



THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

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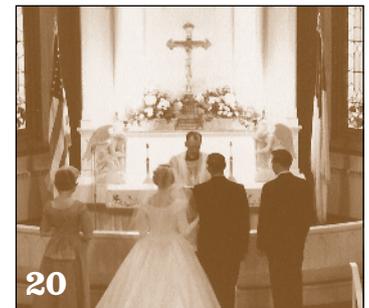
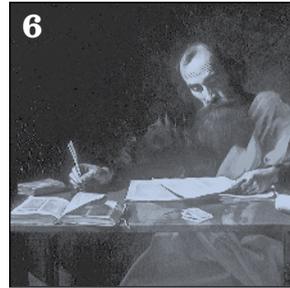
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TO THE READER

June is a month of transitions and celebrations. For many young people it marks the end of their high-school or university studies and the transition to that first job in the vocation they have chosen. In June, we also mark Flag Day, Father's Day (see pp. 3 and 14), and the first day of summer. June also remains a traditional time for weddings. In the Church, we note the Council of Nicaea, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the presentation

of the Augsburg Confession, and at the end of the month, the festival of St. Peter and St. Paul.

It is on St. Paul that Dr. Erik Herrmann, assistant professor of historical theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, focuses in our cover story. Herrmann charts for us the profound influence that Paul had on Luther and the Reformation, and how that influence remains important for us today. Luther found great comfort in St. Paul's

epistles, and so can we.

This also is our annual combined June/July issue. We pray that God will bless your summer activities and that He will grant you peace, contentment, and joy as you live your daily life. And we hope you look forward to seeing *The Lutheran Witness* again in August.

*James H. Heine, Managing Editor
The Lutheran Witness*

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Does Everything Mean Everything?

For a fire-department chaplain, an EMT, and a pastor, the greatest faith-strengthening role he's ever had is that of dad.

I'm a Lutheran pastor, a husband, and a dad. I'm a firefighter, fire-department chaplain, and an EMT. I've been in rooms when people breathed their last and were called home by the Lord, and I've used the Lord's peace to help them find calm. I've been with firefighters after they lost a victim in a house fire and have brought the Lord's peace to them by what I call "the ministry of presence." I've pulled people out of wrecks. But the most demanding, eye-opening, faith-strengthening role I've ever had is that of a dad. It's in that role that I learned first-hand the deepest meaning of "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28 ESV).

Three years ago, my son, Justin, then 25, had his gall bladder removed. Due to complications from the surgery, he became sick, so sick we rushed him to the emergency room in septic shock, almost losing him on the ER table. Thank God for His mercy, the excellent ER staff and doctors, and the CCU unit where he spent the next two weeks. Everything worked together for good.

Several months after that episode, during a checkup, Justin complained about nausea and double vision. The doctor sent us to the radiology department for a CT scan. As they were finishing up with Justin, the receptionist told me the doctor wanted us back in his office immediately.

The doctor said something had shown up on the CT scan. He needed the help of his colleagues, he said. The next morning we were at a neurologist's office and within two minutes of entering his room we were told, "Justin, you have a brain tumor, and it needs to come out Friday." Now, how does that go again? Everything works together for good?

Justin had surgery to remove the tumor and radiation treatments to get what the surgery didn't. OK, we're back to everything works together for good. I like that.

During his recovery Justin became ill again. After rushing him to the ER several times and having a spinal puncture done each time, the doctors decided to put a shunt in his head to drain the excess fluid.

"I think we are in the middle of everything working together for good, Lord," I said to myself.

As Justin recovered from the shunt surgery, his spinal fluid became infected. As we say in my native New Jersey, "This ain't good."

Back in the hospital, the doctor said Justin had bacterial meningitis. This definitely ain't good.

I have never prayed as hard as I did that night and next day for the Lord to bless my son when the doctors could do nothing.

The next day as my wife and I entered the hospital room, the doctor said he had different news. He didn't say good news, just different news. He said Justin didn't have bacterial meningitis; he had a strep infection in his spinal fluid. He would try to treat it. Is this good or bad?

That afternoon the doctor came to our room. He said, "I have good news. Justin has a staph infection, and it is treatable with antibiotics."

You know what happened. "Thank You, Lord! This is great news! By the love and grace of God, everything works together for good for those who love Him!"

Several weeks ago I arrived on the scene of a head-on collision. The occupant of one car, a 15-year-old boy, had died.

As the rescue crew cut away the metal, my role as a dad kicked in. One of my partners and I entered the wreckage and gently lifted the lifeless boy out of the vehicle. I pray that one day, even in this tragedy, his mom and dad will realize the true, deep meaning of "for those who love God all things work together for good."



Rev. Jack Karch is pastor
of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Rome, Ga.



LETTERS

In the shadow of the cross

As I read “Seeing What God Wants Us to See” in the April *Lutheran Witness*, I recalled a photograph I took during our VBS last summer. During a recreation period I had my digital camera, and two girls asked if I would take their picture, so I did. However, they had the sun right behind them, and the photo didn’t come out well. So I had them stand on the other side of the sidewalk, and I got a better picture. The next day I reviewed my pictures, and



I saw the most amazing image. Right in the middle of the picture of the two girls is a shadow of a cross. It is actually a combination of shadows from the overhang over the sidewalk and the church steeple that extends over it. I have since had the picture enlarged, and I have it hanging in my office. I believe the picture says more than words ever could.

Tim Wells
Director of Christian Education
St. John Lutheran Church
Wadena, Minn.

I enjoyed so much “Seeing What God Wants Us to See” in the April *Lutheran Witness*. It brought to mind a personal experience that I had some years ago.

I had always had a fear of flying, and I was dreading my upcoming flight to Toronto. I had only flown one time, and I was a nervous wreck

the entire time, both to and from Minneapolis.

Upon arriving at my gate in St. Louis, to my dismay, the plane was a very small jet, and I really had to talk myself into boarding such a small craft for what seemed like such a long flight. As we took off and then banked around to head for Toronto, I looked out the window and was instantly at peace. On the ground below was a building complex that, from the air, made the perfect shape of a cross.

From that moment I have looked forward to every opportunity

We just read ‘Seeing What God Wants Us to See’ by Diane Strzelecki. What a great story about Walt Timm and his love for his friend and colleague.

Juanita and Louis Schmidt
Benton City, Mo.

to fly. I always ask for a window seat and never cease to marvel at the wonder of God’s creation that is so very evident from an airplane’s vantage point. Be it the splendor of a mountain range, the beauty of an ocean, or simply flying through the clouds and breaking through to see the sun shining above them, I am continually grateful for “seeing what God wanted me to see” that day from the window of that very small jet on my way to Toronto.

Karen A. Ridenour
Bellville, Ohio

We just read “Seeing What God Wants Us to See” by Diane Strzelecki. What a great story about Walt Timm and his love for his friend and colleague. My husband and I met Walt several years ago. We volunteer at Heit’s Point Lutheran Camp on weekends. We enjoy working and meeting

other volunteers and guests. We were working at the camp when “Will” came with a group of men.

Quick thinking by Walt might have changed Will’s life, also maybe bending the rules a little. Walt was a special person, putting God first and camp second. We were sorry when he got hurt and had to retire. He is a true Christian and goes all out to help a person, whether to lead him to God or just be a true friend. How many of us would drive a long distance to meet someone, share the Gospel, and eat a hamburger?

Thank you for putting Walt’s story in *The Lutheran Witness*. He truly deserves it. Walt gave us one of his pictures, and we cherish it. Thank you, Walt and Roz, for sharing your love with us. God bless you.

Juanita and Louis Schmidt
Benton City, Mo.

Making saints

I am a 1956 graduate of what was then St. Paul’s College (SPC) and is now St. Paul Lutheran High School (SPLHS). I was on the organizing committee for our 50th reunion in 2006. I was thrilled with the April *Witness* articles on SPLHS.

SPC was the defining event in my life and my faith. Forty-six years after graduating from SPC, I graduated (via distance learning) from Concordia University Wisconsin and am now serving as a lay minister at my home congregation.

Herbert E. Harfst II
Richmond, Va.

I enjoyed your article about St. Paul’s Lutheran High School. However, you made no mention of their wonderful choir. This group puts on an extended tour every year. This year they were here in Roswell, and they gave us a wonderful concert. An instrumental group also performed during the intermission. Two of the young women stayed in our home overnight. They were the best advertisements for the school you could ask for! I just want to say how much we enjoyed their stay and acknowledge

the work they and their conductor put into the presentation. The closing hymn was so beautiful it had half the audience in tears. Thank you, thank you, St. Paul's Music Department.

*Janice Johnson
Roswell N.M.*

I have just finished reading "Making Saints" in the April issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. What a beautiful and uplifting article about Saint Paul Lutheran High School in Concordia, Mo.! I could not help but feel Saint Paul and other Christian schools are exactly what we need in this day and age—a very positive force in our society. I myself am a graduate of the now defunct St. John's College, Winfield, Kan. I am still benefiting

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Luther's Journey with Paul

For two millennia, the apostle Paul and his writings have been central to the history of the Christian faith. For Luther, the clarity of Paul's message is of the utmost importance.

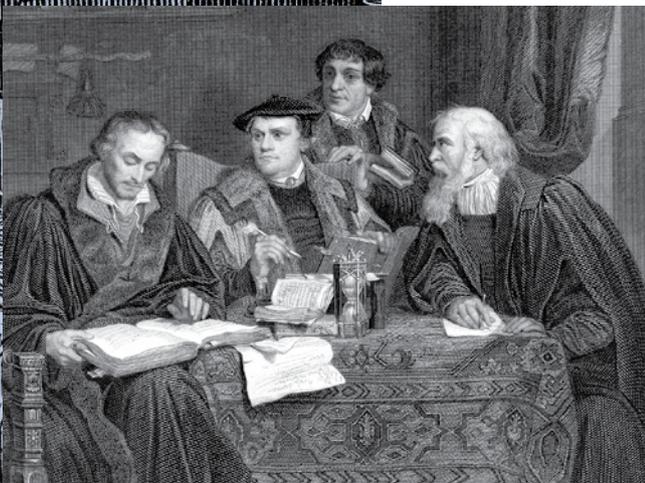


It has been 2,000 years since the birth of the apostle Paul. Actually, historians are not entirely certain when Paul (Saul) of Tarsus was born, placing his birth sometime between AD 7 and 10.

