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Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

"Engage Others with Jesus."



And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:16)

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From the President

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

Here’s food for thought. In the familiar account of Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha, one English version translates Luke 10:42 this way: “Mary has chosen the best dish, and she is not to be dragged away from it” (Moffat). In essence, Jesus asks which is most important—food for the body or food for the soul?

What did Mary hear that day in the little town of Bethany as she sat at the feet of Jesus? No doubt it was especially the comforting message of Jesus’ mission in the world to seek and to save the lost. His life-giving Gospel, which tells about sinners having forgiveness and solid hope for heaven through faith in His life, death, and resurrection is always at the heart of what Jesus has to say for people of every era. “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63).

Eighty-five years ago in our church body, Jesus’ comment about “one thing needful” (NKJV) in relation to Mary at Bethany gained a little extra significance. It was in the summer of 1927. Our synod, while meeting in convention at Lake Mills, Iowa, officially assumed ownership of Bethany Lutheran College. Ever since, the college has held as its motto ΕΝΟΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΧΡΕΙΑ, that of the first Bethany training sessions from our Lord. But this is not just a nice phrase for the catalog. Bethany has a true concern over living out this all-encapsulating axiom of the world’s one and only Savior on our beautiful Mankato campus.



As a synod, we thank God for the men and women who serve at our synod’s college. What a remarkable blessing to have dedicated faculty and staff! Where would our synod be without our beloved college? In 1927, 63 students were enrolled; today there are around 600. The words of Rev. Sigurd Ylvisaker from that time still apply—by God’s grace—to our college today:

I wish to add that we have been fortunate again this year in having a very efficient faculty which had the chief burdens to carry, and through their efficient teaching and the spirit of Christian conduct and fellowship which they have been instrumental in maintaining and developing here, another happy chapter has been lived in our young life here at Bethany... May God increase this blessing daily. (taken from *1928 Synod Report*, p. 96)

Many former church colleges and universities in America have drifted considerably from their once rather Biblical foundations, and the trend poses a danger also for any church-run center of higher learning. What we have at Bethany is not to be taken for granted. We are grateful to God for faithful teachers, administrators, and regents at our college. Hundreds of lives are being touched with the same Gospel Mary heard. Some are even hearing it for the very first time.

Friends, remember our dear college as we seek to engage others with Jesus! What a spiritual dish we have to pass!



John A. Moldstad

For What Life Are We Training?

I wrote a quadratic equation triumphantly on the chalkboard. “When are we ever going to use THAT?” the student asked, or rather declared, since it wasn’t really a question. Anybody who has taught children burgeoning into adulthood has faced the challenge. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*: When are we going to need that? Memorize “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”: I can read it, can’t I? Diagramming sentences: When are we ever going to do that? Memorize the Office of the Keys: The WHAT? When will we have to remember that?

Teachers might be tempted to be defensive or dismissive or even sympathetic. But whether the students know it or not, and whether they are ready for the answer or not, they are posing a question to which they will have to find an answer. What they are really asking is, “What kind of a world are we growing up in where things like this are important?” And there is a corollary, “Are these things really important to the world in which we are growing up?”

Our Lutheran schools are in the position to answer those key questions and to assign them their true relative importance, and the answer is not in any way utilitarian. We don’t have to tick off seven uses for the quadratic formula and three uses for diagramming. We don’t have to justify what we teach because of the certainty that they will find a specific use for it, or because what we teach will be enough for them to cope with the world in which they will live. After all, we live in a world in which only the grace of Christ is enough.

Think of that. Jesus told Paul in the midst of his afflictions, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is God’s grace that puts everything into true perspective. Make the school a cloister where the children would memorize the Bible in its entirety and it isn’t enough to win God’s favor. Teach every bit of

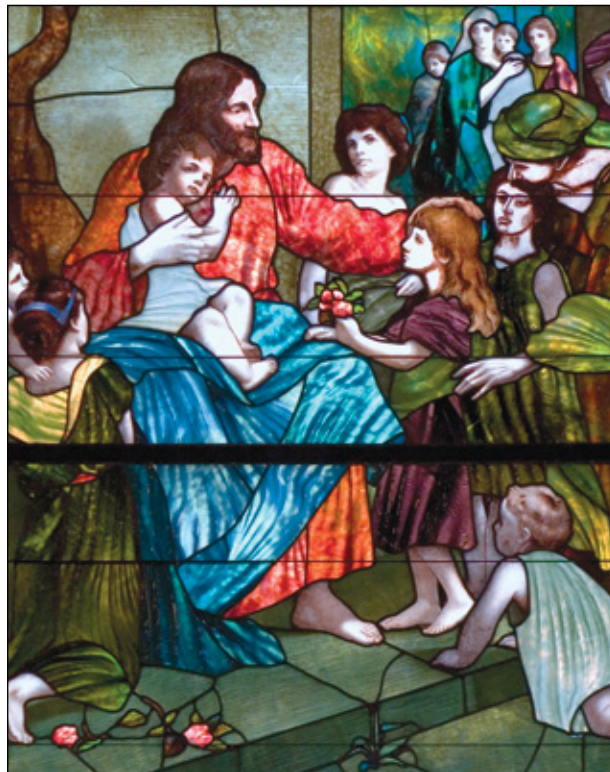
human wisdom and it will eventually come to nothing. Heal all diseases, bestow wealth upon everyone, and it would not be enough. The world would still be broken by sin; there would still be death and judgment. Only grace is enough; only the grace of Christ is sufficient. This truth is the foundation of the Lutheran school.

Children will not earn heaven by learning the Christian faith, but they will learn about the grace of God, and they will carry with them the words by which Christ speaks to them, words of grace: “Rejoice, your sins are forgiven.” In the midst of trial, “The kingdom ours remaineth,” “Come to me you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). The message of the Christian faith is God’s grace.

