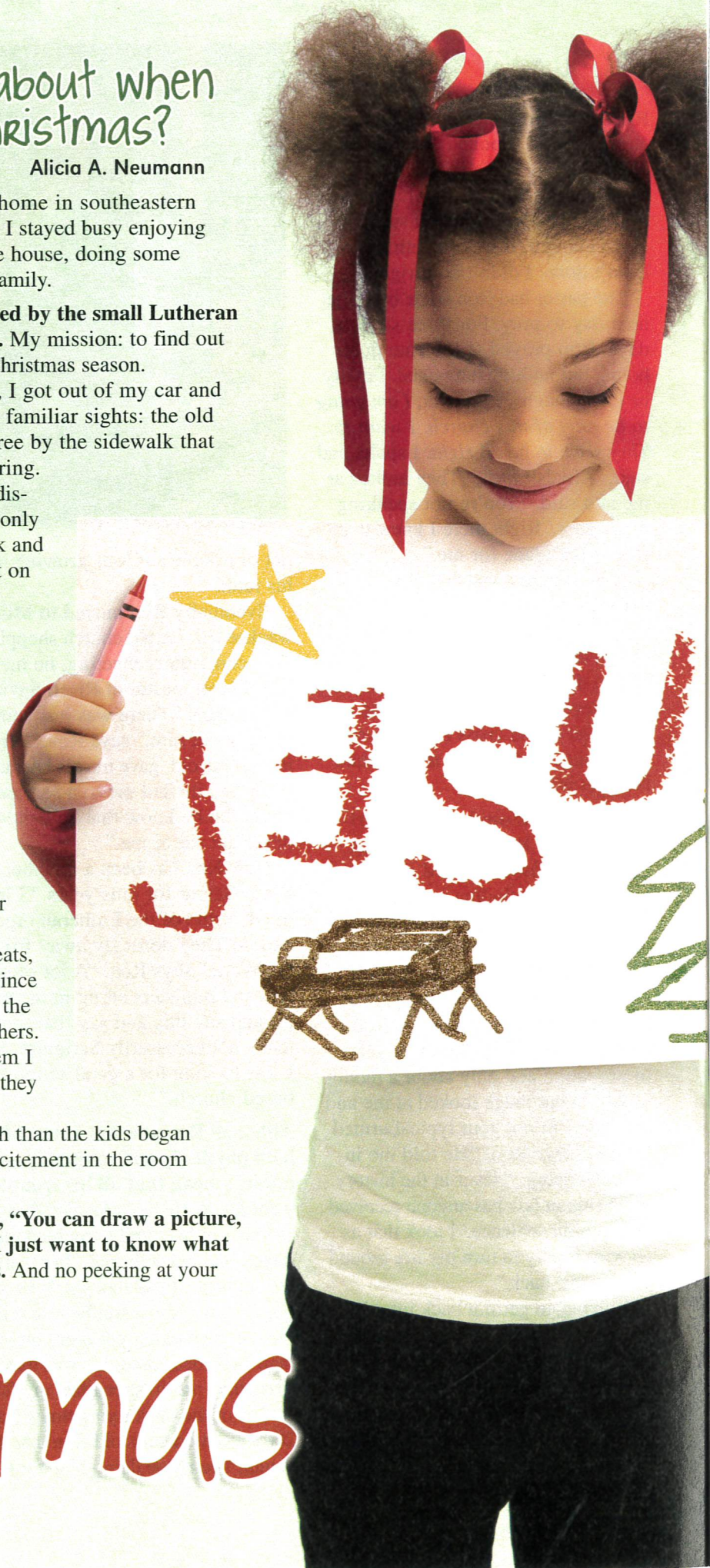
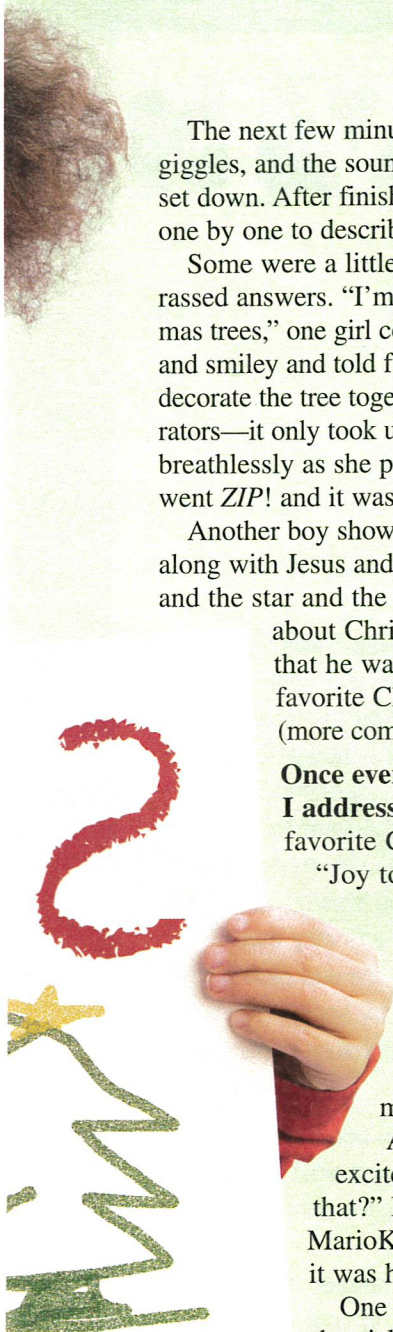


PHOTO: DESIGN PICS

Christmas



The next few minutes were filled with whispers, giggles, and the sound of crayons being picked up and set down. After finishing, the boys and girls came up one by one to describe to me what they had created.

Some were a little bit shy and gave short, embarrassed answers. "I'm not very good at drawing Christmas trees," one girl confided. Others were really excited and smiley and told funny stories. "Mom and me get to decorate the tree together because we are speedy decorators—it only took us about 25 minutes!" one girl said breathlessly as she pointed to her drawing. "We just went ZIP! and it was done!"

Another boy showed me his picture of the manger—along with Jesus and Mary and Joseph and the moon and the star and the angels. "It's my favorite thing about Christmas," he said. He also shared that he was looking forward to singing his favorite Christmas song, "Aleez Nabidah" (more commonly known as "Feliz Navidad").

Once everyone returned to their seats, I addressed the crowd: "What's your favorite Christmas song?" Shouts of

"Joy to the World," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and "Silent Night" floated through the air.

"How about your families—do you do anything special with them at Christmas?" I asked.

One boy said, "We play with my cats."

Another boy said he was really excited to see his cousins. "Why is that?" I asked. "Because they have MarioKart!" he exclaimed. Apparently it was his favorite video game.

One girl said her family plays "hide the pickle," and whoever finds the pickle in the Christmas tree gets to open the first present. This statement caused a bit of a ruckus since not all of the kids knew about this unique holiday tradition. "Why would you put a pickle in a tree?" one boy wondered aloud. The first girl continued, "It's very hard to find the pickle because it's the same color as the tree!" Someone else shouted, "No, it's not. The pickle is shinier than the tree!" The boy behind her chimed in with his two cents: "I would

smell the pickle; that's how I would find it!" After much debate, it was finally revealed that the pickle hiding in the tree was an ornament, not a tasty treat.

The crowd finally quieted, so I rattled off my last question before the kids headed out to recess: "If you heard someone say, 'The only thing I'm looking forward to at Christmas is Santa Claus and the reindeer,' and they didn't know anything about Jesus, what would you say to them?"

Almost in unison, several voices said, "We would tell them it is Jesus' birthday!"

"But why is that important?" I questioned further. "What would happen to us if Jesus hadn't been born?"

One boy raised his hand and, with big eyes, said solemnly, "We would go to hell forever."

"Yeah," said another. "I would tell them that we're all sinners and we need Jesus."

A few quiet moments went by as the words hung in the air. Then the recess bell rang, and the room erupted. I still sat there as the kids stamped by. "We're all sinners and we need Jesus." I thought about that for a little bit. These kids really got it.

On the drive home, I reflected on my heartwarming experience that morning. I felt as though I'd been part of something very special. Yeah, some of the kids had drawn pictures of Santa Claus and reindeer. Others were looking forward to presents or couldn't wait for the delicious Christmas cookies. But everyone there knew that the real reason that we put up trees and send out cards and get together with relatives is because we're so happy that Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins. They knew the real reason for the season. It was like the one boy in class who didn't draw a picture or tell a story. On his sheet of paper, he simply wrote "Jesus." That's what he was excited about.

This Christmas season, I pray that I keep that child-like excitement, that anticipation, and that feeling of pure joy—the kind that gives you little goose bumps—as we celebrate Christ's birth. Like that little group of kids in that little classroom in that little country school in Minnesota, I pray that I will always be filled with awe and amazement as I look to the manger and hear that wonderful story once again.

Alicia Neumann is assistant editor of Forward in Christ.

is for children

WHATEVER

How God protects you every day

God in his grace watches over us at all times and guards us against the evil that approaches.

Jake Jarnigo

How many times have you been in a life-threatening situation? You might say, "Well, not many." But really, almost every moment that passes by could cause harm or trouble. Take driving to school, for example. A deer could run out at any moment, and when you try to avoid the danger, your life ends in an instant. Your life is so precious, but God could take it away in a second. Sometimes, we feel like we are untouchable and immortal, but really we are vulnerable and not in control of life at all. But many times throughout the Bible, God tells us not to fear and reminds us to trust in him.

I think everybody takes his own life for granted at some point. People just don't realize how fragile life is. But then again, we can't go around worrying about what might happen to us. People like that will not have a very enjoyable time on earth.

I remember a time that I knew God was watching over me. I was only five years old. I was spending the day with my dad, who owns a candy store in Madison, because I wanted to see how my dad made all the candy and to eat some, of course. My dad was just wrapping up when he heard a loud bang on the door. He went to see who it was. I was in the back and couldn't see who was there. My dad came back to me and told me to hide in the back closet. To this day, I've never seen my dad look at me with such a serious face. I didn't ask any questions and went directly to the closet.