Nonetheless, despite this lack of precision, Christianity throughout the world is celebrating the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. Pope Benedict XVI announced last summer that 2008–2009 will be a special Jubilee year in honor of Paul. Protestant churches, too, are planning special events to mark the occasion. So also is Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, which is dedicating its next academic year to the theme, “A Year with Paul,” with opportunities for study and reflection on this remarkable vessel of God’s grace.

But one hardly needs to wait for an anniversary to observe the importance and impact of Paul. No other biblical author has received so much attention, so much study, so much controversy in the history of the church as this apostle and his writings. One church historian famously described Paul as the “conscience of the church,” going so far as to say that all of the critical turning points of Christian doctrine in the history of Christianity were “Pauline reactions.” Perhaps this overstates things a bit, but it is striking nonetheless to consider how central Paul and his writings have been through the centuries.

No other biblical author has received so much attention, so much study, so much controversy in the history of the church as this apostle and his writings.



At left: St. Paul the apostle in prison, 19th-century wood engraving. Insert, left to right: Philip Melancthon, Luther, Johann Bugenhagen, and Gaspard Creuziger at work on Luther’s translation of the Bible. The writings of St. Paul had a powerful impact on 16th-century Lutheran reformers.

In the second century, Marcion created no small stir when he argued that Christians should reject the Old Testament because Paul had taught that the Law did not justify. In order to write against Marcion’s dangerous ideas, theologians such as Origen and Irenaeus needed to steep themselves in Paul’s epistles. A renaissance of interest in Paul occurred in the fourth and fifth centuries, culminating in Augustine’s battle against Pelagius, with Paul’s doctrine of grace as the prize. Of course, it is well known that the Reformation of the 16th century was deeply inspired by Paul’s writings, especially Romans and Galatians. In the 20th century, Karl Barth waved Paul’s banner in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, giving birth to a whole new theological movement (Neo-orthodoxy), and most recently, there has been a flurry of new Pauline studies, dubbed dramatically the “new perspective on Paul.”



While any of these encounters with the apostle are worth closer examination, it is Martin Luther's journey with Paul that continues to stir the imagination for many and kindle a love for his writings.

While any of these encounters with the apostle are worth closer examination, it is Martin Luther's journey with Paul that continues to stir the imagination for many and kindle a love for his writings.

Luther's association with Paul began as a love/hate relationship. At the end of his life, Luther would recall this volatile time with vivid immediacy:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which . . . [I had understood as that] with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. . . . I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God. . . . Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted! (Luther's Works, vol. 34, pp. 336–37)

At last, Luther finally understood what Paul wanted: to preach a righteousness that was a gift—a gift by which God mercifully justifies us through faith in His Son. Paul was not describing an implacable standard that could only lead to our condemnation. That would hardly be Gospel, "good news!" Paul was speaking of the righteousness of God that was revealed at the cross—God's insatiable love for us. When Luther realized this, his whole world turned upside down, the bitter became sweet, and the locked sprang open: "I extolled my sweetest word

with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word 'righteousness of God.' Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise" (LW 34:337). While wrestling with Paul, Luther found himself also wrestling with God, and like Jacob of old, Luther would never be the same.

The Trumpet of the Gospel

In many ways, the stage had been set years earlier for this unforgettable encounter. Johann von Staupitz, Luther's mentor and father confessor, was an avid student of Paul. When the University of Wittenberg was founded in 1502, it was Staupitz who was given the task of assembling the faculty of theology. In the university statutes, Staupitz set the tone by naming St. Paul, "the trumpet of the Gospel" (*tuba Euangelii*), as the patron saint of the theological faculty.

When Staupitz gave Luther his teaching position, Luther had already exhibited a passion for Paul's theology. After his introductory lectures on the Psalms, Luther began to tackle Paul's epistles one by one. First he lectured on Romans, then on Galatians, then on Hebrews (which, at the time, was thought to have been written by Paul). His students were completely enamored with this curricular regime and began to promote Pauline studies among the other faculty. Others then began to lecture on Paul as well, the most notable being Philip Melancthon, the young Greek professor. So it was that the study of Paul became part of the reforming program of Wittenberg.

But there was also a very personal dimension to Luther's estimation of Paul. Luther began to see himself—his own life, struggles, and vocation—in light of the apostle's life. Like Paul, he was an embattled man. Like Paul, his zeal for the Gospel brought him into conflict

At last, Luther finally understood what Paul wanted: to preach a righteousness that was a gift—a gift by which God mercifully justifies us through faith in His Son.



with those who would compromise its message or obscure Christ. Like Paul, God's grace had called him to take up the pulpit and the pen in order to proclaim the folly of the cross. Even Paul's remarkable conversion served as a model, so that Luther would often preach on the consolation that such an example of God's grace to sinners offers: "It was, indeed, a truly great and comforting miracle how our Lord God converts the very man who raged so furiously against and had so determinedly persecuted Christ and his Christendom" (*Sermons of Martin Luther: House Postils* 3:269). Perhaps, at times, Luther would confuse his own context with Paul's. But he would nevertheless see a clear confluence of purpose. Much of Paul's life seemed analogous to Luther's own. As the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge would later exclaim, "How dearly Martin Luther loved St. Paul. How dearly would St. Paul have loved Martin Luther! And how impossible that either should not have done so." Indeed, in Paul Luther found a kindred spirit.

But ultimately it was with the *message* of St. Paul that Luther fell in love. The attributes and analogies are fine and good, but Paul was an apostle because of what he *preached*. Luther acknowledged with gratitude that as bearer of the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul was his spiritual father as well as that of his fellow Christians in Germany: "We must confess we are [Paul's offspring], for he brought us all, by the Gospel to Christ. . . . As a result Paul is the master who teaches us, for we are Gentiles" (*House Postils* 3:269).

To You, for You

The clarity of this message gave Paul's writings a peculiar importance for Luther. Thus his opening remarks in his preface to Romans: "This epistle is really the chief

part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest Gospel" (*LW* 35:365). Because Paul not only spoke of Christ and what He has done, but explicitly connects these facts *to you*, as things that Christ has done *for you*, Luther regarded the writings of Paul to be the Gospel, perhaps even more so than those books that are called "Gospels." After all, though there are four "Gospels," there is in fact only one *Gospel*—only one message that is truly "good news"—and this can be found throughout the Scriptures.

The epistles of St. Paul . . . far surpass the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. . . . [they] are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know. (*LW* 35:362)

In Paul's epistles Luther also notes, "You do not find many works and miracles of Christ described, but you do find depicted in masterly fashion how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death and hell, and gives life, righteousness and salvation. This is the real nature of the Gospel."

Luther found Paul himself making this distinction when in Galatians he distinguished his own authority from the message of the Gospel: "But even if we or *an angel from heaven* should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed!" (Gal. 1:8). The authority of Paul as an apostle lay in what he preached, not simply *that* he preached. And it was because Paul decided to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), that his letters are for Luther such a wellspring of the Gospel.

Luther's journey with Paul continued life long. Sometimes he could speak of his society with the apostle in the most intimate of terms, even as a kind of courtship—after all, Galatians was his “Katie von Bora” (LW 54:20). Tracing the course of Luther's work as a reformer, one cannot help but see how much he valued the companionship of Paul. After Luther had been cast into the limelight and become one of the most famous (or infamous!) figures in Germany, his very first major publication effort was to revise and print his lectures on Paul. In 1519, his commentary on Galatians appeared. The Epistle to the Romans he handed over to Melanchthon, who lectured on it repeatedly at Wittenberg. Over a decade later, Luther would publish another commentary on Galatians, the result of another set of lectures. Nevertheless, Luther never thought he could exhaust Paul, nor did he ever think he could provide the definitive interpretation. Instead, Paul was to be a companion for all Christians, in all ages. And in that close society one would find more than an apostle and more than a friend, but the very Christ and Savior who loved him and all people so much that He died and

rose again. For this reason, at end of his preface to that first Galatians commentary, Luther invites all to take this journey:

I have had only one aim in view. May I bring it about that, through my effort those who have heard me interpreting the letters of the apostle may find Paul clearer and happily surpass me. But if I have not achieved this, well, I shall still have wasted this labor gladly; it remains an attempt by which I have wanted to kindle the interest of others in Paul's theology; and this no good man will charge against me as a fault. Farewell. (LW 27:160)

Dr. Erik Herrmann is assistant professor of historical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.



To read more about the apostle Paul and the influence of Paul on Luther and the Reformation, visit [lcms.org/witness](https://www.lcms.org/witness) and click on the link for this story. Dr. Erik Herrmann has prepared a brief reading list.

'I have had one aim in view. May I bring it about that, through my effort those who have heard me interpret the letters of the apostle may find Paul clearer and happily surpass me.'





HOW GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH?

An e-mail exchange about a sermon theme posted on a church sign leads to a conversation about people's perceptions of Jesus and eternal life.

In front of our church, Shepherd of the Hills in San Antonio, Texas, we have a large sign on which we post a variety of messages about the life of our church and school. Each week, one message stays on the sign the longest: a bite-size thought from the upcoming weekend's sermon intended to get people's attention and proclaim the truth of God's Word. Some of the messages posted there over the years included the following:

- "When we see people the way Jesus does, everyone looks much better."
- "Peace has less to do with the absence of war and more to do with the presence of God."
- "Faith is not about what you know but who you know."
- "No investment brings a greater return than putting faith in Jesus Christ."