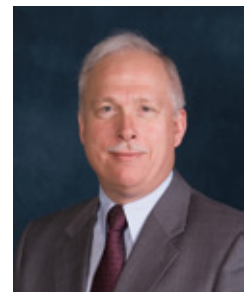
Likewise, factoring polynomials is not the way to eternal life. Yet, every Christian student will be given a number of vocations in this life in which he or she will serve others, and, by grace, this service to others is counted as a gift also to the Lord. Who knows what vocation to which God in

His providence will call any given student, and by that person be a blessing to others? No amount of learning is enough to earn God’s favor, but by grace everything, even the least thing we do in love and faith, is sanctified and counted as a gift to Him.

In our schools, we teach in order to prepare our children for this world, a world in which only the Grace of Christ is enough.



Edward Bryant is pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Lombard, Illinois.



“Go and Make Disciples”

Where have you seen the words in the above title? If you were confirmed as a child, then you memorized them from the *Small Catechism*, where it cites Matthew 28:18–20 as the word and command of God concerning Baptism. You may not have recognized the title right away, though, because this excerpt from that passage doesn't mention Baptism. In the full quote, Jesus says:

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things, whatever I have commanded you.

This command has several facets. Jesus is commanding His apostles (and through them, His Church on earth, i.e., all believers) to “go.” There is one main thing He tells them to do: “Make disciples of all the nations.” That includes every human being. But there are two sub-parts of this, or perhaps two steps in the process of making disciples. First, it's “baptizing them.” Since it's Baptism in God's name, the power behind it is really God's power, yet He commanded His Church to do this as one of the two steps in making disciples. The other step, “teaching them,” is equally important. How much should we teach? “All things” that Jesus has taught and commanded Himself. There is no minimum satisfactory requirement (like the catechism or Sunday school), beyond which all other teaching is optional. We are to teach it all.

These things are the business of the Church. It's not meant to be entertaining or diverting. It's not even meant to be particularly uplifting, though that's usually a nice side effect of the teaching. It's meant to make disciples. That is, to make students of Jesus out of people who were His enemies. These disciples, of all ages, are the ones who live daily in repentance and forgiveness, and who have the God-given certainty of eternal life.

If you would like to be a disciple of Jesus, then you need to consider this passage. Baptism gives us faith in Jesus, but He also wants His children to be taught God's Word. Lutherans do that in a number of ways. Three of these ways are urged upon us in God's Word: the preaching of the Gospel, formal catechesis or instruction in the faith, and the instruction of children in the Christian home. It is the church's responsibility to see that these accompany Baptism, so that Jesus' command is followed as He gave it.

Baptism saves, but not magically, as though the act itself was powerful. Baptism saves because Jesus made it so, by connecting the divine name and God's Word to simple water. The power to save is in the Word, not in the water, the outward motions, or any traditions that mortal man has attached to it. The same Word is what Jesus has commanded

us to teach, “whatever I have commanded you.” If we fail to teach the Word to those who have been baptized, then we have neglected—or even despised—the very power in Baptism that saves.

Among Lutherans, that teaching begins in the home and continues through formal catechesis, or instruction connected with a congregation. When the youth in a church are ready to learn, we take advantage of their learning ability by having them memorize the chief teachings of Christianity, as summarized in the *Small Catechism*. It's meant to be quite challenging, and since many schools no longer challenge children as much as in the past, confirmation class is often the first time our youth must exercise such discipline and perseverance. Parents must also persevere, as they are the only ones providing the daily discipline their children need to complete the course and excel. It can be difficult for everyone involved, but the end result is worth the effort. When Confirmation classes are completed and the youth confirmed, they have a solid foundation for understanding our faith, their Baptism, and the world around them. They are also prepared to receive Holy Communion together with the rest of the Church. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me” (Matthew 19:14). This is what it looks like among Lutherans, and it has been a blessing for generations. Once confirmed, our youth are expected to continue learning as they regularly attend the Divine Service and take advantage of other opportunities with God's Word, such as Bible classes.

When adults come to our churches, drawn by the Gospel to become disciples of Jesus, they must also receive Baptism (if they haven't already) and instruction in the Word. Their instruction includes the same *Small Catechism*, as well as other resources. As part of their instruction, they are expected to demonstrate their genuine interest through regular attendance at the Divine Service. Adults are not required to memorize the *Small Catechism*, though it is certainly encouraged. They tend to find memorization harder than children, and since they often carry the responsibilities of providing a home for their families, it would be unreasonable to demand the hours needed every week for memorization. However, adults cover the Biblical teachings in more depth than children do, and they more readily understand the importance of continuing to learn on their own as disciples of Jesus.

In these ways, the Lutheran Church has honored the command of Jesus. May they bless you as generations have already been blessed.

Jesse Jacobsen is pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Hood River, Oregon, and Bethany Lutheran Church in The Dalles, Oregon.



They're Not "Just Teenagers"

Challenging Christian Youth to Be Involved in Their Church

A common myth about U.S. teenagers is that they do not care about religion. Although there is a growing church attendance "dropout" rate for those in their twenties, studies demonstrate that youth ages 13–18 who have been raised in the church are more concerned about religion than those in their late twenties, thirties, and even forties.

In 2002, George Gallup, Jr., reported that American teens are also more intense (and typically more conservative) about their beliefs than they will be by the time they reach age thirty. Those who drop away from the church are more likely to do so in college than in high school. The primary factors for defecting seem to be the influence of friends, enjoying new-found freedoms, involvement with a new love interest, or the influence of non-Christian instructors at secular schools.