I could hear the banging on the door getting louder. My dad asked, "What do you want?" I could tell he was scared. I put my

head down and started breathing heavily. I was scared too. My dad must have let him in because I could hear a voice clearly yell, "Shut up and get on the floor." I wanted to go out and try to help, but I thought better of it. I heard banging on something. I guessed it was the cash register. The voice yelled, "Why won't this thing open? Come here and open it!" He included many vulgar words, which I'd rather not say. My dad obeyed, and the man left with a snide remark, "Thank you very much."

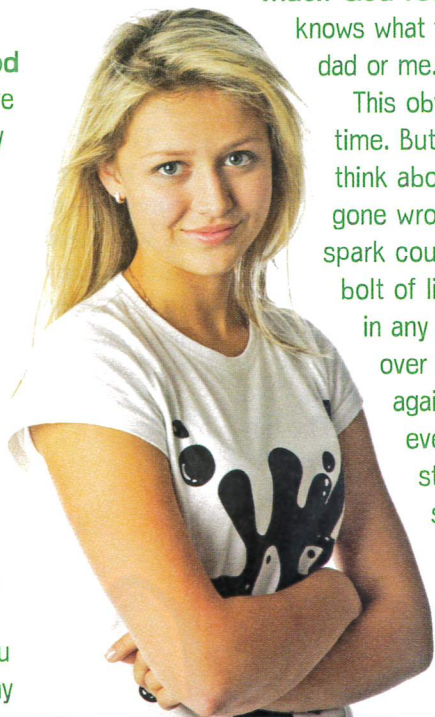
A minute later my dad rushed in by me and picked me up. He was shaking, and it made me cry seeing my dad scared. He sat there holding me for probably 15 minutes before he got up and said, "Let's go."

It's moments like these that you realize how much God really does protect you. Who

knows what that man could have done to my dad or me.

This obviously doesn't happen all the time. But just look back at your day and think about all the things that could have gone wrong and ended your life. A simple spark could burn down your house, or a bolt of lightning could strike you down in any storm. God in his grace watches over us at all times and guards us against the evil that approaches. And even when bad stuff happens, he still cares for us. Every day, we should thank God that we are alive in this wonderful world.

Jake Jarnigo, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills.



Gertrude Esther Nolte
1915–2009

Gertrude Nolte (nee Vogel) was born March 30, 1915, in Jefferson, Wis. She died Sept. 10, 2009, in Olivia, Minn.

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

She is preceded in death by one brother and one sister. She is survived by her husband, Waldemar; 3 sons; 5 daughters; 27 grandchildren; and 18 great-grandchildren.

Norma Rose Engel
1925–2009

Norma Engel (nee Hasz) was born June 3, 1925, in Mt. Prospect, Ill. She died Sept. 17, 2009.

She taught at Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis., and St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.

She is preceded in death by her husband, James; one daughter; and one great-granddaughter. She is survived by one son, two daughters, seven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, two brothers, and one sister.

Robert E. Ehlers
1928–2009

Robert Ehlers was born March 8, 1928, in Grand Island, Neb. He died Oct. 2, 2009.

A 1964 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Christ, Beatrice, Neb.; Hope, Swartz Creek, Mich.; Mt. Sinai, Montrose, Mich.; and St. Marks, Sterling Heights, Mich.

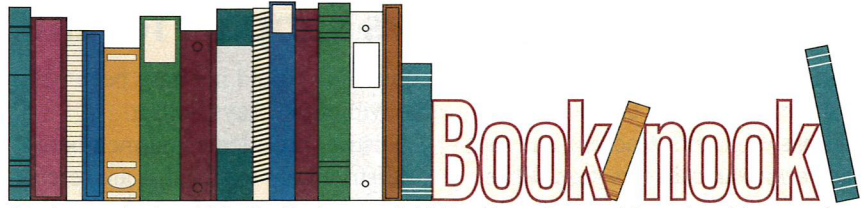
He is survived by his wife, Marilyn; 4 sons; 2 daughters; 26 grandchildren; and 8 great-grandchildren.

William George Zell
1922–2009

William Zell was born Oct. 19, 1922, in Mishicot, Wis. He died Oct. 10, 2009, in Manitowoc, Wis.

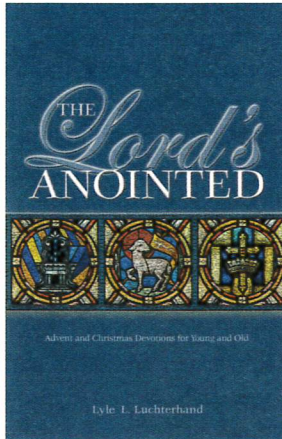
A 1947 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; he served at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis.; Faith, Tacoma, Wash.; Emanuel, Forestville, Wis.; Emanuel, Saint Paul, Minn.; and Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

He is preceded in death by one brother and two sisters. He is survived by his wife, Marian; 2 sons; 2 daughters; 10 grandchildren; 8 great-grandchildren; and 2 sisters.



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.

Prepare for Christmas



\$10.99

In the flurry of activities preparing for Christmas, it's often easy to lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas and why we celebrate it so joyfully. The celebration of Christmas centers on someone far more important than all the preparation surrounding it—our Savior, Jesus Christ, born in such humble circumstances so long ago for such great purpose. In *The Lord's Anointed* by Lyle L. Luchterhand, we are encouraged daily from Advent through immediately following Christmas to appreciate the incredible gift that Jesus was and is eternally for believers everywhere.

These daily devotions take just minutes to read and use language that is easy to understand by youth and adults alike. The devotions highlight

the person and deity of Christ, covering also his holy offices as our sinless Prophet, High Priest, and King.

The author uses meaningful, direct examples from everyday life to convey God's beautiful plan unfolding for our good. We are reminded of our sins that make salvation necessary and why we can be so thankful for receiving this indescribable gift of God's grace.

I would recommend these devotions for adults and for families with older children as the examples have the most relevance for those individuals. For

those who wish to follow the church year calendar, recommended dates for the devotions correspond to a schedule identifying the beginning of Advent in following years. This book is a delightful way to prepare hearts for true worship during Advent and leading up to Epiphany.

*Sondra Retzlaff,
St. Andrew,
Middleton, Wisconsin*

Through my Bible
IN 3 YEARS
01/2010

1. 1 John 1:1-2:2	17. Is. 51:17-52:12
2. 1 Jn. 2:3-27	18. Is. 52:13-53:12
3. 1 Jn. 2:28-3:10	19. Is. 54
4. 1 Jn. 3:11-4:6	20. Is. 55
5. 1 Jn. 4:7-5:3	21. Is. 56, 57
6. 1 Jn. 5:4-21	22. Is. 58
7. John 2 & 3	23. Is. 59
8. Isaiah 40	24. Is. 60
9. Is. 41	25. Is. 61:1-63:6
10. Is. 42:1-43:13	26. Is. 63:7-64:12
11. Is. 43:14-44:23	27. Is. 65
12. Is. 44:24-45:25	28. Is. 66
13. Is. 46, 47	29. Matthew 1
14. Is. 48	30. Matt. 2
15. Is. 49:1-50:3	31. Matt. 3
16. Is. 50:4-51:16	

Career counseling offers support for those without divine calls

Financial cutbacks across the synod—both at the national and the local level—left dozens of pastors, teachers, and staff ministers without calls this year. While many have received new calls, all those who were affected had to deal at one time with the emotions of losing their divine calls.

“There’s shock and consternation of being without an opportunity to serve the Savior in a way that you essentially committed your life to,” says Pastor John Seifert, president of the Michigan District, a district especially hard hit by the economy. “I believe they would say, ‘There’s nothing that I would rather do with my life,’ and all of a sudden that opportunity is gone.”

There’s no simple solution, but synod entities are doing what they can to help.

WELS Committee on Relief provided funding for GreenFields Career Transformation, a professional career counseling service, to offer a workshop to nine called workers and staff members whose positions were eliminated at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw. “The

counseling would not have been possible without it,” says Seifert.

District presidents and members of district help teams also are referring displaced workers to the Career Transition Program, a joint venture of Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service (WLCFS) and Art’s Place at Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC).

Through this program, WLCFS counselors offer emotional support to called workers as they cope with feelings about not being in the public ministry. WLC helps with the job search, including honing the skills of writing resumes, networking, and interviewing.

This is necessary, according to Seifert, because even if a person is eligible for a divine call, we don’t know how the Holy Spirit will direct the call process. “The idea behind it is to allow someone the greatest freedom possible in seeking employment,” he says. “Their primary focus needs to be finding a way to provide for their families even as they earnestly pray for an opportunity to serve again in the public ministry.”

According to Thad Jahns, director of career development at WLC, more than 70 people—including 26 people who attended one of two full-day seminars offered in Saginaw, Mich., and Milwaukee in July—have participated over the past two years. Individuals do not have to pay to participate, with costs being covered by the districts and anonymous gifts to WLC and WLCFS.

“The process isn’t a flip of a light switch,” says Dan Nommensen, Career Transition Program coordinator. “We’re here to continue to coach and mentor people as they’re looking for positions and to continue to support and encourage them on an ongoing basis through the entire transition process.”

Seifert says WELS members should remember these called workers in their prayers. “We want to serve as well as we can those who have served their Savior.”

For more information about the Career Transition Program or to offer help with job placement or counseling, contact Dan Nommensen at 888-685-9522, ext. 209; dnommensen@wlcfs.org.

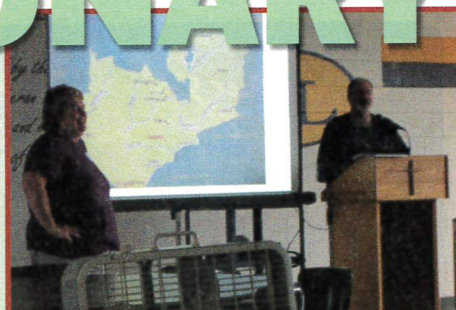
MISSIONARY WORK

WELS members are also showing Christian love for called workers whose positions were eliminated due to recent budget cuts.

Members in the Kenosha, Wis., area held a get-together at Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis., in August to support Missionary Dan and Karen Kroll and their family as well as other world missionary families who were recalled.