We know that people read the messages because they tell us so. We also know they sometimes don't like what they read because they tell us that, too.

The first time we were "scolded" for our message was a while back when the sign read thus: "God calls us to be His children, not His spoiled brats." Two people called, one of them irate, to complain. We received two complaints again last December when the sign said, "Without Jesus, none of us is good enough for God." One person sent an e-mail, asking for the sign to be taken down because it was intolerant and particularly inappropriate so close to Christmas when we celebrate the love of God. The second person called to tell us he had a "visceral" reaction to the sign. Both were polite and civil and had the integrity to identify themselves.

We never intentionally set out to offend people but



HOW GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH?

sometimes we do. The e-mail complaining about the December message came from a woman who described herself as a Christian who attends church and Bible class every week. She quoted John 3:16 this way: “God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him (God) will not perish but have eternal life.” For her, Jesus is just one prophet among many, all of which are equally good. We exchanged e-mails twice, and I tried to explain to her from Scripture why I believed the sign to be true. I also informed her that I believe John 3:16 calls for us to believe in Jesus. In the second e-mail, she wrote about how the Bible has been changed so much over the years, and that interpretations vary. Of greatest concern was her statement that she didn’t believe that Jesus is God. She appealed for tolerance, meaning that the sign should not offend anyone.

That’s an impossible goal. To fail to point people to Jesus offends and saddens me, and I would like to think that my opinion counts, too. We could have posted that everyone is good enough for God, but perhaps that would have offended atheists who deny the existence of God. It would have also been wrong, too, as we know.

Our prayer is that the message on the sign makes people think; that it will encourage those who believe and confront those who don’t—and open a door for them to come to know Jesus more closely so that they might be embraced by His grace and find in Him their Savior. Because of the messages on the sign a few people have visited our worship services and one family actually joined our congregation.

The December message offended some people because it conflicts with what surveys tell us that most Americans believe: That all good people go to heaven. It’s a wonderful thought and, to be honest, I wish it were true. It would make life so much easier.

Logically, though, the idea just doesn’t work. If it’s true that all good people go to heaven, just how good does one have to be? Or to put it the opposite way, just how bad can one be and get away with it?

The Bible tells us that David was a man after God’s own heart. That would seem to indicate that he would have been good enough to go to heaven. But the Bible also tells us that he committed adultery and murder. If one commits adultery and murder, can one still be good enough to go to heaven? My guess is that the family of the murdered party and those injured by the act of adultery would likely give a different answer from those not affected by either act. It’s not at all unusual for people to wish for a murderer to “burn in hell.” Is there a specific number of times one can commit adultery and murder before one becomes too bad to go to heaven? Is there enough opportunity in one lifetime to do sufficient good to erase the evil of even one murder or act of adultery?

People say that there’s some good in everyone. So there must have been some good in Hitler, right? And also in Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, the Son of Sam, and other legendary killers? We all know that Hitler did enough evil to bring the whole world to war, but surely he must have done some good here and there, don’t you think, maybe early in his life?

Trust me, I know there’s no defense for Hitler, but if we choose to think that all good people go to heaven, then we are faced with the challenge of setting a standard to determine how good a person has to be. Is a little bit of good enough? Is there a balance book somewhere that keeps track of all the good and all the evil in a person’s life and declares a person good or evil, depending on which one is greater?

Our prayer is that the message on the sign makes people think; that it will encourage those who believe and confront those who don’t—and open a door for them to come to know Jesus more closely so that they might be embraced by His grace and find in Him their Savior.

Do you see how difficult it is to make sense out of the conviction that all good people go to heaven? As I said earlier, I wish it were true, but everything the Bible tells me is that it isn’t.

Apart from Jesus, nobody is good enough to go to heaven. That’s why the good news of the Gospel is so marvelous. We can all be good enough to go to heaven, not because we manage to do more good than evil, but because God sent His Son into the world to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God sent His Son to be one with us, God with us, to take our place under the Law and live the perfect life we can’t live, and to die an innocent death in payment for the sins of the whole world. God sent His Son Jesus so that whoever believes in Him (Jesus) will not perish but have everlasting life.

The Bible is clear on this, and it proclaims the message over and over again: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are made right with God by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Not everybody believes that. Some are even deeply offended by it. St. Paul was right when he wrote that Jesus is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” The best part is at the end of the passage: “Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame” (Rom. 9:33 ESV).

Dr. Daniel G. Mueller is pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in San Antonio, Texas.



'Signs of the Times'?

Advertising, television, radio, flyers, mailings, personal visits—and even church and school signs—can be effective “first steps” to reach out with the Gospel if they are carefully and thoughtfully presented.

Pastor Daniel Mueller's experience and that of the good folks of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in San Antonio, Texas, is similar to that of many other outreach-minded Christian congregations around the nation. Some of the passersby who see the outreach messages posted by our churches and schools are pleased with the message and how it is presented; others express hurt, concern, or even anger toward both the message and its messengers.

We can certainly thank those who respond positively, but the more important question and the greater concern is this: *How do we, as Bible-believing Christians, positively address those who respond negatively?*

There are times when even our best-motivated activities are perceived negatively. These times give us an opportunity to engage in dialog—which we earnestly pray will lead to “Gospel moments” or “faith-sharing conversations” through which the Christian can clearly present the life-giving message of God's love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness through saving faith in Jesus Christ alone.

We need not be shy about entering into these conversations because we believe that God's Word has the power to change hearts and create saving faith. The apostle Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16 ESV).

Our outreach efforts are attempts to get people to listen, and sometimes people don't like what they hear. When confronted by those with concerns about our outreach approach, it's good to ask, “Is it the Gospel itself that has caused offense or have we, intentionally or otherwise, been the cause of the offense?” As we respond, we would be well advised to remember “a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

LCMS congregations seek to be mission outposts, intentionally and effectively engaging their communities with the Gospel. Advertising, television, radio, flyers, mailings, personal visits—and even church and school signs—can be effective first steps to reach out with the Gospel if they are carefully and thoughtfully presented.

As you consider your outreach approach, good advice from a group of creative, Gospel-centered church professionals includes the following:

- As God's people, we can't just play it safe. We must engage our communities with the Gospel. Our heavenly Father sent His only Son “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). As His body, the Church, our passion is to be about His



Ron Sipe, an elder at Shepherd of the Hills, changes the information on the church sign.

business—sharing Christ with those who need to know Him as Lord and Savior.

- The methods we use must not overpower the message we seek to share.
- Seek the wisdom of mature Christian advisors who will be able to prayerfully give good, sound counsel on what we're planning and how to go about it.

Evaluation of our efforts in Christ's service is also critically important:

- “Did our efforts positively impact the kingdom of God?”
- “What might we do better next time?”

Jesus' words to His disciples as He sent them—armed with their faith and the Gospel alone—into hostile and unbelieving communities can also be our guide. He told them to be as “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

Rev. Scott Snow is national director of outreach for LCMS World Mission.



*Here is a precious gift.
God has given us His Word.
The Word of God is living
and life-giving because faith
comes by hearing it.*

It Is My Father's Word

What greater service can a father render to his children than to point them to their Father's Word?

I was in the sixth grade and I had just made a startling discovery. It didn't occur to me that sixth-graders rarely make startling discoveries that have escaped the rest of mankind, so I was anxious to share my wisdom with my father. I felt I was on the verge of settling an ancient dispute between the Church and science. Mrs. McMahon, my teacher, had just reviewed a geological chart of the ages. With uncharacteristic insight I noticed that the geological ages, and the corresponding plant and animal forms, were somewhat similar to the days of creation.

That evening, after further study, I opened my science textbook and explained my new theory to my father. He listened carefully as I twisted each testimony (Scripture and textbook) to fit my theory and make a neat little compromise. "What if," I said, "the days of creation were actually thousands or millions of years long?" His answer is engraved in my mind as if it happened yesterday: "This," he said, picking up the science textbook, "is the word of men. It is filled with ideas that men have devised. Those ideas will change. This," he added, touching the Bible, "is the Word of God. It is the truth. Its truth will never change. We don't try to make the Word of God fit with the words of men." I received those words for what they were, very wise words from a loving father.

My father's wisdom waned in the ensuing years. In fact, there were days when I was surprised he knew anything at all. Yet, in spite of my teenage rebellion, that moment, those words that pointed me to the Word, stuck with me. In fact, I have now come to believe that those words moved me toward my current station in life. The words of my father pointed me to the Word of my Father.

What greater service can a father render to his children than to point them to their Father's Word? So Moses instructed the fathers of Israel in his day:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:6-9 ESV)

Unfortunately, we fathers often point our children to anything but the Word of God. There are so many idols competing to be the source and center of life we sometimes get confused and, yes, rebellious. We want our children to be successful and happy. We often believe this will require a little deviance from the truth of the Word. There is no excuse for this. There is only, upon repentance, forgiveness and new life through the sacrifice of Jesus.

That new life looks like what the words of Moses describe, a father talks to his children about the Word of the Father. I once heard this excuse from a father who did not want to teach his children the truth: "When I was a kid I had religion crammed down my throat. So I am just going to let my kids decide for themselves."

Upon questioning, I found that what really happened was that when he was a kid, he was dropped off at Sunday School while his parents went to the donut shop. There was no conversation regarding the Word of God in the home. There was little connection between the words of the father and the Word of the Father. What is a child to think?

Here is a precious gift. God has given us His Word. The Word of God is living and life-giving because faith comes by hearing it. It is not difficult for a father to pass this gift on to his children. It might be as simple as saying, "These are the words of men, and this is the Word of God."