How can Christian teens stay involved in their congregations? It is important for parents, pastors, and church leaders to encourage their youth to be involved in service to their Lord so they can experience being a part of the church's eternal mission. We all want to be part of a cause bigger than ourselves. How much "bigger" can you get than "holding up the prophet's hands" as they point people to the gates of heaven?! If we treat teens only as the church of the future, some may not be there in the future.

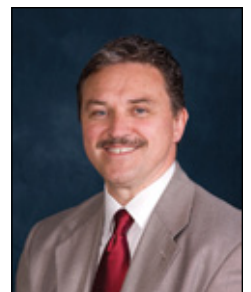
Here are some ways teens can participate in the work of their local churches:

- Teach Vacation Bible School or Sunday School (some recent confirmands make the best teachers)
- Use musical talents to enhance worship
- Assist the pastor on shut-in calls (I know a fifth-grade boy who would dress in a suit to accompany his pastor)
- Help elderly members
- Serve on committees as a junior member, non-voting—such as Evangelism, Trustees, or Membership committees (some teens can be amazing at talking about their faith)
- Visit nursing homes to sing or play hymns on the piano
- Have youth groups sing Christmas carols at homes of shut-ins
- Assist with counting the offering at church
- Use your skills with photography, video, or audio equipment
- Serve as webmaster for your church website
- Establish and update a Facebook page for your church
- Help out on special clean-up days
- Provide babysitting for church functions
- Serve a special meal at church, such as during Advent, Lent, or Easter

If you are a teen who would like to find some way to be involved, ask your pastor for suggestions on appropriate ways to use your talents and gifts in the church. God promises to bless the faithful service of His chosen people, whether young or old.



Donald Moldstad is chaplain at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota.



Our Comfort in Christ's Work of Sanctification

“To sanctify” means “to make holy.” This is not the same as “to justify,” which means “to declare one acquitted.” Sanctification is a process, justification is instantaneous. Sanctification occurs within us, justification took place outside us. Sanctification happens over time. Justification occurred once for all in eternity. To use the same word “holy” in comparison, sanctification is a process within our hearts and lives of becoming more holy. Justification is God’s declaration that for Jesus’ sake, on account of Jesus’ holiness, He declares us holy, because Christ’s holiness covers our unholiness. Justification saves us, while sanctification is our response of thanks by trying gratefully to do what God asks and commands.

In Christ’s perfect justification, which He earned by fighting temptation and winning this battle, God found reason to charge His Son’s perfection to us. What a great, great comfort Jesus gives us!

The good works we do and the avoidance of sin, indeed the very desire to struggle against sin, are the result of faith in God’s remission of our sins. St. John wrote, “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Consider these other Bible passages:

- “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11).
- “Forgiving one another, as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).
- “Giving thanks unto the Father, who...has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12–14).

- “In all these things, [tribulations, sorrows, etc.], we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Romans 5:3–11; 8:37).
- We fight against the flesh with its “affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

The Gospel produces sanctification in us, not the Law. For the Law cannot give us the power to bring about its fulfillment. St. Paul puts it this way: the Law is “weak through the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

The Gospel, in contrast with the Law, brings about its own acceptance. It is the power of God unto salvation, as Paul says, “Faith comes by hearing and what is heard is the message of Christ” (Romans 10:17). But the Gospel does even more. It brings about the desire to keep God’s Law, for the Gospel alone tells us of God’s goodness and mercy and love and pardon in Christ. And it is the Gospel’s power that gives us the strength to keep the Law at least to a

degree, though we will never reach perfection in this life.

We must always remember that our works, even those done in faith, don’t take on value that causes God to forgive and save us, since God demands perfection and these are never perfect works.

“The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).



James P. Olsen is an ELS pastor emeritus living in Ontario, Wisconsin.

Using Technology to Spread the Gospel

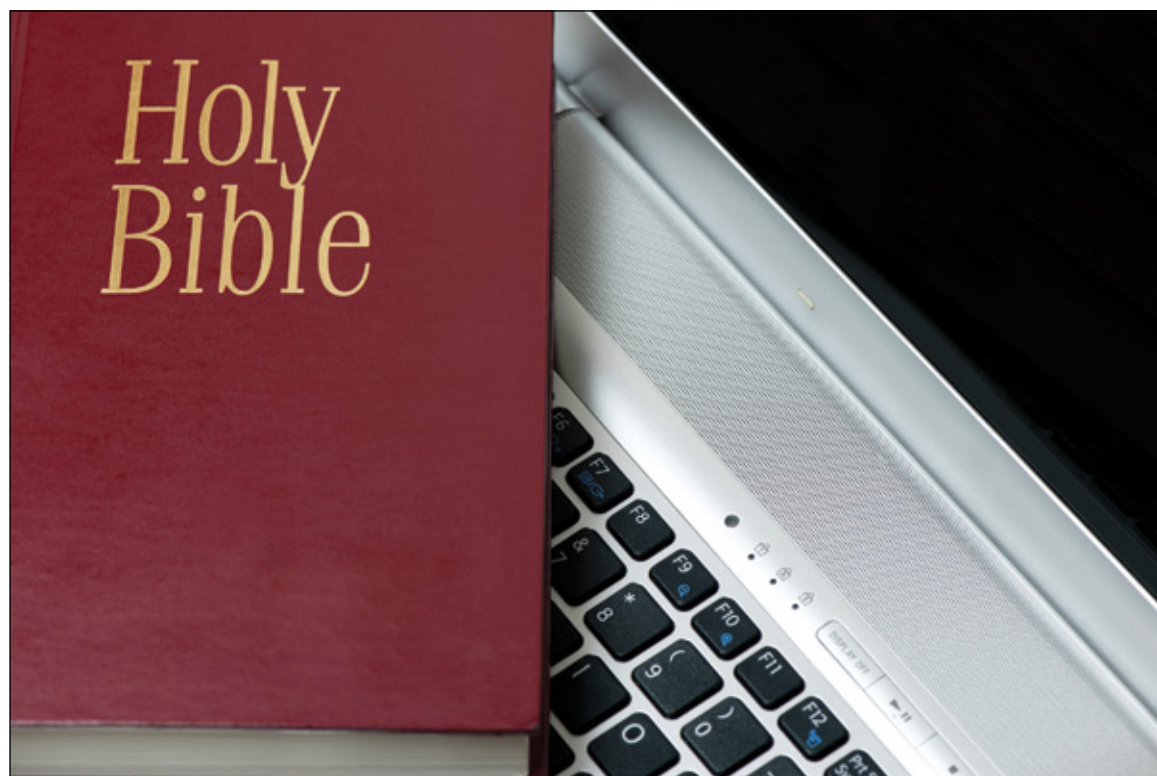
The year 1453 saw the invention of a printing press with moveable type. A few decades later, Martin Luther and his colleagues published various editions of the Bible, and treatises promoting the message of the Reformation, which were spread throughout Europe on a scale that could not have been possible without the printing press.