Traditionally when the Kroll family came to the Kenosha area from Zambia, Africa, on furlough every two years, they would invite friends and family together for a cook-out. When Kroll’s position was cut, Cindy Willer, a family friend, wanted to continue the tradition to show support for the family. The idea spread throughout the Kenosha area, with about 175 people attending the event.

At the event, the Krolls talked about their lives in Zambia,



Dan and Karen Kroll talk about mission work in Zambia, Africa.

Africa, as well as the mission work still going on there today. Other world missionary families who were impacted by the cuts also were highlighted, and their contact information was distributed so those attending could reach out to them as well.

More than \$6,000 as well as boxes of household items and clothes were given to help the family.

“Hopefully this event was able to provide encouragement to the returning world mission families as they reestablish their lives and ministry back here in the States,” says Willer, a member at Mt. Zion, Kenosha, Wis. “It certainly gave the Kenosha area churches a wonderful opportunity to gather together in fellowship to show Christian love and support.”

Editor’s note: Pastor Dan Kroll recently accepted a call to St. John, Lake City, Minn.

Translation work expands in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, seven million people are packed into an area smaller than the state of Rhode Island. It's in this special administrative region of China that Asia Lutheran Seminary (ALS) is trying to reach those who don't believe in Jesus. Worldwide, well over 90 percent of Chinese are not Christian. "I think of the disciples' words to Jesus when he suggested feeding the five thousand," says John Lawrenz, a professor at ALS. "What is so little among so many?"

This fact doesn't make the believers feel smug or isolated, but, instead, keeps them focused. "A single-minded sharing of Jesus Christ—no more and no less than what the Holy Spirit revealed—is a rare commodity in East Asia. That's why we are here," says Lawrenz, who arrived in 2004.

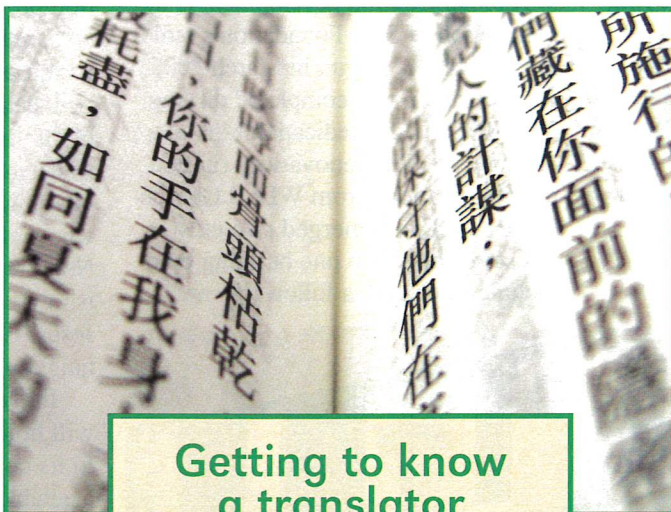
To reach as many as possible, "our strategy is to produce good Lutheran material in good Chinese for all levels of outreach," says Lawrenz.

Translation, however, is not simple. Chinese written language involves thousands of characters. "Each [Chinese character] is a 'hot button' that directs thoughts to a wealth of Chinese stories and philosophical observations," says Lawrenz. Using the wrong one could affect how the gospel is communicated. Also because the people value education, "any translating we do has to be very good Chinese, or it will not be read," says Lawrenz.

The Translation Working Group, an offshoot of ALS, takes this responsibility seriously. The members, who include expatriates and local Chinese Lutherans, plan, direct, approve, and carry out the work.

Working in both East Asia and the United States, the translators produce a wide range of materials on three different levels. The basic need is for simple, culturally sensitive evangelism pieces. Currently, materials used in prison min-

istry in the United States are reviewed, made more accessible to East Asian culture, and translated. A new version of *The Promise* is being produced, and the video *Road to Emmaus* is being translated into Mandarin and Cantonese, including subtitles and voice-overs.



Getting to know a translator

Yeung Kit Ling—who also uses the English name, Yvonne—was raised with a mish-mash of religious beliefs. As a child, she was taught that her ancestors' spirits live in a shadowy existence the Chinese call "hell." You can go to a "better" or "worse" hell depending on your deeds. Yvonne also went to temples that blended ancestor worship with Taoism and Buddhism. She then attended a Roman Catholic elementary and secondary school, where she learned Bible stories but didn't hear the gospel. As a teen, Yvonne was exposed to Jehovah's Witnesses. Right before she started post-secondary school, she attended a study center of the South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission, WELS' sister church, where she improved her English, learned the truth about Jesus, and was baptized.

Now, 20 years later, Yvonne, who is tri-lingual, works full time for the Translation Working Group. She coordinates the ministry's interpreting and translating work. Filled with the truth, Yvonne is working to spread the gospel and fill the spiritual void in her home country—and beyond.

The next level of materials is for believers. "We have an ambitious plan to put out three volumes of The People's Bible annually," says Lawrenz.

The highest level of work is producing materials for seminary-level students. From doctrinal to church history books, the material helps prepare the men and women of ALS for service throughout the church.

For all that has been completed, there is still work ahead. With half of the world's population living within a four-hour flight from Hong Kong, "we have more work and more demand than we can fill," says Lawrenz. Materials are distributed freely in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Canada, and the United States. In other Chinese-

speaking nations, however, literature distribution is not allowed, and other ways of reaching out are needed.

Still, "it is amazing how the network grows—like a spider web," says Lawrenz. Part of that web is growing because of a young man from Myanmar who studied Hebrew at ALS last year. One year later, Paul and Carol Hartman from Multi-Language Publications are visiting Myanmar to see if a publications ministry could assist local Christians. Paul has located his office in Hong Kong, and Carol is assisting in the production of children's materials in East Asian languages.

Just as Jesus used five loaves and two fish to feed the multitudes, the translating team in Hong Kong knows that the Holy Spirit will use their efforts to reach many more than they can imagine.

Translating materials is only part of the work in Hong Kong. To meet ALS students, watch this month's WELS Connection.

Linda Buxa

Holding out Jesus' promises in New York City

WELS Home Missions supported the establishment of Sure Foundation, New York City, in 2000. For almost 10 years, Sure Foundation has struggled to find a way to reach the millions of people that surround it. Yet Sure Foundation's commitment to spreading God's Word is now paying off with visible dividends.

Tim Bourman, pastor at Sure Foundation, explains, "Not only is God having us grow in faith, but he also is blessing us numerically. We now serve 60 souls and 50 communicants. At the beginning of 2008, we were at 23 communicants with 25 souls."

Continued growth is likely. Sure

Foundation began its first youth confirmation class in October with five young adults attending—only two of whom are baptized. Adult basic Christianity courses are also flourishing, resulting in an adult baptism, several infant baptisms, and new communicant members.

Another exciting development is the completion of Sure Foundation's building renovation. Begun in March 2005, the renovation was completed on Aug. 30, 2009, and the dedication took place on Nov. 15. The renovation, funded mainly by a loan from WELS Church Extension Fund, merged two existing storefronts into one building that includes a chapel, a fellowship area,

offices, and Bible study rooms.

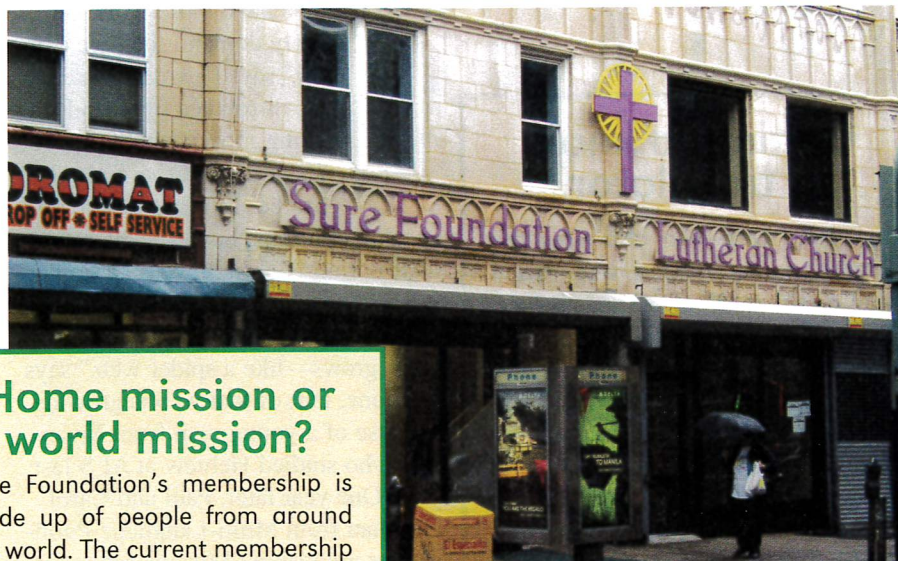
"As I look back at the project, it might seem like it was a bad building project [because it took so long to complete], but God used the building project in some unexpected ways," says Bourman. "God was doing a renovation project of his own, but not just on our physical building. He did a renovation project on the hearts of Sure Foundation. God taught us stewardship of our time and talents. God taught us leadership. God taught us to count our blessings. God taught us to focus on who we are and what we are doing in New York. God taught us that the church isn't a building but hearts trusting in Jesus. God taught us patience. God taught us to love each other."

In December, Sure Foundation will hold a grand opening to signal to its community members that it is available to serve their spiritual needs with the pure gospel.

"It is hard to know how the building will impact our ministry," says Bourman. "I am just sure that it will. We must have some of the heaviest foot traffic past our building in the entire synod. New York is a walking city since most people don't have cars. The trains are the veins of the city. Literally hundreds, probably thousands, walk past our building every day because of its location right off one of the busiest trains in Queens."

Sure Foundation, still partly funded by Home Missions, has come a long way over the past 10 years and has emerged as a growing church thanks to God's grace.

As Bourman notes, "We expect to have an adult baptism this Sunday, which is really just an example of all the ways God has kept his promises among us. Here in New York we have such an opportunity to reach those who are truly lost and unchurched. It seems like at least twice a week I have a chance to sit down with someone who has never heard the gospel and hold out Jesus' promises to them."