Rev. Terry R. Forke is president of the LCMS Montana District.



Two-Timers



Who is really
two-timing whom?

Except for Christmas and Easter, I love to greet at church.

On those two occasions, you get so many visitors at the door that it's almost overwhelming. While this is good, you also get the two-timers. You know, those people who are "on your books" but come only at Easter and Christmas.

As a fellow greeter, I can recite the conversation you might have had at Easter:

Greeter: "Hello! We're so glad you're here. Thanks for visiting us. Would you please sign our guest book?"

Two-timer: "Sign? I'm a member here, and have been for five years."



Two-Timers

As Lutherans, we have so much to offer—a rich liturgy and a rich history. Most important, we offer the true and unerring Word of God. In a word, what we have is CHRIST, and that needs to get out to everyone. Especially to those who only come to church twice a year.

Greeter (thinking quickly): “Ah. Oh. I’m sorry, I didn’t recognize you. I’m sort of new.” If you have two services you can add, “Well, you must go to the other service.”

Translation of this last response: “I’ve been going here for three years, and I’ve been here almost every Sunday, but I cannot remember ever seeing you. However, I’m too nice to say that out loud.”

I suspect this has happened to some of you.

As I began to think about “two-timers,” I realized the reference has a negative connotation. Two-timers. We have all met them. They walk in, talk to a few people they know, leave after the service, and are not seen again until another holiday.

While this is seldom a hot topic in the churches with which I’m familiar, it is something that is rarely talked about in a good light. Hardly a good word is said about the subject, even by pastors. Many people, and I include myself, have even disliked two-timers. I mean, the audacity—to show up twice a year and expect to reap the same rewards as the rest of us. They haven’t done anything to help the congregation. They haven’t given any money—or, perhaps worse, they cut a big check twice a year, as if that will ensure their standing. They don’t teach Sunday School, serve on the property committee, or behave as though they know something about church manners—“Hey, do you know you’re sitting in my seat? I sit here all the time.”

Yet, over the years, as I have gotten older and rounder and softer (both in attitude and because of my rounder-ness), my thinking on two-timers has changed. It has changed in two ways. First, I have remembered that the number of times I attend church will not get me into heaven. The simple act of coming to church is not going to get me or anyone else saved. Going to church is like any other act; it is a response to God for the love and faith the Holy Spirit has created in us. We come to church to worship the Lord and learn of His love for us. We come to have our faith strengthened through hearing the Word. We come for the fellowship we get by gathering with fellow believers. We come to receive the forgiveness for our sins through both Baptism and Holy Communion.

Now don’t get the wrong idea, I know that “faith comes by hearing.” I don’t want to dilute that in any way. What I want to do is change how that gets applied to two-timers, and that is how I have changed in the second way.

More and more, I want to be happy—and I want us to be happy—that they come and hear the Word. Instead of passing judgment, I want to accept the fact they have come and encourage them while they are here. I want to take the time to understand *why* they only come twice a year, not punish them for coming twice a year. When we show true, honest, loving and God-pleasing concern for these people, we may give them the boost they need to come more often.

We need to take an extra step: Point them out to our pastor; introduce them to our friends. Pray for them and follow up with a call to them the next week. A friendly call, from someone besides the pastor, saying thank you for coming, may go a long way to helping them be more faithful.

What I am saying is this: It’s a two-way street. Yes, two-timers may not have been in church for a half-year, but have we as a church contacted them in those six months? Did we take the time to see them when they hadn’t been to church for two months? Did we call on them and say, “Hey, we missed you. Are you okay?” As a congregation, are we two-timers ourselves, in that we contact them only when we are (1) conducting our stewardship drive or (2) doing our yearly review of our members? Is this the message they are getting from us as the church: You only matter when we need money or are taking a census?

All of this may not work. We may not change some two-timers. (Changing hearts is, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit.) What I do know is this: A proverbial slap on the wrist or cold shoulder for poor attendance seldom produces positive results. We need to ensure that those we perceive as two-timers are not being given the two-timing treatment by ourselves as a church. Engagement and a hand extended in genuine friendship offers a better course.

As Lutherans, we have so much to offer—a rich liturgy and a rich history. Most important, we offer the true and unerring Word of God. In a word, what we have is CHRIST, and that needs to get out to everyone. Especially to those who only come to church twice a year.

Mark Einspahr is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Gardnerville, Nev., where he is an elder.





Something Old,

A Minnesota LCMS family honors a wedding-day tradition born of both taste and economics.

When Carolyn Sommers of Bloomington, Minn., walked down the aisle of Trinity Lutheran Church in Faribault, Minn., on Aug. 11, 2007, she continued a family tradition that began 45 years earlier. She wore her mother's wedding gown, a dress also worn by all three of her sisters.

"I pretty much knew I would be wearing Mom's dress," explains Carolyn, the youngest of the Sommers daughters. "I wanted to keep it a tradition."

That tradition began on June 9, 1962, when Delores Boernsen, a native of Hartley, Iowa, donned the nylon organza full bouffant-skirted bridal gown and a crown seed-pearl headpiece and married Roger Sommers at Trinity.

Delores Sommers never expected that someday she would have four daughters who would wear her \$69 wedding dress. But her daughters, starting with twin Laurie, did just that. "I love it," Delores says. "I really appreciate that they thought so much of using my dress."

For Laurie Meyer of Trimont, Minn., the decision to wear her mother's gown was one of taste and economics. At the time of their Sept. 12, 1987, marriage, husband John, now pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Trimont, was serving his vicarage at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in St. Cloud, Minn., and money was tight. The dress appealed to her and fit her budget.

"I just really liked the dress. I liked the simple, classic lines," Laurie says. "I thought it would be nice to wear my mom's dress."

With some alterations—full-length sleeves replaced with near-elbow-length lace sleeves, removal of some rose appliques, a new lace front panel to cover several stains, and her own headpiece—the ensemble became Laurie's. Like her parents before her, Laurie was wed at Trinity in Faribault.

Six years later, on July 17, 1993, Laurie's twin sister, Linda, walked down the aisle of Trinity's new sanctuary and married Bruce Donnay. She too wore her mom's dress, unchanged since Laurie's wedding. And, like her twin before her, Linda, now of Glencoe, Minn., and a staff member at First Evangelical Lutheran School in Glencoe, chose the dress for sentimental reasons and purchased a headpiece to make the ensemble hers.

When the next Sommers daughter, Christine, married Sean Austin on Sept. 4, 1999, at University Lutheran Chapel in Boulder, Colorado, the wedding gown underwent a major change. Per her daughter's request, Delores removed the lace

Something New . . .



One dress, five weddings: At left, Carolyn Sommers Tillotson, wearing her mother's bridal gown in 2007. Above, left to right: Roger and Delores Sommers (1962), Rev. John and Laurie Meyer (1987), Bruce and Linda Donnay (1993), and Sean Austin and Christine Sommers Austin (1999).

sleeves as she and Roger drove west from their Minnesota home to the wedding.

Christine, who now lives in Bozeman, Mont., always knew she would follow tradition and wear her mother's dress. "It was mainly to honor my mother," she says, ". . . because I loved my mother dearly and always looked up to her."

But she also appreciated the era and the femininity of the gown. At the time of her marriage, she was living in a rustic cabin and wearing Carharts, and she wanted something feminine, Christine explains. She completed her Cinderella-type image by wearing her mom's cultured pearl necklace and earrings and her mom's crown headpiece, all part of the original ensemble. (The original imported silk illusion veil was swapped for new tulle.) Christine also wore her mother's white leather high-heeled bridal shoes, the same heels she pulled on while playing dress-up as a child.

While growing up, the youngest of the Sommers sisters, Carolyn, remembers trying on her mother's gown numerous times when friends visited. The dress hung in her bedroom closet. She knew even then that someday she would follow family tradition and wear the dress

on her wedding day. That day came on Aug. 11, when Carolyn married David Tillotson. Like her sisters before her, Carolyn made some alterations. Fraying lace on the 45-year-old gown was replaced, and the front skirt panel was restored with fabric similar to the original material. Carolyn completed her vintage look with her mom's crown headpiece.

She also included daisies among her wedding flowers, just like all the Sommers women. And like her mother and two of her sisters, Carolyn walked down the aisle of Trinity in Faribault to exchange vows with her husband-to-be.

Whether more Sommers women will continue the family wedding-dress tradition remains to be seen. Maybe a granddaughter will wear her dress someday, Delores Sommers speculates, maybe not. For now, Delores says she's honored that all four of her daughters chose to wear her bridal gown on their special days.

Audrey Kletscher Helbling, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Faribault, Minn., is a freelance writer and contributor to *Minnesota Moments* magazine, where this story was first published.



Note: The "official notices" are published for a single purpose only: giving notice of a result, namely, changes in the Synod's membership rosters by the addition or deletion of the names of individuals and congregations. It is not always appropriate that reasons for the changes be identified in the published notices. Since a change can occur for any of a variety of reasons, no assumptions may be made merely from the fact that a change has occurred.—Ed.

Official Notices From the Districts

DANIEL H. WOODRING, Niles, Mich., resigned from the Ordained Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as of March 31. DAVID RINGEL, Lowell, Mich., is no longer a member of the Commissioned Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod because he has not responded to the Annual Reporting Form. MARY KAY WATERS, Grand Haven, Mich., is no longer a member of the Commissioned Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod because she did not reapply for inactive status. RICHARD E. WEBB, Waterford, Mich., resigned from the Commissioned Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as of March 27. They are, therefore, no longer eligible for call consideration.—Rev. C. William Hoesman, president, LCMS Michigan District.