The year 1900 saw the invention of the first radio device capable of transmitting the human voice. Thirty years later, the first broadcast of the “Lutheran Hour,” with Walter A. Maier as speaker, went out over the air. This was one of many examples that were to follow over the years, of Lutherans using this technology to bring the Gospel message to people at a physical distance.

The new communications technology of our time is the Internet. But the Internet differs from print and broadcast media in a very significant way: it is available to everyone. If someone wants to get his message out to the world, he does not need to persuade a publishing house to print his book, or a broadcasting company to air his program. He can go online himself and with a minimal expense—or perhaps with no expense at all—the information he wants to disseminate can be made available, either to the world as a whole (or at least to as much of the world as has a computer and an Internet connection), or to specific people at a distance whom he wants to reach.

It is very easy for a Lutheran congregation to establish an online presence. There are some website hosting companies that make it very easy for a person or organization to

create and publish a site, even if the person or organization in question lacks the skills of a professional website designer. The website for the church I serve—redeemerscottsdale.org—is “Exhibit A” of this possibility! Our web space, within the very user-friendly Angelfire website hosting company, costs about \$32 per year. And our domain name, acquired through the related Lycos company, costs about \$13 per year. It is easy to post digital photographs and other images, and the texts of sermons, essays, and other written materials, on



such a website. No special computer program is required. If a congregation is able to retain the services of a professional, it can, of course, produce a more sophisticated-looking presence on the web. But if this is not feasible, a functional website can be had for relatively little cost.

Preparing video recordings of a service or sermon for posting on a website would require a certain level of investment in recording and editing equipment, and someone with the competency to prepare such video files for posting. But posting audio-only recordings is, again, very easy. What is

needed is a digital recorder, preferably one that records in the popular mp3 format. An audio editing program can be helpful too, but even that is not necessary if the audio files do not need to be modified before they are uploaded.

I am aware of several people in various states and countries who listen regularly to the recordings of worship services that are posted each week on our website. Some of these people are unable physically to attend church where they live, either because they are shut-ins, or because they live in places where there is no orthodox Lutheran church. There may be many more who benefit from these recordings, of whom I am not aware. Perhaps the Lord will grant us the privilege, in His eternal kingdom, of meeting people we never knew in this life, who were brought to faith, or sustained in their faith, by means of the sermons that were preached at our little church.

Members of our congregation who may miss church from time to time, because of illness, travel, or work obligations, are likewise able to listen to these recordings. Our members refer their unchurched friends to them as well, as an evangelism outreach.

The Internet can also be used for live, interactive meetings and classes. The Committee on ELS Worship, on which I served, held most of its meetings via the Skype internet conferencing program. The members of our committee were able to see each other and speak to each other, even though we were physically located in several different states spread out over three time zones. We were able to get more work done, at much less cost, because of the Internet and what it offered.

The Arizona congregation that I serve has taken on a regional character and is not simply a neighborhood congregation. Many of our members live at a significant distance and therefore would find it difficult to travel to the church for a mid-week Bible study. Others, too—because of a busy schedule, or difficulty in travelling at night—are not able to attend such a physical gathering at the church. So, our church has a study group that “meets” one evening per week via Skype.

Another benefit of holding a class like this over the Internet is that we can occasionally bring guests from other places into the group. We once did a study of a book that had been written by several authors. Many of them were willing to join us from their homes on the evening when the particular chapter they wrote was being discussed by our group, and to participate in that discussion. I have also conducted afternoon catechism classes in this way, for catechumens who live at a distance from me and from each other. Additional uses of the Internet in such a way could include holding occasional online regional pastors’ “winkels,” for circuits that are spread out over a large territory.

There may be limitations concerning the degree to which some churches and individuals are able to use the Internet for such purposes. People with slower “dial-up” connections cannot easily connect to online programs like Skype or download large audio files. People who have no Internet connection at all obviously cannot benefit from this technology.

However, from the perspective of our Biblical, Lutheran theology, there are some things that simply cannot be done over the Internet. For example, the kind of personal pastoral oversight that is required for the proper celebration of the Lord’s Supper cannot really be exercised over the Internet, with a webcast that is (or could be) going out to people and places all over the world. The *Formula of Concord* also confesses, on the basis of Scripture, that the Lord’s institution requires that “his words are *spoken over* the bread and cup,” and that “the *consecrated* bread and cup are distributed” (emphasis added). The lack of physical “connectedness” between pastor, elements, and communicants that is inherent in electronic communication makes this impossible.