Sure Foundation, New York City, recently finished a renovation project on its worship facility.

Home mission or world mission?

Sure Foundation's membership is made up of people from around the world. The current membership includes people from 11 different countries. Two worship services are held each Sunday, one in English and one in Spanish. On a month with five Sundays, the final Sunday includes a combined bilingual service so that English-speakers and Spanish-speakers can worship together.

Tim Bourman, pastor at Sure Foundation, says, "When we worship together, it is a beautiful mosaic of colors and languages. Our church reflects our neighborhood, which is said to be the most diverse neighborhood in the world."



On the first Sunday that Sure Foundation used its renovated building, four families joined the church. Pictured are those who communed for the first time, along with Pastor Daniel Olson (far left) and Pastor Tim Bourman (far right).

Churches offer God's Word and support to ex-offenders

Handing out backpacks containing basic necessities to ex-offenders is a great way to help them physically as they adjust to life outside of jail. But three Milwaukee-area WELS congregations and organizations are using this opportunity to help them spiritually as well.

In the Basic Backpack and New Life Supportive Care Network, ex-offenders from the County Correctional Facility-South, a co-ed Milwaukee County jail that releases 24,000 inmates a year, pick up backpacks filled with items such as food vouchers, bus tickets, and phone cards from distribution sites, most of which are churches. Three of these sites are housed in WELS congregations and organizations—Risen Savior, St. Marcus, and Northside Ministries.

But the ex-offenders don't just receive a backpack; they also can receive a hot meal, support, and the gospel.

At Risen Savior, coordinator Ron Whittaker calls the program New Life Ministries because he wants to emphasize new life in Christ. "I don't talk about prison because I want them to forget that," he says. "That's part of their past. This is about being a new man of God."

Four to five ex-offenders regularly attend his Bible study and support group on Monday night. Several are attending church and taking adult instructions classes.

Whittaker also serves as a mentor to many of these men. "I'm a brother that they didn't have, and sometimes I have to be a father," he says.

At St. Marcus, between 6 and 13 ex-offenders and family members attend God & Grub on Thursday night where Mart and Barb Rosewicz serve home-cooked meals, lead a Bible study, and offer time for fellowship.

The Rosewiczes also work to integrate the ex-offenders back into

society, including helping them get clothing, housing, and jobs.

Mart, a lay evangelist who works part time doing Bible studies and counseling at the County Correctional Facility-South, first met one of the attendees when she handed her program information when she was released from the facility 16 weeks ago. She has been in church and at Bible study every week since and just completed adult confirmation classes. "It thrills me that I can call her my sister in Christ," says Mart.



Above: Mart Rosewicz (left) hands out backpacks and offers support to ex-offenders on Thursday night at God & Grub at St. Marcus, Milwaukee. Right: Prison Ministry recently published "Water of Life," a series of 30 half-hour Bible studies for use by people mentoring recently released inmates.

He continues, "This ministry continues to strengthen my faith each and every day. The past year has given me many opportunities to witness the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of prayer. I have been blessed to be a part of the lives of these brothers and sisters in Christ as they have realized that they too are safely in God's grip."

Funded by grant money, this program was developed to reduce the number of ex-offenders returning to the County Correctional Facility-

South. Since WELS Prison Ministry and Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries (WLIM) are working together to minister to inmates at that facility, WELS is able to participate in the program.

According to Pastor Mark Wenzel, one of the two WLIM chaplains at the County Correctional Facility-South, this program fits into the direction WLIM and WELS Prison Ministry are heading. "We're recognizing that it's not enough just to do work while they're in prison," he says. "There has to be something when they come out."

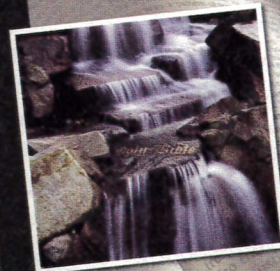
To that end, WELS Prison Ministry has developed Bible studies for ex-offenders, which are currently being used by the WELS churches in this program. WLIM is working on a mentoring training manual to help those who want to work one on one to support ex-offenders. "We want to

get more people involved in mentoring," says Wenzel. "Witnessing takes being a friend, being a human being with other people."

He continues, "Let's not be afraid of reaching into our community

and talking to people who are different than us, people who have gotten themselves in situations that we wouldn't want to be in. Let's find a way to minister to them."

To learn more about the program or about mentoring ex-offenders, contact Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, 414-259-8122, wlim@wlim.net; or WELS Prison Ministry, 414-256-3240, csm@wels.net.



Water of Life

Parish Services becomes the Congregation and Ministry Support Group —

During its October meeting, the Conference of Presidents (COP) acted on a synod convention resolution and the need to reduce costs to balance the budget by adopting a number of changes to Parish Services.

The Board for Parish Services, established in the 1980s, has functioned in a variety of ways throughout synod history. Recently, Parish Services has taken the form of six commissions—Evangelism, Parish Schools, Special Ministries, Worship, Youth Discipleship, and Adult Discipleship—and the area of Parish Assistance. Each of these areas has been coordinated by a full-time administrator, along with support staff. Volunteer members of the individual commissions, along with members of the Board for Parish Services, provided grassroots input and oversight for this work.

The 2009 synod in convention, acting on recommendations by the Ad Hoc Commission, resolved that direct responsibility for the ministries of Parish Services should be moved from its board to the Conference of Presidents. The rationale was that this move “would give the COP a more direct working relationship with Parish Services as it carries out its work of strengthening congregations of WELS” (2009 *Proceedings*, p. 65).

Among the changes made by the COP is renaming Parish Services to the Congregation and Ministry Support Group. Under this new group,

- the Commissions on Evangelism, Special Ministry, and Worship will continue to function as they have;
- the Commissions on Youth Discipleship and Adult Discipleship will share one director, at least for the time being;
- the Commission on Parish Schools will now be called the Commission on Lutheran Schools and will take over coordination of the Forward with Lutheran schools consulting services; and

- Parish Assistance, which provides fee-based consulting to individual congregations, will be discontinued in its current form.

Individual commissions will function as before, but their work will be coordinated by a Congregation and Ministry Support Council that will replace the Board for Parish Services. WELS President Mark Schroeder says, “The Congregation and Ministry Support Council is designed to provide advice, ideas, and input for the various entities of the Congregation and Ministry Support Group. It will not be a policy-setting or decision making board, as the Board for Parish Services was; rather, it will help to ensure that close cooperation and coordination is taking place.” The council will include the group’s directors, several members of the Conference of Presidents, and representatives from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College.

The Conference of Presidents will choose one of the commissions’ full-time directors to act as the group’s coordinator on an annually rotating basis. Pastor Bryan Gerlach, director of the Commission on Worship, was selected to serve in 2010. He will represent the Congregation and Ministry Support Group on the President’s Advisory Council and as a Synodical Council advisory member.

How will these changes impact congregations and their leaders? Schroeder explains, “While the individual units of the Congregation and Ministry Support Group will continue to provide some direct ministry services to individuals, the emphasis will shift to providing training and resources to congregational leaders, both called workers and lay leaders. The work now being done by several of the commissions to offer Schools of Worship or Schools of Evangelism will gain a higher profile and emphasis, since these efforts are in keeping with the plan to make this

Conference of Presidents issues new calls and eliminates others

Because the Conference of Presidents replaced the Board for Parish Services as the Congregation and Ministry Support Group’s calling body and also because of some changed responsibilities, the Conference of Presidents issued new calls to the called workers overseeing the individual commissions.

- Pastor Bryan Gerlach, director of Worship; Pastor Carl Ziemer, director of Special Ministries; and Pastor Mike Hintz, director of Evangelism, accepted their calls.
- Pastor Dave Kehl, former Adult Discipleship administrator, returned the call to serve as director of Adult Discipleship and Youth Discipleship.
- Teacher Greg Schmill, former Forward with Lutheran Schools consultant, is still deliberating the call to serve as interim director of Lutheran Schools. The Conference of Presidents hopes to call a permanent director by June 30, 2010.
- Teacher Jeff Inniger is still deliberating the call to serve as associate director of Lutheran Schools.

The Conference of Presidents eliminated the positions of Pastor Paul Kelm, Parish Assistance consultant, and Pastor Elton Stroh, Parish Assistance administrator, because the Parish Assistance program has been discontinued.

A newly appointed committee will bring recommendations to the Conference of Presidents in April 2010 outlining the scope and function of a replacement for Parish Assistance, which may include a commission with its own director.

group an important deliverer of continuing professional education to our called workers. In addition to providing this kind of training to congregational leaders in a group setting, the various commissions will also be available to provide advice and expertise to individual congregations seeking to improve their efforts in specific areas.”

District news

Arizona-California

Members of **Paradise Valley, Phoenix, Ariz.**, dedicated their new church building on Aug. 30.

Dakota-Montana

A fire damaged **St. John, Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada**, on Oct. 14. The fire began in the church's cry room but also destroyed parts of the sanctuary and the entryway. No one was injured.

Happy anniversary!

AC—A 50th anniversary celebration was held on Nov. 15 for **Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.** The celebration included a special service and dinner.

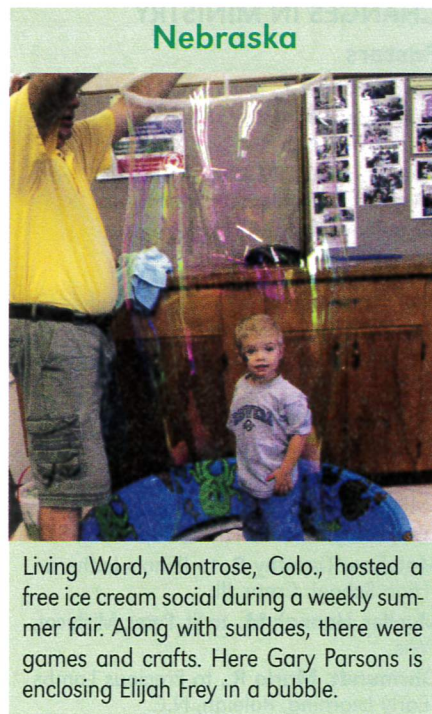
NE—**St. Mark, Aurora, Neb.**, celebrated its 60th anniversary on Nov. 8.