RACHEL FRANCISCO, ELIZABETH FRUEND, KERI GALCHUTT, KORRINA HEMPHILL, JANELLE HENDRICKS, KELLEY LIMBACK, ROSANNA MARTZ, LAURA OSBOURN, REBECCA PESSELATO, MARTA PITTSCH, BENJAMIN RODEWALD, WENDY SEBAN, LADONNA TELLE, BARRY TERRASS, TAMARA TEWES, CATHERINE VIETS, KELLI VONDERFECHT, and TIMOTHY ZEIGLER have been removed from the Commissioned Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. CHAPLAIN DWAIN E. SLIGER and REV. JAMES R. SHAW have resigned from the Ordained Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They are, therefore, no longer eligible for a call.—Rev. Ray G. Mirly, president, LCMS Missouri District.

REV. ROBERT CUTLER was appointed circuit counselor of Circuit 10 (Boise Valley), replacing REV. MARTIN FRUSTI who resigned his circuit counselor position.—Dr. Warren Schumacher, president, LCMS Northwest District.

EUNICE F. MATHEWS, Chippewa Falls, Wis., and LEAH WIERSCHKE, Black Duck, Minn., were removed from the Commissioned Minister of Religion roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod due to failure to apply for inactive status per Bylaw 3.11.2.b of the 2007 Handbook.—Rev. Joel A. Hoelzer, president, LCMS North Wisconsin District.

REV. CHRIS DAVIS, First English, Dorset, Minn., was appointed circuit counselor for the Park Rapids Circuit, replacing REV. DANIEL BURNS, who has accepted a call to the North Wisconsin District.—Rev. Donald J. Fondow, president, LCMS Minnesota North District.

Official Notices Colloquies

DAVID W. KAISER, North Canton, Ohio, has completed all requirements for the Pastoral Colloquy Program through The Lutheran Church—

Missouri Synod. DEBRA E. LEE, Great Falls, Mont.; PETER MONFRE, Milwaukee, Wis.; ALICIA K. CRESPO, Jacksonville, Fla.; CHERYL K. HALLOW, Seymour, Ind.; and KIMBERLY A. KELLY, St. Joseph, Mo., have submitted an application for the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through CUEnet.

Correspondence regarding their applications should be directed within four weeks after publication of this notice to Dr. William R. Diekelman, Chairman, Colloquy Committee, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

WILLIAM A. ZIECH, Channahon, Ill., has completed the Director of Christian Education Colloquy of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. SUSAN M. ROGALSKI and RENEE MANAHAN, O'Fallon, Mo., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Mark A. Waldron, Director of Teacher Colloquy, Concordia University Chicago, 7400 Augusta St., River Forest, IL 60305-1499.

LUANN SCHMIDT, Glencoe, Minn., and REBECCA MCKINNEY, Newhall, Iowa, have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Stephen C. Stohlmann, Director of Colloquy, Concordia University, St. Paul, 275 Syndicate St. North, St. Paul, MN 55104.

MARY L. NABER, Muskego, Wis., and AMY J. KUTZ, Muskego, Wis., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Rev. Albert L. Garcia, Ph.D., Director of Lay Ministry/Teacher Colloquy Program, Concordia University Wisconsin, 12800 N. Lake Shore Drive, Mequon, WI 53097-2402.

Official Notices Requests for Reinstatement

JOHN R. ASHCRAFT III, Collinsville, Ill.; CARLA J. FAGA, St. Charles, Ill.; GRETCHEN HUESMANN, Grafton, Wis.; DONALD G. HOFFMANN, Cincinnati, Ohio; SHANNON N. RITTER, Kalispell, Mont.; and SARA M. WOLFF, Wauwatosa, Wis., have applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than July 5.—Dr. Raymond L. Hartwig, Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

Positions

The Lutheran Witness *welcomes notices for positions available at affiliated entities and Recognized Service Organizations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., June 20 for the August issue and July 20 for the September issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.*

Camp LuWiSoMo, Wild Rose, Wis., seeks to fill a full-time, year-round position of **program director**.

Responsibilities include assisting the executive director in the following areas: developing,

publicizing, implementing, and evaluating camp programs; designing and leading Bible studies; recruiting, training, coordinating, and evaluating program staff; providing guidance and leadership that promotes Christian growth and team ministry among the staff; encouraging the use and support of Camp LuWiSoMo among the churches in the South Wisconsin District; and establishing responsible budgeting in the area of program.

Qualifications: Committed to the Great Commission; able to work well in team ministry; trained and/or experienced in the areas of outdoor education, retreat leadership, public relations, and administration; strong communication and interpersonal skills; creative, self-motivated, independent, and organized; bachelor's degree; and an LCMS member, preferably rostered.

For a job description, visit www.luwisomo.org/pdf/ProgramDirector.pdf.

Resumes and questions may be directed to Kurtis Bueltmann, Camp LuWiSoMo, W5421 Aspen Road, Wild Rose, WI 54984-9177; e-mail kurtis@luwisomo.org; or call (920) 622-3350.

The following institutions of the Concordia University System (CUS) are seeking candidates for positions described below:

- **Concordia College—New York, Bronxville, N.Y.,** seeks to fill the following position: **Director of Annual Giving.**

- **Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon,** seeks to fill the following faculty position: **Undergraduate Teacher Education.**

For more information about these and other CUS positions, including complete job descriptions, qualifications, and application process, visit <http://www.lcms.org/cusjobs> and click on "Positions Available at Our Campuses."

Director, Music & Worship Resources

Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., is seeking a full-time **Director, Music & Worship Resources.** This position oversees the development and production of all music and worship publications, linear, visual, audio, and multimedia; finds and recruits potential editors, composers, and clinicians; serves as chief liaison concerning worship and music with LCMS units and other publishing houses; and prepares and oversees the annual business plan.

Candidates must be a member of the LCMS, listed on the official roster of Synod (preferred), possess a master's degree or equivalent training in theology and/or church music and have five years parish experience or its equivalent with demonstrated interest in total parish ministry.

To apply, please forward a cover letter and resume to CPH, 3558 S. Jefferson, St. Louis, MO, 63118; or email cpresume@cpublishing.org.

Anniversaries

The Lutheran Witness *welcomes notices 50 words or less from LCMS congregations about their upcoming "milestone" anniversaries. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., June 20 for the August issue and July 20 for the September issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.*

St. John, Springfield, Pa., will celebrate its 160th anniversary throughout the summer, beginning June 1 with a special service. Contact the church office at (610) 543-3100.

Redeemer, Burlington, N.C., will conclude its 50th anniversary year with a dinner and program at 5 p.m., June 14, and a festival service at 11 a.m., June 15. To register for the dinner, contact the church office at (336) 227-7092 or e-mail yourredeemer@earthlink.net.

Zion, Granton, Wis., will celebrate its 125th anniversary beginning at 2 p.m., June 20, with games, praise bands, and a pig roast; and also at the 10:30 a.m. worship celebration on June 22 with guest preacher Dr. Mark Hanneman from "Life . . . Revised." A noon potluck will be served, followed by songs of praise and remembrance at 2 p.m. Contact the church office at (715) 238-7422.

Immanuel, Burns, Wyo., will celebrate its 100th anniversary June 22. Former pastor and current Wyoming District President Richard Boche will preach at the 10:30 a.m. service. Rev. Ted Bourret will preach at the afternoon service. A congregation meal will be served between services. Contact the church office at (308) 235-2582 or e-mail krmars@juno.com.

Trinity, Hilbert, Wis., will celebrate its 150th anniversary at the 9:30 a.m. service, June 22. Dr. Paul Mueller, regional director of Africa LCMS World Mission, will be guest preacher. An 11:30 a.m. dinner will be served, followed by a 2:30 p.m. service conducted by Rev. John C. Wille, president of the South Wisconsin District. Contact the church office at (920) 853-3134.

Faith, La Grande, Ore., will celebrate its 50th anniversary June 28 with fellowship and a picnic, and on June 29 with a Jubilee service, with Pastor Samuel Wiseman officiating. Contact the church office at (541) 963-2831.

Grace, Alma Center, Wis., will continue its 100th anniversary celebration on June 29. Rev. Joel Hoelter, president of the North Wisconsin District, will be guest preacher at the 10:30 a.m. service. A dinner will follow. Contact the church office at (715) 964-2203.

Zion, Holyoke, Colo., will celebrate its 100th anniversary at the 10 a.m. worship service on June 29 with District President Randall Golter as guest preacher. A catered meal will follow, along with a 2 p.m. service with Rev. Ken Klaus, Lutheran Hour speaker, to serve as preacher.

Trinity Central, Los Angeles, Calif., will celebrate its 125th anniversary at the 10:30 a.m. worship service on June 29, followed by lunch and fellowship. Contact Pastor Hong at (323) 732-4444 or Deacon Lane at (562) 941-1151.

Hope Lutheran Chapel, Osage Beach, Mo., will celebrate its 50th anniversary of "Come As You Are, Worship In Your Car" drive-in worship services at 7:30 a.m. on July 6, followed by a breakfast. Contact Hope Lutheran Chapel, 1027 Industrial Drive, Osage Beach, MO 65065; (573) 346-2108.

Immanuel, Beemer, Neb., will celebrate its 140th anniversary with a festival service at 10:30 a.m. on July 13. Guest preacher will be Rev. Clint Poppe, Nebraska District first vice president. A pro-

gram with entertainment will follow the noon meal. Contact Rev. Roger Schepmann at (402) 528-7253.

Immanuel, Gaylord, Minn., will continue its 125th anniversary celebration on July 13, with several sons of the congregation to return as guest preachers. Dinner will be served at noon, followed by a reunion of Immanuel confirmands from 2 to 4 p.m. Contact the church office at (507) 237-2380.

Clear Lake, Fremont, Ind., will celebrate its 70th anniversary at the 9 a.m. worship service July 20. Dr. Paul Maier, LCMS vice president and best-selling author, will be the preacher. A brunch will follow the service. For more information, contact the church office at (260) 495-9219, or visit online at www.clearlakelutheran.org.