So, while the Internet may be used for church activities that are the equivalent of what Jesus did when He preached publicly to anyone who was there to listen, it may not be used for the equivalent of what Jesus did when He gathered with the closed circle of His disciples in the upper room, to give them—bodily, by His own hand—the Sacrament of His body and blood.

Pastors should also make sure that they are not (perhaps unintentionally) engaging in an unethical form of “sheep-stealing,” if people who belong to other churches are invited into an online study group that they lead. (Our general policy is to ask non-members who belong to other churches to inform their pastors of their desire to participate in our group.) Certain legal issues may also need to be considered, if recordings of copyrighted hymn texts or hymn tunes that were sung and played in a recorded worship service are posted on a website, or if they are posted for longer than the “fair use” provisions of copyright law would allow. But a church should be able to work its way through these matters with little difficulty and find numerous and fruitful ways to utilize the Internet for outreach and education.

This new communications technology presents great opportunities that the Lord of the church—and the King of the universe—is making available to us. Let us take advantage of these opportunities—in the spirit of Luther and Maier—to His glory!

David Jay Webber is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona, and a member of the ELS Doctrine Committee.



Pastor, I Have a Question...

Question: *In the middle of the night, before I wake, I dream I have an urgent destination I cannot reach. I wake and our country's problems keep me awake. What will the future bring?*

Answer:

No one knows the future or what dreams mean except God. God permitted some people to know the future. Pharaoh dreamt about the future. His dreams haunted him. Learning that Joseph told Pharaoh's cupbearer the meaning of his dreams, Pharaoh sent for him. Joseph answered, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16).

Dreams may trouble us also. The future can be worrisome at times. God alone gives us "an answer of peace."

God has not sent us people through whom He interprets dreams. The Biblical prophets foretold the future primarily to prepare the world for the birth of His Son. Their words are recorded in the Bible and fulfilled in Jesus, about whom Isaiah prophesied: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Jesus saves us from evil that plagues us. God adopts us as His children. He washes us clean of all our iniquity through the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is our Prophet, who speaks words of love to us. In His Word, Jesus prepares us for the future, comforts us in trying times, assures us when we are frightened, and gives us peace of mind and heart during both good and trying times.

God's children turn to Jesus when dreams trouble them; that is, they turn to His Word when they struggle, and He answers. Jesus reminds them that they ought not to trust in anything other than God. The major problem with worry is that people trust money, a retirement fund, an insurance policy, or the strength of government. When such things prove themselves to be less than reliable, we worry.

The almighty God is still in heaven. God promises to use His authority to bless His people. He always rules over all things. He keeps us in the palms of His hands. Paul said:

What is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:19-23).

When troubles keep us awake at night, review God's promises and recite His words. We are His people. He loves us. Should worries persist, review how faithful God has always been even during trying times.

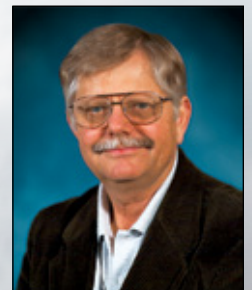
Betrayed by his brothers, sold as a slave, and imprisoned for years, Joseph took comfort in God's grace: "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:19-20).

When troubles disturb sleep, review the last catastrophe that troubled your sleep. God kept His promise. He took care of you, even if you don't remember. God is always faithful.


Should God in His grace allow troubles that do not end, He promises to deliver us from all evil, granting us a blessed end when He graciously takes us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. (The explanation to the Seventh Petition.)

Send your questions to:

Pastor Charles Keeler
117 Ruby Lake Dr.,
Winter Haven, FL 33884



Charles Keeler is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.



Youth Notes

Building a Life Worth Living **Building Self-Control**

It seems that not much time passes these days between stories of mass murder in our country. The attempted assassination of a Congresswoman in Arizona; moviegoers gunned down in Colorado; worshippers attacked in Wisconsin. Crazy or not, the killers have something in common—a complete lack of self-control over their own anti-social behavior.

Contrast those infamous characters with Olympic athletes who recently competed in London, England. During the past four years, the men and women who participated in the Olympic games spent hours each day perfecting their skills. Exhibiting extraordinary self-control, they ran countless miles, swam countless laps, shot basketballs and arrows, rowed boats and rode bikes, jumped on trampolines, wrestled, vaulted, and tumbled.

It's hard for me to comprehend either extreme. How can a person abandon human civility and cause such mayhem? On the other hand, how can a person hit a shuttlecock back and forth for eight hours a day?

The writers of the Bible talk a lot about self-control. Apparently, the lack thereof has been a longstanding problem. When building a life worth living, there are a couple of things to keep in mind.

First, be mindful of the fact that the loss of self-control could have eternal consequences. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he encouraged them to be like athletes preparing for a race. In his analogy, he reminded them that the stakes were high. They were not racing for a wreath or medals; the prize was an eternity in heaven.

Second, be grateful that Jesus had perfect self-control. Think of all the times He was tempted to sin. Never did He give in!

There were thrilling victories throughout the recent Olympic games. There were some catastrophic failures as well. One diver scored a less-than-perfect 0.00 when he landed flat on his back. One commentator called it the “worst dive in Olympics history.” An American track star fell in the finals of a race and lost her dream of winning a gold medal. Each athlete trained for years only to be disappointed.



Your Savior has already won the prize of heaven for you. Still, don't run aimlessly or box as one beating the air. Discipline yourself. Ask God for help when you feel weak. Stand on Jesus' forgiveness when you falter. I'm sure it would be awesome to stand on the podium with an Olympic medal draped over your neck. It'll be more awesome standing beside your Savior in heaven someday!

Daniel Madson is a former school teacher and a member of Abiding Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin.