SEW—**Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.**, celebrated 50 years of operating its own school on Oct. 9-11.

On Oct. 18, **Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center, Madison, Wis.**, celebrated three anniversaries. WELS began serving students at the University of Wisconsin—Madison 90 years ago. The chapel opened 45 years ago, and 30 years ago Pastor Tom Trapp began serving as the chapel's campus pastor.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the ministry of **Prof. Alan Siggelkow** on Nov. 9.

The district reporters for this month are: **AC**—Frederick Casmer; **DM**—Wayne Rouse; **NE**—Timothy Kemnitz; **SEW**—Scott Oelhafen.



Living Word, Montrose, Colo., hosted a free ice cream social during a weekly summer fair. Along with sundaes, there were games and crafts. Here Gary Parsons is enclosing Elijah Frey in a bubble.

WELS news briefs

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

In response to 2009 synod convention resolutions, the Board for Ministerial Education authorized **two new study committees** at its October meeting. The financial study committee will be studying how financial assistance is distributed at each school and determining a consistent financial philosophy for the entire system. The Mandarin study committee will look into how to add Mandarin language study to the curriculums at the high schools, college, and seminary.

The governing board of Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., at its September meeting resolved to **create a task force** "to study new programs within the mission of MLC that prepare individuals for congregational service." The college will be exploring how to provide training for individuals who do not want to become full-time called workers but still want to be equipped to serve the church part time. Another priority established at the meeting was the building of a new

early childhood education learning center at the college.

Commission on Special Ministries 414-256-3241; csm@wels.net

About 45 active jail ministry volunteers, chaplains, and mentors of ex-offenders gathered together in October to exchange ideas, enhance their skills, and encourage one another at the **2009 WELS Jail Ministry Conference** in St. Charles, Ill. The conference—sponsored by WELS Special Ministries and Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries—offered keynote presentations, small group sessions, and much time for networking so attendees could discuss the joys, challenges, troubles, and frustrations of jail ministry. Grants from WELS Kingdom Workers, the Siebert Foundation, and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans helped fund the conference.

World Missions 414-256-3234; bwm@wels.net

Representatives from **five WELS entities involved with humanitarian aid met** in October to discuss how

they can work together to accomplish even more for God's kingdom. The meeting included representatives from WELS Board for Home Missions, Central Africa Medical Mission, Committee on Relief, Humanitarian Aid Committee, and WELS Kingdom Workers. Each group explained its current organizational structure and individual goals for the future. Then all the groups identified joint priority issues and attainable objectives for the future that relate to WELS humanitarian aid in general. This included creating a new committee, with representatives from each group, to develop an overarching humanitarian assistance philosophy and to tackle other future joint efforts. A grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans funded the meeting.

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

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Carr, Michael T., to St. Peter, Clovis, Calif.
Johnston, Mark J., to Our Savior's, East Brunswick, N.J.
Seager, Paul, M., to Immanuel, Fort Worth/Grace Alone, Alliance, Tex.
Siggelkow, Alan H., to retirement

Teachers

Baures, Melissa, to The Shepherd's Lamb Child Care, New Hope, Minn.
Benzing, Thomas A., to Good Shepherd, Midland, Tex.
Boehlke, Jeanette C., to retirement
Brohn, Kay E., to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.
Diercks, Belinda A., to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.
Free, Mary A., to St. Paul's, Rapid City, S.D.
Malchow Timothy P., to Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.
Mueller, Hannah M., to St. Peter, Mishicot, Wis.
Ohrmundt, Marla R., to Precious Lambs Early Learning, Raleigh, N.C.
Olson, Bethany L., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Schallert, Terry S., to St. John, Sparta, Wis.
Schultz, Jeffrey D., to St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.
Sharrett, Catherine L., to retirement
Thiesfeldt, Lisa K., to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.
Wehrs, Pamela J., to St. John, Sparta, Wis.
Zastrow, Donovan M., to Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.
Zeitler, Susan K., to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lock box, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. The last business day of each month is the reporting cutoff date for the CMO deposit. For the deposit to be included in reported receipts for the month, CMO must be received in the synod's bank lock box on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lock box up to and including Jan. 8, 2010, will be credited as 2009 CMO, if accompanied by a 2009 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Synodical Council of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) invites all voting members of WELS to nominate a qualified:

- layman to serve as a member on the WELS VEBA Commission
- teacher to serve as a member on the WELS VEBA Commission
- pastor to serve as a member on the WELS VEBA Commission
- layman to serve on the WELS Pension Commission
- teacher to serve on the WELS Pension Commission
- layman, teacher, or pastor to serve on the WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.
- layman to serve on the WELS Investment Funds, Inc.
- layman to serve on the WELS Foundation, Inc.

Nominations must be received by Jan. 8, 2010. Contact the president's office to submit names. 414-256-3202; carla.martin@wels.net. The list of candidates will be published in mid-January.

COMING EVENTS

Living Nativity—Dec. 4, 6-9 P.M.; Dec. 5, 6-9 P.M.; Dec. 6, 4-7 P.M. St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis. 15-minute outdoor presentation that runs every 20 minutes. Free admission, refreshments, and parking. 920-565-3780. Web site, www.stpaulshowardsgrove.org.

Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 5, 7 P.M. St. John, Newtonburg, Wis.
 - Dec. 6, 4 and 7 P.M. Grace, Manitowoc, Wis.
- Alan Ross, rossoa4@comcast.net.

WELS ministerial school Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 6, 3 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.
- Dec. 13, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100.
- Dec. 13, 3 P.M.; Dec. 18, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., 920-261-4352.
- Dec. 18, 7 P.M. Michigan Luther Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., 989-793-1041.

WELS Riders Christmas party—Dec. 12. Tentatively at St. Luke, Oakfield, Wis. Patrick Stankiewicz, pstankiewicz66@yahoo.com.

Pathways to Christ (ladies) retreat—March 12-14, 2010. La Sure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: "Window of Opportunity." 920-233-1069. Web site, www.martinlutheroshkosh.com.

Christian Woman Today retreat—March 19-21, 2010. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Theme: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Maureen, 262-784-0412.

Chapel of the Christ dedication weekend—

- April 10, 2010
 - 11:15-11:45 A.M., children's choir mini-concert
 - 1-3 P.M., organ open console
 - 1-3 P.M., seminars: Worship, Christian Art, Architecture, and Ministerial Education
 - 4:30-6 P.M., art exhibit opening, campus tours
 - 7 P.M., chapel dedication service
 - 8:30 P.M., presentations in chapel: Art and Furnishings, Building of the organ
- April 11, 2010
 - 2:30 P.M., chapel dedication service
 - 4 P.M., presentations in chapel (repeated from Apr. 10)

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 877-652-1995; mlcinfo@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.

In conjunction with the dedication of Chapel of the Christ on April 10-11, 2010, Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., is hosting a juried exhibit of 2-D and 3-D art centering on the theme "Solus Christus—In Christ Alone." The grand prize submission will be purchased by MLC for \$1,000. The runner-up will receive \$500, and the people's choice winner will receive \$100.

Photos of submissions must be sent to MLC by March 1, 2010. Selections will be announced March 15, 2010. The art exhibit will be shown on campus from April 10 through May 15. For more information, guidelines, and submission forms, go to www.mlc-wels.edu/go/art.

St. Paul's second missionary journey tour—May 17-27, 2010. Nearly a dozen biblical sites in Greece will be visited. Hosted by Bethany College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minn. Adolph Harstad, 507-344-7373, aharstad@blc.edu.

NAMES WANTED

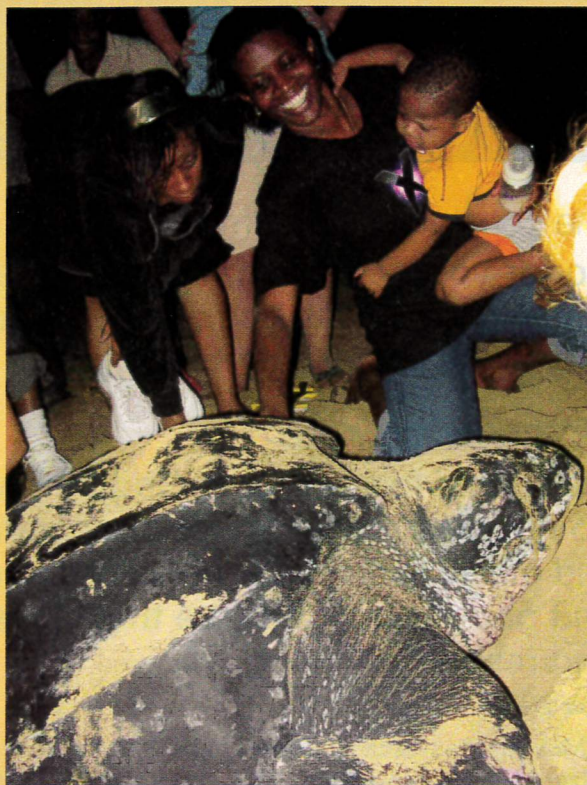
Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), Canada—WELS members moving to Vancouver, BC, and Victoria, BC. James Malmberg, 604-948-9990; jamesmalmberg@telus.net.

Pastors and missionaries traveling to Hawaii—guest quarters available free, 30 minutes from the Kona International Airport on the island of Hawaii. Michiko Sato, 808-325-1035; lucymichiko@netscape.net.

Fort Knox, Ky.—soldiers and civilians moving into the area. Paul Horn, 270-304-1682; revhorn@yahoo.com.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Picture this



Thirty-five members of Trinity, Castries, St. Lucia, drove to the beach this summer to watch turtles that come on shore to lay eggs. This year the group observed three leatherback turtles laying their eggs. According to Tom Spiegelberg, pastor at Trinity, the turtles on average lay about 150 eggs but only 2 from those eggs will grow up to be adult turtles. Says Spiegelberg, "Trinity has been doing this activity ever since 2002. It's great to come together and enjoy God's creation."