Redeemer, Owatonna, Minn., will celebrate its 125th anniversary at the 10 a.m. service on July 20. Rev. Ken Klaus, Lutheran Hour speaker, who served his vicarage at Redeemer, Owatonna, will be guest speaker. A catered dinner will follow. For tickets or to leave a message, call (597) 451-2720, or e-mail rlcowat@smig.net.

Trinity, Weatherford, Texas, will celebrate its 50th anniversary at the 10:15 a.m. service on July 20. Texas District President Ken Hennings will be the day's teacher and preacher. Former pastors Carroll Kohl, Robert Boyce, and Richard Nelson will participate in the service. A catered lunch will follow. Contact the church office at (817) 613-1939.

St. John's, Park Rapids, Minn., will celebrate its 100th anniversary on July 26 with church tours, confirmation-class reunions, bell-choir performance, and refreshments; and on July 27 with two celebratory worship services, a noon meal, and a program. Contact the church office at St. John's Lutheran Church, 803 First St. W., Park Rapids, MN 56470; (218) 732-9783.

Trinity Evangelical, Mountain Lake, Minn., will celebrate its 100th anniversary July 26-27 with special activities, a potluck supper, and worship outdoors on Saturday. Sunday worship services will be held at 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. A pork-loin dinner will follow. Contact the church office at (507) 427-2451.

St. Matthew, Port Angeles, Wash., will celebrate its 70th anniversary as a congregation and its 50th anniversary of the dedication of the current sanctuary on July 27 at the 10:30 a.m. festival service. Rev. Mark Post will be the guest preacher. A dinner will be served in the fellowship hall following the service. Contact the church office: (360) 457-4122.

St. Peter, Barnes, Kan., will celebrate its 125th anniversary on Aug. 24. Former pastors Rev. Donald Illian and Rev. Darold Boettcher will participate in the service. Kansas District President Keith Kohlmeier will be guest lector. A catered noon meal and fellowship will follow. E-mail wiechman@bluevalley.net or telephone (785) 763-4556.

Cross of Christ, Bountiful, Utah, will celebrate its 50th anniversary at the 10:30 a.m. service on Aug. 24, with a reception and fellowship to follow. Rocky Mountain District President Randall Golter will be guest preacher. Contact the church office at (801) 295-7677.

Trinity, Olympia, Wash., will celebrate its 100th anniversary with a centennial dinner on Aug. 30 and a celebration worship service on Aug. 31. Dr. Paul L. Maier will be guest speaker and preacher at both events. Contact Shirley Fricke at (360) 866-7445.

Bethlehem, Bruderheim, Alberta-British Columbia, will celebrate its 111th anniversary on Aug. 31 in conjunction with the community of Bruderheim's Centennial with one special mission

festival service at 10 a.m., followed by a dinner. Rev. Les Gierach, mission developer and mission executive of the Alberta-British Columbia District, will be the guest preacher. Contact Laura at (780) 796-3568 or the church office at (780) 796-3543.

Faith, Knob Noster, Mo., will celebrate its 25th anniversary throughout the year, with a special service at 9:30 a.m., Aug. 31. Former pastors are invited to participate. Photos and remembrances may be submitted for inclusion in a history presentation to Faith Lutheran Church, P.O. Box 31, Knob Noster, MO 65336, or by e-mail at info@faithlutheranchurch.net.

In Memoriam

Obituary information is provided by district offices to the Synod's Office of Rosters and Statistics. Any questions about content should be referred, therefore, to the appropriate district office.—Ed.

ORDAINED

BIELEFELDT, WALTER F.; May 23, 1913, Malone, Texas, to March 6, 2008, Tomball, Texas; son of Henry and Lydia (Markwardt) Bielefeldt; graduated St. Louis, 1938. Served 1939-1978. Ministries/parishes: Wallis, Clifton, Walburg, Pasadena, Wharton, Texas; Texas District circuit counselor: 1954-1956; retired 1978. Preceded in death by his wife, Paula (Gaertner) Bielefeldt. Survivors: sons: Walter Jr., James; daughters: Margaret Jacob, Elizabeth Lorenz, Paula, Mary Ave-Lallemant, Lois Boerger. Funeral and interment: March 10, 2008, Tomball, Texas.

HEDSTROM, ROGER F.; July 9, 1943, Berkeley, Calif., to Feb. 28, 2008, Rockwell, Texas; son of Ralph D. and Phyllis (Muehlenburg) Hedstrom; graduated St. Louis, 1969. Served 1969-1975; 1976-2002. Ministries/parishes: Long Beach, Daly City, Calif.; Phoenix, Chandler, Apache Junction, Ariz. Survivors: son: Andrei; daughters: Deidre Amon, Christina. Funeral: March 1, 2008, Rockwell, Texas; cremation.

MEYER, ERWIN M.; May 28, 1920, Winfield, Kan., to March 1, 2008, Linn, Kan.; son of Martin and Elise (Klipp) Meyer; graduated Seward, 1942. Served 1942-1960. Schools/ministries: San Antonio, Texas; St. Louis, Mo.; Chicago, Ill.; Saginaw, Mich. Colloquy 1962. Served 1962-1980. Ministries/parishes: Cedar Falls, Fairbank, Oskaloosa, Iowa; St. Joseph, Mich.; retired: 1980. Survivors: Doris (Pierce) Meyer; son: John; daughter: Marcia. Funeral and interment: March 4, 2008, Linn, Kan.

NIERMANN, WALTER H.; July 2, 1927, Overland, Mo., to Feb. 22, 2008, Napoleon, Ohio; son of Walter and Emma (Nehrt) Niermann; graduated St. Louis, 1952. Served 1952-1992. Ministries/parishes: Blairstown, Iowa City, Iowa; Amherst, Ohio; retired: 1992. Preceded in death by his wife, Elvira (Ziegelbein) Niermann. Survivors: sons: David, Thomas, Rev. Stephen; daughters: Deborah, Pamela Goebel, Dcs. Elizabeth. Funeral: Feb. 26, 2008, Iowa City, Iowa; interment: Feb. 26, 2008, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

OBERHAUS, PAUL R.; Sept. 18, 1941, Holgate, Ohio, to March 7, 2008, North Ridgeville, Ohio; son of Raymond and Lorena (Baden) Oberhaus; graduated Fort Wayne, 1995. Served 1995-2008. Ministry/parish: North Ridgeville, Ohio. Survivors: Sharon (Carr) Oberhaus; sons: Brian, Phillip; daughters: Angela Chester, Susan Jackemeyer. Funeral: March 11, 2008, North Ridgeville, Ohio; interment: March 13, 2008, North Ridgeville, Ohio.

REIMANN, DAVID K.; Aug. 1, 1956, Midland, Mich., to Jan. 15, 2008, Columbus, Ohio; son of Rev. Fredrick and Irene (Neumann) Reimann; graduated St. Louis, 1983. Served 1983–2008. Ministries/parishes: Cleveland, Dublin (Amlin), Ohio; Ohio District chairman, Board of Youth Services, 1988–1997. Survivors: Mary Jo (Luedtke) Reimann; son: Timothy; daughters: Kimberly, Taralyn, Malia. Funeral: Jan. 19, 2008, Dublin, Ohio; cremation.

TENSMEYER, WILFRIED H.; Jan. 15, 1912, Huey, Ill., to March 20, 2008, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; son of Herman and Louise (Glammeyer) Tensmeyer; graduated Springfield, 1942. Served 1942–1977. Ministries/parishes: Elkader, Burlington, Iowa; Banning, Twentynine Palms, West Covina, Calif.; Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Iowa East District circuit counselor: 1948–1951; S. California District: 1948–1951, 1954–1955; Northwest District: 1988–1991; retired: 1977. Preceded in death by his wife, Ruby (Stahnke) Tensmeyer. Survivors: sons: Joseph, Gregory; daughter: Linnea Lee. Funeral: April 6, 2008, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; cremation.

WANGERIN, WALTER M. SR. DR.; Aug. 21, 1917, Lexington, Ky., to Dec. 30, 2007, Colorado Springs, Colo.; son of Rev. Walter C. and Erna (Geertz) Wangerin; graduated St. Louis, 1942. Served: 1943–1981. Ministries/parishes: St. Louis, Mo.; Shelton, Wash.; Milwaukee, Wis.; Grand Forks, N.D.; Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; River Forest,

Ill.; retired: 1981. Survivors: Virginia (Storck) Wangerin; sons: Paul, Walter, Philip, Gregory; daughters: Deborah, Dena. Funeral: Jan. 5, 2008, Colorado Springs, Colo.; interment: St. Louis, Mo.

WILLIAMS, MATTHEW R.; Oct. 15, 1969, Amarillo, Texas, to Feb. 5, 2008, Cleveland, Ohio; son of James and Leonna (Jackson) Williams; graduated St. Louis, 2003. Served 2003–2008. Ministry/parish: Cleveland, Ohio. Survivors: Stacey (Norrid) Williams; sons: Alexander, Elijah; daughters: Rebeka, Emma. Funeral: Feb. 8, 2008, Cleveland, Ohio; interment: Feb. 11, 2008, Amarillo, Texas.

COMMISSIONED

BLEEKE, MARGARET L. (ALBERS); Sept. 15, 1934, Springfield, Ill., to Feb. 11, 2008, Pensacola, Fla.; daughter of George and Mildred (Schultz) Albers; graduated River Forest, 1960. Served 1975–1979, 1980–1997. Schools/ministries: Metairie, New Orleans, La.; Pensacola, Fla.; retired: 1997. Survivors: Ralph Bleeke; sons: Jonathan, Steven; daughters: Debra, Lisa. Memorial service: Feb. 23, 2008, Pensacola, Fla.; cremation.