Treasurer's Report

Summary of Income from Congregations

Budget	Actual	Balance
\$725,000	\$385,663	\$339,337

Contributions for July 2012:

Congregations - Budget \$51,991

Designated Contributions

Synod Fund	\$315
Church Extension	\$142
Home Outreach	\$1,126
World Outreach (general)	\$100
Parish Education and Youth	\$15
World Needs	\$2,040
India	\$1,668
Peru	\$288
Chile	\$25
Korea	\$1,793
Lutheran Schools of America	\$155
Cross-stitch	\$275
Thoughts of Faith	\$7,209

Other Revenue

Seminary Salary Reimbursement	\$20,000
Royalties	\$61
MAP	\$125,000
Registrations	\$19,380
Subscriptions	\$8,516
Publications	\$64
Estates	\$2,725

Total \$242,889

Memorials for July 2012

Gifts Received for the Synod in Memory of Memorial by

Marie Zawacki

Silas and Mary Born - Mankato, MN

Harold Brass

Norma Ring Roerig - Combined Locks, WI

Rose Heikes

Faith Lutheran Church - Clara City, MN

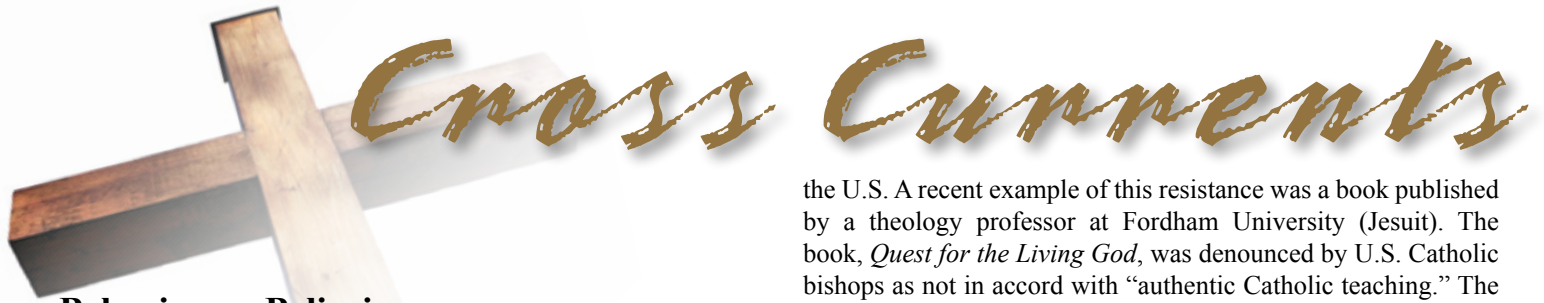
Gifts Received for the Seminary in Memory of Memorial by

Emily Doepel

Martin and Martha Doepel - Eau Claire, WI

Harold Loe

Gaylin and Rebecca Schmeling - Mankato, MN



Cross Currents

Behavior vs. Believing

You have maybe seen them. If a parent, you may have even bought them. They are called VeggieTales, and they could be found in the children's section of a Christian bookstore or perhaps in a church preschool. These videos were an attempt to teach Bible stories through vegetable cartoon characters, such as Larry the Cucumber and Bob the Tomato. Such characters would seem harmless enough. They were characters that appealed to children, as their producers sought to teach Christian values. VeggieTales videos were meant primarily for a Christian market, but eventually, they appealed to a wider audience. Throughout the 1990s, they became quite a success story.

That was then. VeggieTales are no more; that is, they are no longer under the control of the man who created the whole enterprise, Phil Vischer. The production company eventually went bankrupt and changed hands.

Meanwhile, a change was taking place in the heart of Mr. Vischer. He became a man with a new perspective on the videos that he had once produced. Here is how he put it: "[The videos] convinced the kids to behave Christianly without teaching them Christianity." He went on to explain: "You can say 'Hey kids, be more forgiving because the Bible says so,' or 'Hey kids, be more kind because the Bible says so!' But that is not Christianity, it's morality."

He indeed was on to something, a different perspective than what he once had. He now sees Americans drinking what he calls "a dangerous cocktail." He adds, "Our gospel has become a gospel of following your dreams and being good so God will make all your dreams come true. It's the Oprah god. We've completely taken this Disney notion of 'when you wish upon a star, your dreams come true' and melded that with faith and come up with something completely different."

The VeggieTales videos lacked the true motivation for a Christian life. That which alone can provide the true motivation is found alone in the Gospel about Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life for us and shed His innocent blood on the cross for our redemption, "that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The Pope and "Catholic Identity"

Various Roman Catholic sources have reported that Pope Benedict XVI wants U.S. Catholic colleges and universities to do more to affirm their "Catholic identity." He had reference particularly to ensuring that the faculties and staffs of these institutions be in line with Roman Catholic teaching. He singled out the church law requirement that Roman Catholic theology teachers have a mandate to teach Catholic doctrine. It was noted that there has been continuous resistance against this mandate in

the U.S. A recent example of this resistance was a book published by a theology professor at Fordham University (Jesuit). The book, *Quest for the Living God*, was denounced by U.S. Catholic bishops as not in accord with "authentic Catholic teaching." The Pope was concerned about the confusion resulting from "instances of apparent dissidence between some representatives of Catholic institutions and the Church's pastoral leadership." "Such discord," he added, "harms the Church's witness."

We, of course, cannot join the Pope in his attempts to reinforce the teaching of Roman Catholic doctrine and solidify "Catholic identity." However, one can understand that the Pope would be concerned about the more liberal philosophy that has influence in Roman Catholic academic circles.

But this is not only a problem in the Roman Catholic Church. The same situation exists in other denominations, Lutherans included. The loss of "Lutheran identity" has already occurred in colleges that once lived up to the name "Lutheran," but which cannot be recognized as Lutheran today. And rare is the college or university that can still wear the identity of "confessional Lutheran." They are a vanishing breed, but are so necessary today. May God preserve their numbers among us.