Submitted by Tom Spiegelberg

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

The Christmas season offers many opportunities to reach out with the message of Christ and his love. Here are some suggestions of activities congregations can do:

- Hold a Christmas for Kids program. Invite neighborhood children and their families to the church for a day of Bible stories, activities, crafts, and food.
- Invite women from the community to an Advent by Candlelight service so they can remember the real reason for the season.
- Conduct a Living Nativity at your church, complete with actors, animals, and the Christmas message.
- Get a group together to go caroling at the mall, in the neighborhood, or a local nursing home. As an added bonus, deliver baked goods or shovel sidewalks for shut-ins while others in your group sing.
- Go to a nursing home and visit with the residents. Loneliness can weigh on people during the holidays.
- Volunteer to wrap presents at the mall. You never know when you'll get an opportunity to share the reason for your Christmas joy.
- Organize a congregational service project like volunteering at the local food bank or homeless shelter.
- Gather food or toys to give to those in need.
- Send a care package to those serving in the military.
- Advertise special services for Advent and Christmas in the newspaper and with outdoor banners and signs.



REACHING OUT AT CHRISTMAS

Even in an age of e-mail, God's law still guides us. Follow this imaginary conversation between a granddaughter and grandfather that shows us how God's law applies to all generations.

Dear Grandpa,

Things are not going well between Mom, Dad, and me. They want me to stop being friends with Mckenna. They were okay with her before she got involved in Buddhism. Now they think she's a bad influence. That is so unfair! Good friends are not easy to find. There's nobody else in my whole school I'd rather hang out with. Help!

I love you.

Denali

The Fourth

The Fourth Commandment:

Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not dishonor or anger our parents and others in authority, but honor, serve and obey them, and give them love and respect.

Dear Denali:

Mckenna has taken an interest in Buddhism? Wow! When I last talked with you, Mckenna wasn't interested in anything spiritual.

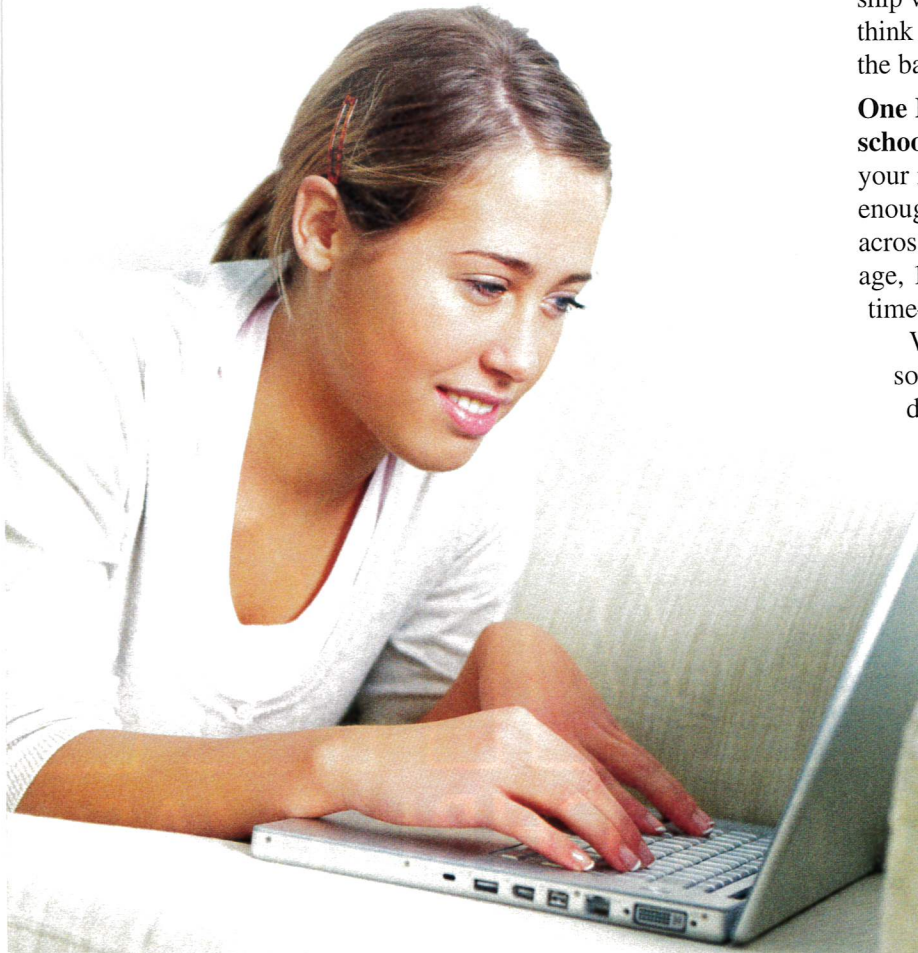
But I'd rather not write about Mckenna right now. You seem more concerned about your mom and dad. I understand. A good friend is a treasure. Friends help heal life's hurts and heighten life's happinesses. I am sorry your friendship with Mckenna is threatened by your parents' fears. Yet think beyond this friendship to another consideration. That's the babysitter factor.

One Friday night when your mother was in early grade school, Grandma and I went out for the evening. Since your mother and Aunt Jackie and Aunt Susan were not old enough to stay home on their own, we hired Melinda from across the street to sit with them. Melinda was about your age, 15 or 16. Our girls had never given a sitter a hard time—not before or after this. But that night . . .

When we got home, Melinda met us at the door. She sobbed out the story of three disrespectful and disobedient daughters and their relentless terrorist attack.

I don't think you've ever seen your grandpa red-faced with upset. But that night I was. In commando-mode I charged up the stairs. I burst into the girls' bedrooms, and within seconds I had subdued the tiny terrorists. I marched my prisoners of war back downstairs. They duly apologized and were consigned to their bedroom cells—with the promise of appropriate punishment in the morning.

What was the big deal? Why was I so upset? After all, Jackie and Susan and your mother had not disrespected us. Ah, but they had. Grandma and I were the ultimate target of their behavior because Melinda represented us that night.



Commandment

James A. Aderman

Our Father in heaven has established a system in our world where he has put a number of babysitters in charge of us. Each of these people functions in his place. Parents are the most important of these representatives. That's why the Fourth Commandment points to them and demands of us, "Honor your father and mother."

But God's Word makes it clear that this honor extends beyond parents. Luther says this commandment means that we will not dishonor or anger our parents and others in authority. That's anyone with responsibility for us. Anyone we answer to or take direction from: professors and principals; shift supervisors and military superiors; police, presidents, and pastors. The obedience and respect we give them is obedience and respect given to God.

I imagine you are thinking, "I know all that, Grandpa, but my parents are unreasonable. Do we have to obey people in authority who are unfair, unjust, and even unchristian?"

The Christians in Rome must have asked a similar question—not about parents but about their government. Paul answers. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1).

Clearly, we Christians will obey our government—even an anti-Christian government. The Roman emperor to whom those believers were to submit was Jesus-hating, church-persecuting Nero. Can't you hear the Roman Christians mumbling, " 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities'? That can't be right. Certainly not Nero!" Yet Paul says, "He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted" (Romans 13:2).

Now let's get back to your parents. If we are to obey an anti-Christian government, don't you think we need to obey whomever God gives authority over us? Even if your mom and dad are unreasonable, you'll still want to respect their decisions.

Does that mean we obey no matter what those in authority demand? Of course not. If God's representatives demand that we do anything that is against our Father's will, we must disobey. Jesus' disciples had to do that after Pentecost. The same leaders who engineered Jesus' death ordered that all teaching about Jesus stop. Peter and the rest of the apostles took their stand. "We must obey God rather than men!" they told the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29).

Why risk your life by disobeying the Sanhedrin? Why risk a job rather than follow the boss' insistence to be less than honest? Because our first level of loyalty is to our Father, not his sitters. When there's a conflict between

what our Father wants and what his representatives want, we follow our Father—every time.

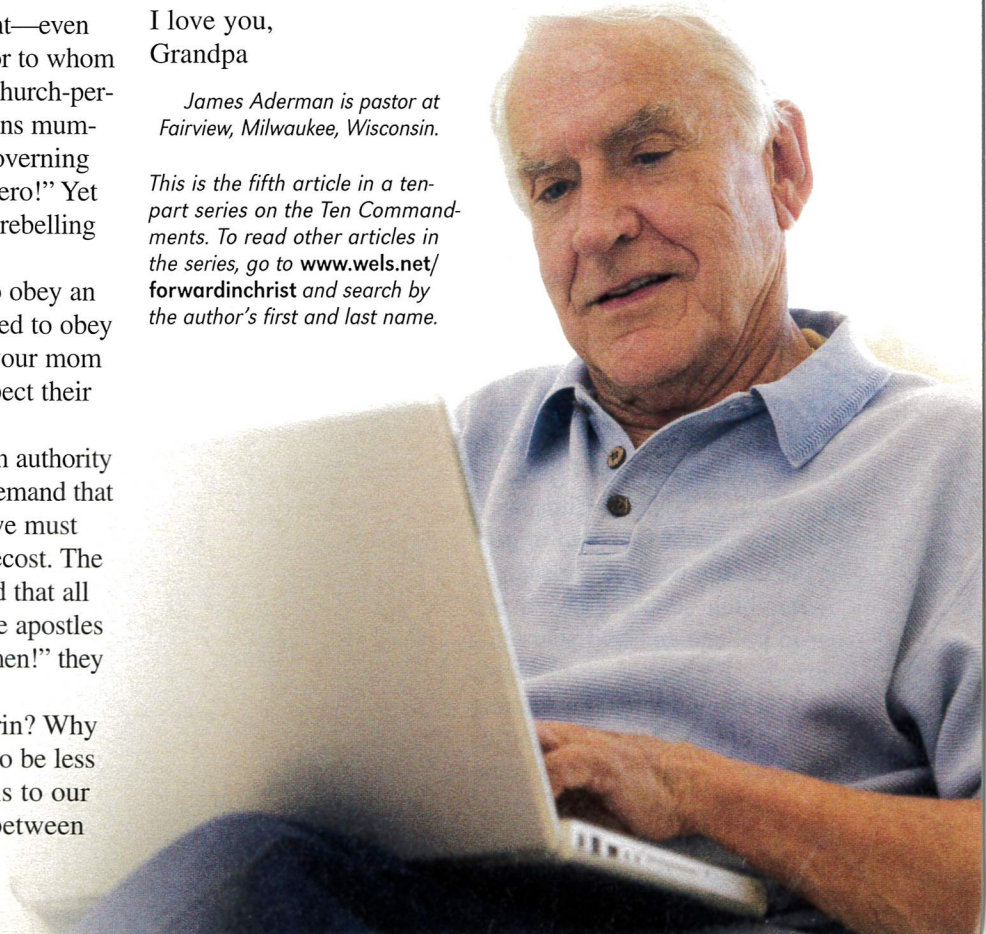
You didn't miss this, did you? We refuse to obey our sitters whenever they demand we do anything against God's will for the same reason we obey them all the rest of the time. We keep the Fourth Commandment because God has made himself our Father. Think of it, we rebellious, godless people are his children! Loved and longed for, now and always! Jesus—who traded his perfect life for our putrid lives and who suffered our punishment during his death—guarantees that eternal status. We respect and obey, even love, those in authority over us to show honor and gratitude to our Father.