OLLHOFF, JEANNE A.; July 3, 1940, St. Joseph, Mich., to March 26, 2008, Jackson, Mich.; daughter of Norbert and Alma (Weimann) Ollhoff; graduated River Forest, 1962. Served 1973–2003.

School/ministry: Jackson, Mich.; retired: 2003. Funeral: March 29, 2008, Jackson, Mich.; interment: March 31, 2008, St. Joseph, Mich.

LUEPKE, ELDOR G.; July 30, 1914, Uniontown, Mo., to Feb. 23, 2008, Webster Groves, Mo.; son of Louis and Magdalena (Hueschen) Luepke; graduated River Forest, 1937. Served 1937–1978. School/ministry: Affton, Mo.; retired: 1978. Survivors: son: James; daughters: Joyce Soeldner, Carol Jessen. Funeral and interment: March 5, 2008, Affton, Mo.

SALES, DEBORAH ANN (BROOKS); March 20, 1950, Detroit, Mich., to Dec. 7, 2007, Justin, Texas; daughter of Kenneth and Nancy (Kesler) Brooks; colloquy Ann Arbor, 1999. Served 1999–2007. Schools/ministries: Walled Lake, Mich.; Keller, Texas. Survivors: Barney J. Sales; daughters: Kendra Tabor, Amanda Wilson. Funeral and interment: Dec. 11, 2007, Keller, Texas.

LETTERS

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from my two years there. I am almost 84 years old, and I realize more than ever that rather than make things “fun and games” for our youth, they want and need to be challenged so they grow up as “a reed not swayed in the wind,” standing firm in today’s society.

*Lee Priebe Spomer
St. Paul, Minn.*

Built on a rock-solid foundation

“Revitalizing Rural Churches” in the April issue of *The Lutheran Witness* stirred up memories of my rural parish and one-room school near Hannibal, Mo. Established by hard-working German Lutheran farmers, our church and school (now closed) was the focal point of our lives.

But, as time went on, many of the young people left for college, better opportunities, or married and moved to other communities. By the 1990s Immanuel Lutheran Church had few children.

That has changed. On my visits, I am overwhelmed by the number

of children who take part in the pastor’s message for kids. And the crying of the little tots is music to my ears. (And the enthusiastic congregational singing is outstanding!)

Currently, plans are being made for a new church as a result of the deterioration of the physical foundation of the present building. But the spiritual foundation built on rock-solid faith in our Lord and Savior remains firm.

*Catherine Bridgman
Albuquerque, N.M.*

Bravo! The April 2008 *Lutheran Witness* deserves a gold star. This is the best edition in a long time, with articles that are relevant, fresh, and thought-provoking.

May God bless this ministry!

*Glenna Osborn
St. Matthew Lutheran Church
Lee’s Summit, Mo.*

The April 2008 cover, “Revitalizing Rural Churches,” led me to believe I would find articles inside that our rural California church could identify with and learn from. I antici-

pated articles giving examples of several churches around the country and their challenges, and maybe one with some suggestions on how to actually “revitalize.”

Instead, I found just one article on the topic, and a short message by the managing editor; even the President’s column ignored the topic. The lone article was a nearly blatant advertisement for the SPIFE program located at St. Paul Lutheran High School, which itself incidentally and conveniently has two articles covering four pages with nary a word about rural churches. If you were going to spend this much space on the school and its program, why not put it on the cover?

Where were the articles covering inadequate new membership classes, or new-member mentoring tips, or the difficulty in recruiting leaders after burning out the precious few who always serve? What about 50-, or 75-, or even 100-year old churches that are physically falling apart and there’s no money to fix them? What about the members who have lost faith in their rural churches for the

Degrees of Glory?

Recently, in a Sunday School class I was visiting in an LCMS church, someone asked a question—and the pastor answered—regarding “degrees of glory.” Is this something the Lutheran Church teaches? I have been a Lutheran Christian all of my life and don’t recall ever having heard about “degrees of glory” before. Or have I just forgotten something? —Anonymous, Texas

In its 1989 report on the End Times, our LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations addressed this question as well as others. Regarding heaven and “degrees of glory” the commission said the following:

“Eternal life is pictured in the Scriptures as a state of never-ending ‘blessedness.’ This means, on the one hand, that Christians will live forever in perfect freedom from sin, death, and every evil (Is. 25:8; 49:10;

1 Cor. 15:26, 55–57; Rev. 2:7, 11; 20:14; 21:4). At the same time, they will experience the unending joy of being with God in the new heavens and new earth (e.g., Revelation 21–22; Ps. 16:11). Forever eliminated is the possibility of falling away from God. This blessedness will bring with it the joy of being in eternal communion with fellow believers, whom we have reason to believe we shall recognize (cf. Matt. 17:3). And, there will be no limitations or degrees attached to the enjoyment of the happiness to be experienced, though there will be degrees of glory corresponding to differences of work and fidelity here on earth, producing praise to God but no envy (see 2 Cor. 9:6; Matt. 20:23).”

Send your questions to “Q&A,” c/o *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Please include your name and address. All questions will be considered, but none can be answered individually.

forementioned reasons and have moved on to nondenominational churches with their modern warehouse buildings and bulging sanctuaries? Instead, we get a few facts about one town of a few thousand people in one of the preferred “heartland districts,” reinforcing the feeling that those of us in the outer areas are out of the loop, and on our own to fix our troubled congregations.

A final thought: *Ablaze!* should have been preceded by a year or more of *Prepare!* Messages, relationships, and the Holy Spirit may truly bring the unchurched to know God’s love, but when they encounter the typical old rural Lutheran church to learn more of God’s Word and receive the Sacraments, they’ll be confused and frustrated, and gone in a few weeks. We are not ready to provide a proper worship home to 100 million people.

*Darren Hughes
Atwater, Calif.*

Ashes to ashes

The April Family Counselor
“Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust”

response to the couple that was not comfortable with the idea of cremation invites further discussion on the topic. In view of the great value and honor God has bestowed on our bodies, it is unsurprising that Christians are uncomfortable with incinerating them as though they were trash.

God created us in His own image as body-and-soul beings, redeemed our bodies with His own life, dwells in the bodies of His believers, has promised to raise and glorify our bodies, and has even taken a human body as His own in Christ! His great love and care for our bodies, not to mention the examples God gave us when He buried Moses and when He was buried Himself, should teach and impel us to show similar love and care for the bodies of our fellow men, including when they die.

We would also do well to remember that our bodies are not our own, to do whatever we please with them, but belong to Him who redeemed them at the price of His blood. Shall we deliberately destroy that which our Redeemer purchased at such a cost?

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Making Choices in the Civic Arena

I turned 18 this year, and I am excited to vote in the upcoming presidential election. I've been following the race and talking with friends and family about my views. My parents and I disagree about presidential candidates for a number of reasons. They imply that I'm wrong because I'm in favor of a candidate they don't like. How am I supposed to feel like an adult when they don't respect my opinion?

Come November you will enjoy the great blessing of taking part in the democratic process to help choose our nation's new leader. I commend you for taking this seriously, both by studying the candidates' platforms and discussing the issues with your friends. By participating in the political process, you cannot only help select candidates, but you will help define issues and contribute to the development of government programs that reflect your faith.

You're also experiencing the normal struggle teens often have as they express political ideas that may be different from their parents' views. Being tolerant of a variety of opinions is part of what makes for a healthy democracy—a concept with roots in ancient Athens, where differences of opinion were encouraged and valued. Citizens debated an issue in the Assembly and cast their vote by a show of hands or, occasionally, by a “division of the house” when the issue was impor-

tant. The side obtaining the most votes formed the majority opinion, thus deciding an issue. That did not mean, however, that those in the minority were wrong. Parents and teens alike sometimes forget that aspect of the political process.

Your parents may not agree with your opinion or your choice of candidates, but that does not mean you are wrong (even though many parents are gratified when their children follow their own political preferences). Each of us deserves respect, not only as United States citizens but, more important, as people made in God's image. As Christians who live in a democracy, our faith calls us to be involved in the political process. And believers who are equally committed to their faith can arrive at different opinions in the civic arena. Exercising your right to vote, therefore, is both a privilege and an expectation. In this and every activity in which we participate as adults we take personal responsibility for our choices. As Christian adults, we make such choices, not with the goal of pleasing others or to be accepted, but to express our personal views, informed by prayer and our understanding of God's Word.

Dr. Leslie (Jack) Fyans is a clinical psychologist and member of the Ministerial Health Committee of the Synod's Central Illinois District.

Send your questions to Family Counselor, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Please include your name and address.

LETTERS

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I would humbly suggest the notion that cremation “has no theological significance” requires more thoughtful consideration.

*Rev. Daniel J. Bishop
Arenzville, Ill.*

“Pastoral kudos” to Rev. William Knippa and his fine answer in the April issue of our *Witness*. It was more than accurate; it also was most pastoral.

The church—pastors in particular—need to be proactive with parishioners in pre-funeral planning. Such allows the individual to make use of his or her funeral as the final confession of his or her faith and relieves the survivors of making last-minute

and possibly highly subjective and emotionally charged decisions, i.e., selection of hymns, Scripture readings, designated memorials, etc.

Even beyond the matter of pre-funeral planning, thought and discussion ought to be given to the good stewardship practice of pre-funeral financing/purchasing. It is a given that the cost of funerals will not be less five years from now; why not free the survivors of that additional expense?

Years ago, as a result of a detailed adult Bible study on death, etc., my parish took action and consecrated a portion of the parish's property as our “Memorial Garden” where the “cremains” of the faithful departed could

be placed to await the Resurrection. There is no cost. Indeed, over the years, surviving families have made contributions for the upkeep and improvement of the memorial garden. This, too, is an act of good stewardship, i.e., space limitations at existing cemeteries, cost of burial plot, etc.