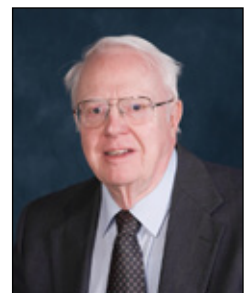
A Responsible Response

In a response to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) statement on human sexuality (Human Sexuality—Gift and Trust), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has a well-crafted statement of its own, in which it upholds the true Scriptural position on marriage. The LCMS response goes into some depth and can be treated only briefly here. It states, for instance: "One may not appeal to 'God made me this way' as a justification for sexual sin any more than he or she could invoke this for any other sinful inclination or behavior." The response also says that by redefining marriage as something more than the union of one man with one woman, the ELCA document "represents a radical departure from what God has instituted and it opens the way for the church to bless what God condemns."

Part of the ELCA document argues for what it calls "conscience-bound beliefs." The LCMS statement responds: "Where conscience-bound beliefs govern rather than the Word of God, we are led to what Luther sees as an identifying mark of the theologian of glory. Such a theologian, Luther asserts, 'calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.'"

To condone and defend the practice of same-sex marriage, as does the ELCA document in its essence, is in direct conflict with the theology of the cross. The LCMS document is a responsible, and Scriptural, response.

Paul Madson is an ELS pastor emeritus living in North Mankato, Minnesota.



Luther: Vocation as God's Calling

A frequent subject in Dr. Martin Luther's works (sermons, commentaries, tracts) is the Biblical teaching concerning Christian vocation. It is God's calling of the Christian to serve his or her neighbor in love, not only through one's occupation, but in the natural orders of spouse, parent, and child. Usually, a Christian is called by God into a multitude of offices all at the same time.

Luther especially became aware of this teaching as he worked through his guilt over breaking his vows taken as a monk. He came to realize those vows were sinful since by taking them he fled legitimate God-given vocations to serve self. He would regretfully recall how he joined his fellow monks as beggars in their vows of poverty, taking from neighbors so that they could confine themselves behind walls, giving attention to personal spiritual quests through prayers and devotions. Their vows of celibacy were taken even against natural desires to be married in order to serve self. All of this had the cloak of piety, giving the appearance of service to God, but God serves His creation through human vocations, not man-made attempts to flee vocations.

While it is taught throughout the Scriptures, one of the clearest and most concise passages that speaks of Christian vocation is 1 Corinthians 7:20: "Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called." Luther fled his vocations as son, law student, and productive citizen so that he might serve self in the self-chosen works of monkery.

This "pious" fleeing of vocation is not so unfamiliar among 21st century Christians. In order to flee difficult marriages or challenging parenting issues, Christian spouses and parents will pour themselves into church activities, taking themselves away from the home perhaps several times throughout the week. Charitable community activities can be misused for the same purpose, meanwhile wrongly easing the conscience as home and family disintegrate.

Luther chose to serve self as a monk when he was seeking to make himself right with God through his own efforts. As faith in Christ's work alone for such a right relationship with God grew in his heart, he saw clearly that he was set free from a life pursuing self-righteousness. Being unburdened by the Gospel of salvation in Christ, he was set free to serve his neighbor in his many God-given vocations of husband, father, preacher, professor, and even civil arbiter at times.

Through a proper understanding of vocation in this life, we too need to value the vocations our neighbors have that serve us and how we in turn through ours serve them. We confess in the explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: "[God] has given me my body and soul,

eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; that He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods, and all that I need to support this body and life; that He protects me from all danger, guards and keeps me from all evil." God gives us these gifts and preserves them through such vocations as doctors, nurses, farmers, millers, bakers, grocers, tailors, re-

altors, parents, police, firefighters, and the like.

Through our vocations, made holy offices by the blood of Christ, we have the high privilege of being God's hands, mouth, and heart of flesh in our world today showing His love and compassion to all. We engage our neighbors with Jesus in all our interactions occasioned through our God-given vocations. (For further reading see: *Luther on Vocation* by Gustaf Wingren and *God at Work* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr.)



Glenn Obenberger is co-pastor of Parkland Ev. Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington.



Claiming Your Place

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)*

Most of us, at one time or another, have had the opportunity to claim our place in a congregation of believers. Such a claim was made when you arranged a time for you or your family to be photographed for inclusion in a pictorial church directory. Such a publication is a nice way for us to familiarize ourselves with our brothers and sisters—our spiritual family—that we call our home congregation.

Consider, for a moment, your earthly family. If you were taking a family photo and you arranged for this to happen at the most convenient time possible, when everyone from your family could be around, what would it say if your brother said, “Thanks, but no thanks. I’d rather not be included in the photo.” It says rather a lot, doesn’t it? It would seem to say that your brother no longer lays claim to his birth place in your family. We pray that it would never be! Certainly, he didn’t choose to become part of the family in the first place. It was God who included him in your family to begin with, but it’s your brother who, for reasons maybe only known to himself, is rejecting his God-given claim of sonship in that family.

The evangelist John, the very namesake of the congregation I serve, speaks of our spiritual family claim, one far greater than even our claim to earthly family. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1) “Children of God!—That IS what we are!” What an incredible claim we have! This claim isn’t one that belonged to us by nature, however.

Our natural claim was on the other end of the spectrum: children who could only lay claim to God’s wrath, walking about with sin’s deadly target on our backs (Ephesians 2:4-5). But God, in His great mercy, refrained from heaping His holy wrath upon us. Instead, He lavished Fatherly love upon us. Rather than destroying us, He adopted us as His dear children. He did this by showering us with Love that took human form. He showered us in the Love of Christ.