Back to Mckenna. Why don't you try again to talk with your mom and dad. Speak in a way that shows your high regard for God's love for you. Show that you are working to understand their concerns. And maybe you need to explain to Mckenna that your parents don't want you to be drawn away from Jesus by her beliefs. And, if nothing changes, please be willing to bow to their decision. Don't do it because your parents are right. Do it because God loves you, because he's forgiven you, because he's adopted you. Do it because you know his heart. Do it because you can trust his choice of babysitters.

I love you,
Grandpa

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is the fifth article in a ten-part series on the Ten Commandments. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and search by the author's first and last name.



A prodigal son— **RESTORED**

Our loving Father warns us, “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness” (Proverbs 4:19). When we stray onto that path, our Father can turn us to the path of the righteous.

One of Jesus’ best loved parables tells of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). He abandoned life with his father for something he thought was better. After a life of riotous living away from home, he landed in a pig sty, came to his senses, and was received into his father’s forgiving arms. My life has been a modern version of that son who was lost and found.


LOST

I grew up in the home of devout parents, who were members of a WELS congregation. I attended Lutheran elementary school for eight years and spent one year in a WELS high school away from home. Away from parental care, I began to indulge in underage drinking and smoking.

After one year, I was dismissed from the school. I spent the next three years at several public high schools. Though I attended church every Sunday and sang in the church choir, my personal life went further astray. I kept on drinking and smoking and began to experiment with drugs. In the process I sought the company of indulgent women. All this while I gave an impression of being a Christian. I always managed to stay out of trouble, but my life was not Christian.

After high school I lasted one year in college and two years in a marriage. I made a comfortable living as a contractor by winning bids on storm damaged houses and hiring migrants for the labor.





In short order, I supplemented my income by becoming involved in drugs—trafficking and selling pot for cash. Meanwhile, I had stopped my church attendance and choir membership and indulged myself as a high roller in all the attractions of the world.

I tired of using and trafficking drugs. So I moved on to gambling and became addicted. With \$5,000 to \$10,000 in my pocket, I visited casinos and race tracks from New Jersey to Nevada and California and, most of the time, managed to lose it all.

Then I found a way to feed my addiction. My income grew through work that I did on homes that had been heavily damaged from natural disasters. As my contracted income enlarged, my pursuit of worldly pleasures kept pace. But soon my gambling losses became insurmountable. So I began to rob customers. I failed to make good on the contracts and used the down payments to cover gambling debts. But the debts quickly outran the stolen income. In short order, I was the target of the law and the courts.

In this crisis, I fled from one state to another and tried to keep my lifestyle by contracting, stealing, and gambling. Time began to run out on me, and the law began closing in on me. I turned myself in to the police and was extradited to the region where I had begun robbing my customers. From \$500,000 in cash at my disposal the year before, I had been reduced to \$1.50 in my pocket. Waiting extradition, I was incarcerated with the state's worst offenders—one-third of them charged with first-degree murder. Prison facilities were abominable. Far worse, I was physically abused on a daily basis and in unmentionable ways. My life had hit bottom.

FOUND

For the first time, I prayed to the Father—from whom I had turned away 25 years earlier—for help. I repented of my sinfulness, admitted that I was totally at fault, and fully expected to die from the mistreatment of the inmates. Then, by accident, I came upon a Bible study pamphlet sent out by WELS Prison Ministry. I wrote to the address and began to receive mailings that comforted and assured me of the Father's forgiveness to repentant sinners. Then, miraculously, after 60 days of abuse in prison, the torment suddenly stopped. Several of my abusers even asked to be put on WELS Prison Ministry's mailing list.

Five months later, to my surprise, the district attorney dropped charges against me, and I was extradited to another state where I had begun my criminal life. Here I was sentenced to prison for eight years.

It's been a long journey for a prodigal. About 40 years ago, I decided to walk the path of unrighteousness. But after 40 years, the truths I learned as a child and teenager flooded back into my memory through the devotional materials sent me by WELS Prison Ministry. I have been restored into the Father's grace and a new life with my Lord Jesus. When I am released from prison and have found new employment, I am resolved to repay those from whom I have stolen. The story of the prodigal son who was lost and is found repeated itself in my life. Thanks be to God!

Due to the personal nature of the article the author requested to remain anonymous.

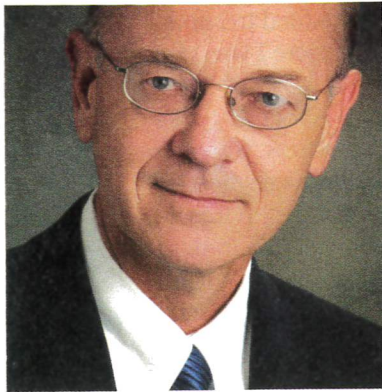
WELS Prison Ministry, a part of the Commission on Special Ministries, reaches out to more than 52,000 inmates through its ministry-by-mail program. Through a central office at New Ulm, Minn., a small staff utilizes the services of hundreds of volunteers to prepare regular mailings, correct Bible correspondence tests, and serve as pen pals to inmates.

Partnering with Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, WELS Prison Ministry also supports a three-person Jail Ministry Training Team that equips individuals and congregations for local jail and prison ministry. The Jail Ministry Training Team has trained more than 150 volunteers from 30 congregations located in 12 different states. This effort has been largely funded by a grant from WELS Kingdom Workers.

Prison Ministry recently published "Water of Life," a series of 30 half-hour Bible studies for use by people mentoring recently released inmates.

Volunteers are a crucial part of prison ministry, says Carl Ziemer, administrator of WELS Special Ministries. "Recent statistics report that one percent of Americans are behind bars," he says. "The need for God's people to bring the gospel behind the bars of jails and prisons is great and apparent. What most don't understand is that unless ordinary Christians reach out in love to this troubled population, they will never learn about the love of their Savior. WELS Prison Ministry wants to train you to do that work."

For more information, contact Dave Nack, administrator of WELS Prison Ministry, at welspm@newulmtel.net; 507-354-3130; P.O. Box 452, New Ulm, MN 56073.



Mark Schweden

Celebrating Christmas— in spite of themselves

We are well into the season of Advent. Already we're preparing once again to celebrate the first coming of our King in humility, and we are directing our attention ahead to when he will come again in glory as the almighty King of kings. Naturally, God's people view this season as a time of spiritual preparation—with heartfelt repentance for our sins and with joyful anticipation of commemorating the birth of Jesus.

As we look forward to our celebration of Christmas Day, it's easy to recognize that we will not celebrate this event in the way that the world around us celebrates it. Our Christmas will be different. Our holiday is a holy day.


For a long time, faithful Christians have watched with some dismay as the world around them has taken this holy day and blessed event and changed it into something very unholy and secular. We see the season of our Savior's birth transform into a season of marketing, frenzied shopping, and materialism. We watch holiday gatherings and office parties become opportunities to overindulge in food, alcohol, and boorish behavior. We see little children measure the meaning of their Christmas celebration by how many items on their Christmas wish list appeared under the tree—with all too many sincerely believing that those gifts were left there by a chubby man in a red suit. We hear the annual debates about what kind of Christmas displays are permissible on public property—or whether they can even be called Christmas displays. Even the greetings of the season have been sanitized and cleansed of references to the one whose birth we celebrate; "Happy holidays" and "Season's greetings" are mouthed joylessly by store clerks and printed on greeting cards.

We tend to look at all of these distortions of the true celebration of Christmas with some sadness and even some resentment. But I think there may be a different way to look at it.

Isn't it interesting: This is a world that rejects Jesus as the Savior. It's a world that has no intention or desire to acknowledge the true meaning of his birth. It's a world that wants to find joy and pleasure in anything and everything but the Savior himself. Yet, in spite of itself, that world can't help making the celebration of Christmas the high point of the annual calendar. Even with all of Satan's attempts to direct people's attention away from this Savior and his entrance into the world, unbelievers can't help making this season a season of celebration. To be sure, they don't celebrate Christ, but even their misguided celebration is unwittingly and unintentionally connected to the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago. Consciously and unconsciously, they try to take the Christ out of Christmas. But even in their Christless celebrating, they unknowingly point to the event in Bethlehem that changed the world.

We will look at how the world celebrates Christmas, and we will be sad for those who do not know what it really means. But we can also smile just a little, knowing that, in spite of themselves and without intending to, they draw attention to the One whose grace they deny.

A familiar slogan says, "Let's put the Christ back into Christmas!" For us, Christ has never been missing in our celebration. But for those who have removed him, it's our God-given task to help them, one by one, to understand the real reason for our celebration of Christmas.



I believe in the HOLY SPIRIT

I believe in the resurrection of the body. Charles F. Degner

When Job was experiencing his darkest moments, he confessed his faith in the resurrection of the body. God permitted Satan to take away every creature comfort in Job's life. His wealth evaporated in a day. His ten children died in one accident. Painful sores covered his body. His wife ridiculed his faith. His friends accused him of sin.