*Rev. R.R. Krueger, emeritus
Platte Woods, Mo.*

Mercy for the living

I struggled with the letter on funerals [“Letters,” April 2008]. Serving in a congregation that regularly does over 50 funerals a year, it becomes clear that our issue is not so much truth as love. A funeral or memorial service is for the living

Why Go to Church?

A reader wrote a letter to the editor of his local newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I've heard perhaps 1,500 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time, and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving those sermons."

This started a controversy in the "Letters" section, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for several weeks, until someone penned this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked perhaps 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I can't recall the complete menu for a single one. But I know this: They all nourished me. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment these past 30 years, I would be spiritually dead today."

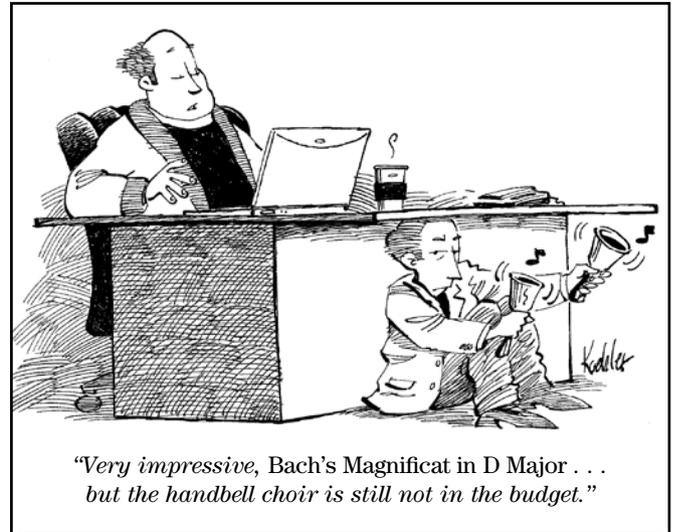
Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment!

—Nancy Yount
St. Louis, Mo.

Be Precise

My husband was working outside on a day he was expecting an important telephone call. So he put our two young children in charge of rushing the phone out to him when the call came in.

"Bring the telephone to me when it rings," he instructed.



Twice he went inside and asked, "Did the telephone ring?"

"No, Daddy," was the universal reply.

After a while, he checked again, but this time, remembering the ring-tone setting, he asked, "Has the phone beeped?"

"Yes, Daddy, it's been beeping."

It pays to remember that young children think literally.

—Nikki Pratt
Bethel Lutheran Church
Bryan, Texas

and the focus is on proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. We work hard to care for the families both in life and death. There is so much opportunity to love by showing mercy and compassion. Can't we simply perform a funeral for those who are baptized into Christ and offer care and concern for the living? If given the choice between truth and mercy, in this case, I'll choose mercy for the living.

Tim Klinkenberg
St. John's Lutheran Church
Orange, Calif.

Finding insight

Previously I had read with great interest the article on reconciliation

in the February *Lutheran Witness*. The caricature sketch caught my eye, and the article was exceptional.

In April, you published Rev. Steven B. Borst's "Finding Insight in a Movie Blunder." Once again, the sketch caught my eye, and I was eager to read the story. I realized that I had seen both movies, "There Will Be Blood" and "Atonement." I read the story with rapt attention and was touched by Rev. Borst's concluding lines: "Yes, the body and blood of Jesus first and foremost atones for our sins, but it also compels us to seek communion with one another. . . . 'At-one-ment' involves personal sacrifice, and the window of opportunity to make things right is often so short

that we dare not hesitate to reach out to others with humility, contrition, and grace."

Please continue to "catch my eye" with the caricature sketches and meaningful encouragement in living the Christian life.

Gloria G. Bourchard
Columbia, S.C.

We welcome letters that comment on articles in *The Lutheran Witness*. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send letters to "Letters," c/o *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to Lutheran.Witness@LCMS.org. Please include your name, postal address, and telephone number.

The Prodigal Father

by Ben Eder

Sunday, June 15, is Father's Day. A familiar Bible text regarding fathers is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Although this story is usually told from the perspective of the "lost son," what about the father in the story? What was his responsibility? And how does he respond to the wanderings—and return—of his son?

The word *prodigal* means being "rashly or wastefully extravagant," or "giving in abundance." With those definitions in mind, the father could be said to be "prodigal," too—generous in bestowing mercy and grace upon his wayward son.

The parable is found in Luke 15:11–32. Please read it first; then answer the following questions.

According to verse 12, the younger son asks for his portion of his father's estate. Under Mosaic law, the younger son was entitled to one-half of what the older son would receive (Deut. 21:17). When the younger son asks for his portion, what, in effect, is he saying to his father?

The son goes off to a "far country," where he spends his money in extravagant living. Broke and despondent, he comes to his senses. What conclusion does he come to (vv. 18–19)?

When the father sees his son approaching, what does he do (v. 20)?

By providing a robe and other accessories, and throwing a party, what is the father saying to his son (vv. 22–24)?

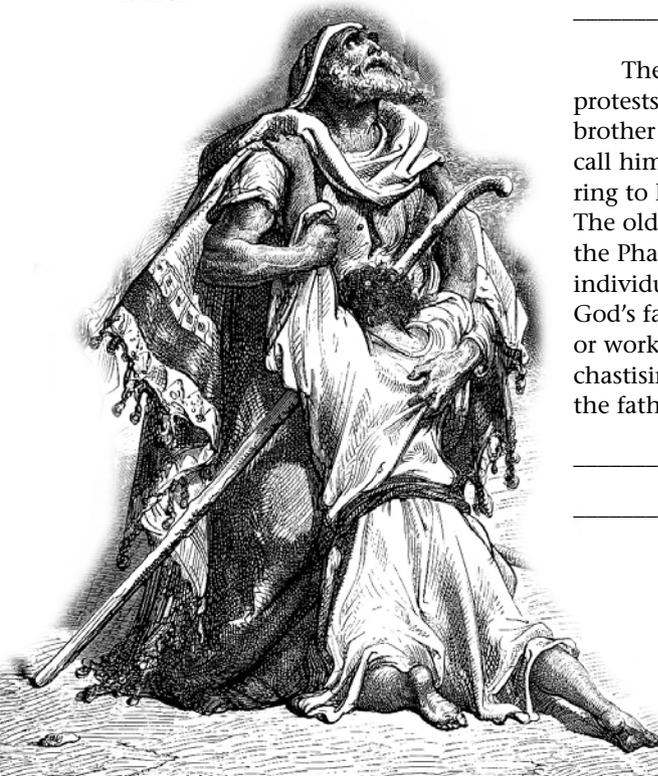
The older son is indignant. He protests the gracious treatment his brother is receiving. He refuses to call him "my brother," instead referring to him as "this son of yours." The older son probably represents the Pharisees and other self-righteous individuals who believe they earn God's favor through their character or works (see Luke 15:2). Rather than chastising his older son, what does the father say to him (vv. 31–32)?

The father's reaction to his younger son's return is in line with what Jesus says about the sheep that strays but returns. What happens in heaven when the repentant sinner returns to the fold (Luke 15:4–7)?

The graciousness of the father in this parable reflects the disposition of the heavenly Father toward His children. In fact, Scripture uses the word *Abba* (Aramaic for "Father") to describe the loving nature of God (see Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15). Do you view God as "Father"?

The father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son shows us how God the Father relates to His children. God is merciful, for He does not give us what we deserve (His wrath and punishment for sin), and He is gracious, for He gives us what we do not deserve (forgiveness and restoration through faith alone in Jesus Christ). Although this parable speaks to all people, it contains a special message for earthly fathers: What kind of father are you? Do you reflect the love of the heavenly Father, or do your children see something else? May the love of God be found in all earthly fathers!

Rev. Ben Eder is pastor of Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kenmore, N.Y.





Peace in Anxious Times

We are living in a time of anxiety, conflict, and concern.

People are anxious today about employment and job stability; about the price of gas, other fuels, and food; and about the future leadership of our country.

Armed conflict continues in Iraq as news reports implicate Iran in the equipping and training of militias there. There is conflict in our own country over the war and such other issues as immigration reform. We see conflict among and within political parties, in some of our congregations, and even in our families.

People are concerned and worried.

It's easy at times like this to lose our focus on why we are here. Thoughts become fixed on the matters that face us in life. Our focus can become centered on ourselves rather than on God and why He created us and has blessed us so richly.

The apostle Paul understood this human proclivity for worry and anxiety. He had pastoral counsel for those who are anxious. He wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7).

Paul's counsel to the Philippians was to focus on the Lord rather than on themselves.

Some may think that this is easy for Paul to say. He didn't face the same issues or conflict or troubles we face today. The truth is, though, that Paul knew trouble. He wrote to the Corinthians that he had been imprisoned, beaten severely, and exposed to death repeatedly.

"Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one," he wrote. "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers" (2 Cor. 11:24-26).

Paul was no stranger to conflict and danger. Still, he says to rejoice! The Lord is near! In a spirit of thanksgiving, he counsels, go to Him in prayer with your requests.

This would be my pastoral counsel as well. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

This is the God who knows everything. Not even a little bird falls to the ground without His knowledge. He knows what worries us, what troubles we face, and what concerns are on our minds. He knows, and He cares. He cares so much that He sent His Son to the cross to forgive us our sins and to assure us of life in all its fullness.

He cares for you!

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

I leave you with this thought, in the words of St. Paul: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The second stanza of a favorite hymn, "Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me" (*LSB* 722), says it nicely:

Lord, when the tempest rages, I need not fear,

For You, the Rock of Ages, are always near.

Close by Your side abiding, I fear no foe,

For when Your hand is guiding, in peace I go.

Lives Transformed through
Christ, in Time . . . for Eternity!

e-mail: president@lcms.org

Web page: www.lcms.org/president

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16-17