The Good News—the Gospel of Jesus—is the Love that accomplishes this adoption. The Gospel shares the lovely exchange that took place as Jesus took sin’s deadly target from your back and shouldered it Himself—dying

for your sins. The Gospel adoption papers express that Jesus, through your baptismal waters, drapes upon your back His sinless life, His “robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). Through this love of God lavished upon you in Christ, YOU, dear reader, possess the saving claim “Child of God.”

Children of God. That is what we are! What a glorious claim we have through God’s love in Christ. A hymn writer invites us to sing of this claim:

*Baptized into Your Name most holy,
O Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
I claim a place, though weak and lowly,
Among your saints, Your chosen host.
Buried with Christ and dead to sin,
Your Spirit now shall live within.*

God included us in His family portrait by way of His love in Christ, His Son. He provides us a weekly opportunity to lay claim to our place in His family as we assemble together with our spiritual family around the Gospel of Word and Sacraments—the very Love that made us family in the first place. Our divine services are our weekly opportunities to eagerly claim our place among God’s family. God grant that we cherish every opportunity to claim the childhood God has given us through His Son! And may God the Holy Spirit move us to encourage others who may be neglecting their claim to include themselves again in their God-given family, as well. To that end we pray:

*And never let my purpose falter;
O Father, Son and Holy Ghost;
But keep me faithful to Your Altar,
Til You shall call me from my post.
So unto You I live and die
and praise You ever more on high. AMEN.*

Kyle Madson is co-pastor at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan.



FROM THE EDITOR...

All Things Work for Good

The eighth chapter of the Book of Acts describes a huge transition for the Church of the Way in Jerusalem. As Stephen's body was being buried, Saul began a persecution of others who believed in Jesus as their Savior. This led to an exodus of believers to Judea and Samaria, which led Philip to speak the Gospel to people in the city of Samaria, which led Peter and John to travel to Samaria and baptize these believers. While those who suffered persecution and death at the hands of Saul may have wondered how this disruption of the church in Jerusalem would benefit Christ's Church, St. Luke shows us how the Gospel was actually spread to more people by tribulation.

Those who witnessed the deaths of Stephen and St. James may have also wondered what good God brought to the Church, when they could have lived many years testifying to people about what Jesus did to save all people from their sins. In both cases, these two died at the hands of people who had opposed Jesus. It was God's good will that their witness and faith in Jesus be seen by His enemies. Only God knows how their martyrdom led other people to desire the same faith. This also shows how God was gracious even to the enemies of the truth.

Just over 20 years ago, two of our ELS pastors died of cancer. They also could have had many more years to work in the kingdom of God, but He chose to take them home. The people whom they served have spoken of their unwavering faith and how they were an inspiration to the members who witnessed this.

Last January, we learned that Mrs. Ruth Webber had cancer at the age of 23. Their son, John, is now six months old and is doing well. While we cannot know now how God will turn all this into good, Scripture

declares that God is gracious and merciful, that His wisdom far exceeds ours, and that He will bless those who trust in Him.

Through Internet technology, Ruth's story has been followed around the world. People from Scotland, Peru, Norway, South Korea, and across the U.S. are aware of what is going on and are praying for this family. Thank you to all the ELS and WELS members and congregations, and so many others who have prayed for and helped this family. They have been blessed with

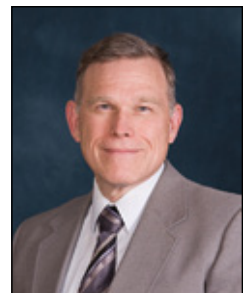
many close and helpful friends. It is truly awesome to see how many people and congregations have given witness of their faith and compassion through the quiet help they have given.

Because of these deeds of kindness, God has already worked much good for the Webber family and for all the rest of us. Perhaps God is using this situation to show how much the Internet can connect us with other people who need to know about Jesus' work of salvation or who need our prayers.

The Bible speaks about the heroes of faith who "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" because they desired a better and heavenly country (Hebrews 11:13). We should always thank God that He has called us by the Gospel, justified us by faith in Jesus, sanctified us by His grace, and promised to take us into heavenly glory. Whether we live two decades or the proverbial four score and ten, God can use the witness of our faith and lives as light and salt to lead people to hear the Gospel and believe on Jesus.

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Theodore Gullixson is pastor of
Grace Lutheran Church in Madison,
Wisconsin.



ART MOST HIGH

One of the first lessons you learn as a teacher is that students learn best when something is taught several different ways. Simply telling them about Gettysburg is good, but when you tell them about it and show them pictures of the battlefield, look at paintings and pictures of the battle, read letters written by some of the soldiers, and make them draw maps of the area, the lesson usually sinks in better.

The church has understood this for many years. Our worship and our learning about Jesus involve not only our ears, but also our voices, our mouths, our fingers, and especially our eyes. Lutherans have always understood the importance of pictures and of art as a way to communicate the Gospel. This is why so many Lutheran churches used seasonal colors, altar paintings, and stained glass windows. The builders knew that a child might not understand all the words being spoken in



church, but they understand a stained glass window of Jesus holding a lamb. They knew that a person's mind might wander during the sermon, but a painting over the altar of a Bible story meant that their minds would never be far from the Gospel message.

There is a trend in modern church architecture to construct churches like auditoriums, where the walls are essentially bare, without even windows, so there is nothing to distract you from the person in front of you on the stage or screen. And when your church is all about a preacher, this architecture works well.

But the focus of our preaching is not the preacher, or the choir, or the musicians. "We preach Christ crucified," (1 Corinthians 1:23) and thus, as Lutherans, we fill our sanctuaries with art and music that reinforce that message so that our minds will always be fixed where true joys are to be found.



Alexander Ring is co-pastor of Parkland Ev. Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington.

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