Our bodies will rise on the Last Day

Yet Job confessed: "Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another" (Job 19:23-27). Job got his wish. Christians have engraved his words on their tombstones as a witness to their faith in the physical resurrection of the body.

How did Job see so clearly what the disciples missed when Jesus told them plainly that he would die at the hands of his enemies and rise again (Mark 9:30-32)? Such faith in the face of misery is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Disease and old age can rob a person's body of its beauty, its strength, and its dignity. It is difficult for others to watch loved ones experience such trouble. What hope is left when our strength is gone? We have the hope in the resurrection. Jesus connected our resurrection with his resurrection when he promised, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19).

Our bodies will always be new

"And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—

I, and not another." Job confessed a resurrection of a real body, the same body that God has given him to wear in his days on earth—the same skin, the same flesh, the same eyes. "Will people recognize me in the resurrection?" That question is often asked. Of course people will recognize you!

The Bible gives us more information about the bodies we will have when Jesus raises us on the Last Day. Paul calls it a "heavenly body," an "imperishable" body, a "spiritual" body, a body clothed with "immortality" (1 Corinthians 15). We will have the same bodies. Only our bodies will be changed so that they will be fit for heaven and for eternity. They will always be new. They will never wear out or age or get sick or die (Revelation 21:4,5).

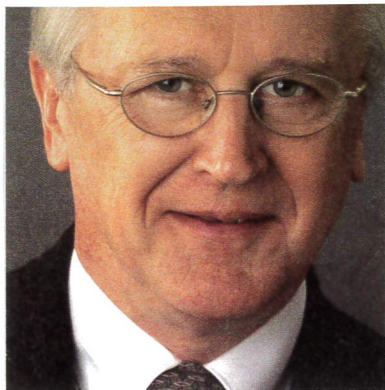
Paul tells us that Jesus "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). Think of Jesus in the 40 days that he spent with the disciples after his resurrection. They recognized him. They touched him. He ate with them. He took a walk with them. He joined them by the lake. We can expect the same for ourselves that Jesus experienced in his body.

I believe in the resurrection of the body. "Holy Spirit, give me such a faith when my body wastes away and when death is near!"

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

This is the seventh article in an eight-part series on the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. Go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and search by the author's first and last name to read other articles in the series.

WE WILL HAVE THE SAME BODIES.
ONLY OUR BODIES WILL BE CHANGED
SO THAT THEY WILL BE FIT FOR
HEAVEN AND FOR ETERNITY.



John A. Brann

Bethlehem's Lamb

Bethlehem is only a few miles from Jerusalem. Today you have to pass through a check point because Bethlehem is not under Israeli control. But you can still get to the town where Jesus was born. You do have to bend down to enter the door of the Church of the Nativity.

Once inside you have to stand in line and jostle with other tourists. But with a little patience, you stand for a moment at the traditional place where Jesus was born—marked with a 14-point star.

Outside from the Shepherds' Field, you can look across a little valley to see the hill that supposedly is the place where Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. At the end of the dry season, the Judean wilderness is clearly evident from Bethlehem—it's where the green stops. While we were there, we also could see a flock of sheep below in the valley.

At the end of the day, we came to a souvenir shop in Bethlehem run by a Christian. It was off the beaten path, and the neighborhood was not tourist friendly. He welcomed us and asked us to pray for peace so that he and other Christians could continue to live and share their faith in Jesus. Christians in Bethlehem are just over one percent of the population. He just may have been hoping that we would spend some of our money in his shop, but I think he was sincerely looking for a peace neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians would achieve. I think that he already has the greater peace of Jesus. His welcome sticks with me.

Why relate such a travelogue? For a couple of reasons. First, many Christians still want to visit the places mentioned in the Scriptures. Of course, they come for all different reasons. I remember one young woman simply posing at a site

with one of those "model" poses. I wondered if she was there just to get close to a potentially important and historic site, without knowing its significance. But others were there out of reverence and respect for Jesus.

Another reason for sharing the sites of Bethlehem is to ask you to pause and marvel at what happened there so long ago. As we stood at the Shepherds' Field, I wondered why God would come to such a place.

Actually, I wondered why he would come to earth in the first place. The tension between opposing political views isn't new or unique. It's just that the flashpoints for open hostility change. The weapons have changed too, from a Roman short sword to automatic weapons, artillery, and missiles. Why would God bother? Even if open hostility is checked, greed, jealousy, pride, arrogance, drunkenness, sexual immorality and perversion, as well as many other dark secrets we'd rather not know about persist just below the surface of human life. Have you checked the news lately? Yes, indeed, why bother?

I marvel that God would demonstrate so much love for all people in this world that he sent his Son. And he sent him to Bethlehem, not Rome or any other seat of power and glory. Dusty Bethlehem on the edge of the wilderness. Such deep love for such unworthy creatures.

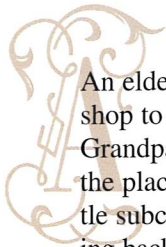
Remember the sheep in the valley. Long ago many of them would have been destined for sacrifice in Jerusalem. One special Lamb of God came there and was destined for sacrifice in Jerusalem—to die for you and for me so we would have a peace that surpasses anything on earth. Praise God and have a blessed Christmas.



Donald W. Patterson

Portraits of a mature Christian

A deep trust in the power of Jesus' gospel



An elderly gentleman took his grandson into the workshop to make a birdhouse. After measuring the boards Grandpa put one in the vice, started a half-inch cut at the place he had marked, and handed the saw to his little subcontractor. The boy bit at his lip and began sawing back and forth with all his might. Suddenly, his wild strokes made the saw bind up and bend sharply to one side. Grandpa smiled, wrapped his hands around the boy's, and said, "You don't need to work so hard. Trust the saw to do the work for you." Together they sawed slowly and gently. Then Grandpa let go, and the boy kept cutting as the saw sailed right through the wood. "Trust the saw to do the work," he kept telling himself.

Often we Christians are like that little boy. Making rules and New Year's resolutions for ourselves often produces quick changes, but they lack the power to help us persevere. We end up feeling guiltier than before. "How to" programs often fail to propel us after the newness has worn off. Instead, we must learn to trust the Lord's "saw" to do the work it was designed to do. His saw is the gospel of Jesus' love for us. Once learned, it becomes a strong force that works through us to make us capable of doing great things.

Many of Paul's letters are sprinkled with insights into how the gospel enlightens us and fills us with the power to conquer sinful habits, overcome the chains of guilt, and free us to love the unlovable. Mature Christians learn to trust the gospel of Jesus to work through them instead of pushing so hard with human strength. The passage from Titus can help us discover how the gospel of Jesus is a power we can trust to transform us and make us eager to do good works for God.

Titus 2:11-14:

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope

—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Points to ponder

1. What does Paul say the gospel teaches us? How does it do that?
2. According to verse 14, what did Jesus redeem us from? What did he redeem us for?
3. What picture in the verb *redeem* helps us understand that being saved includes having our status as a weak sinner changed into a powerful free saint?
4. Compare Romans 6:1-14 with this passage. What role does our baptism play in our ability to do good works for God?
5. Explain how the gospel makes us eager to good works.

Fruit to bear

1. Verse 14 says Jesus made us his very own. Explain to a close friend what it means to you to be Jesus' very own.
2. List eight people from the Bible who were eager to do good works for God without pressure from rules?
3. How does dwelling on God's love help you to love someone who makes it hard for you to love him or her?

Other Scriptures verses on this topic

Mark 5:18-20

Luke 19:8

Galatians 2:20-5:26

Ephesians 2:10

Romans 6-8

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

This is the second article in a 12-part series on Christian maturity. Find this study and answers online after Dec. 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.

A One-minute MANGER

How can we use 60 seconds to explain the meaning of Christmas?

Jeffrey L. Samelson

More than 20 years ago a little book was published that has proved an enduring business best-seller: *The One Minute Manager*. The basic premise is that there are three things effective managers need to do in interacting with their employees, and that those communications should be brief, clear, and concise.

A chance misspelling—making it a one-minute manger—once got me wondering about how well we do in communicating the message of Christmas. While we would certainly love the opportunity to give a curious child or an uninformed adult a 60-minute presentation of the truths and importance of Christ's birth, it's more likely that we would have only 60 seconds to explain "the reason for the season." So how might we prepare to share the joy of Christmas with a friend, neighbor, colleague, or classmate—or even a stranger at the store—in a brief, clear, and concise way: "A One-Minute Manger"?

Giving

Almost everyone associates Christmas with giving—both shopping for and getting presents—so your one-minute conversation easily can focus on the idea of gifts: People often make lists of the things they think they want for Christmas and overlook what they

really need. God knew exactly what we needed most, and because he knew us so well and loved us so much he gave us just that—a Savior who is Christ the Lord. We needed Jesus because each and every one of us is someone who sins, and each and every one of those sins has earned us death and hell. At Christmas, God gave us his Son to save us from that.

Travel

Your one minute can focus on the idea of travel, since so many people take trips during the holidays—and many have heard of the journeys of Mary and Joseph and the Magi: Christmas tells us about the biggest and greatest trip ever made—the Son of God left his glory in heaven and came to earth to be one of us, condescending even to be born, a little baby in the most humble circumstances—in a manger! He came because we needed someone to go in our place—to live perfectly, which we could not, and to die as our substitute, so we wouldn't have to. And now anyone who trusts in him will go to heaven.

Celebration

People also associate Christmas with parties, so celebration can be a focus of your one minute: Not only is the holiday Jesus' birthday, it's also

a time of "good news of great joy," as the angels told the shepherds (Luke 2:10). Everyone knows how good it feels to be forgiven when you've been naughty instead of nice. Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose again to win us forgiveness for all our sins. That freedom from guilt is something we will want to celebrate in every way we can!

The apostle Peter encourages us to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). At this time of year when Christian love, joy, and hope are on everyone's mind, opportunities abound for quick conversations that explain what Christmas is really all about. Perhaps remembering "A One-Minute Manger" will help. Get ready to give that "reason for the season" and point others to their Savior, Jesus, and the greatest Giver, God.

That one minute might make an eternity of difference.

Jeff Samelson is pastor at Christ, Clarksville, Maryland.

