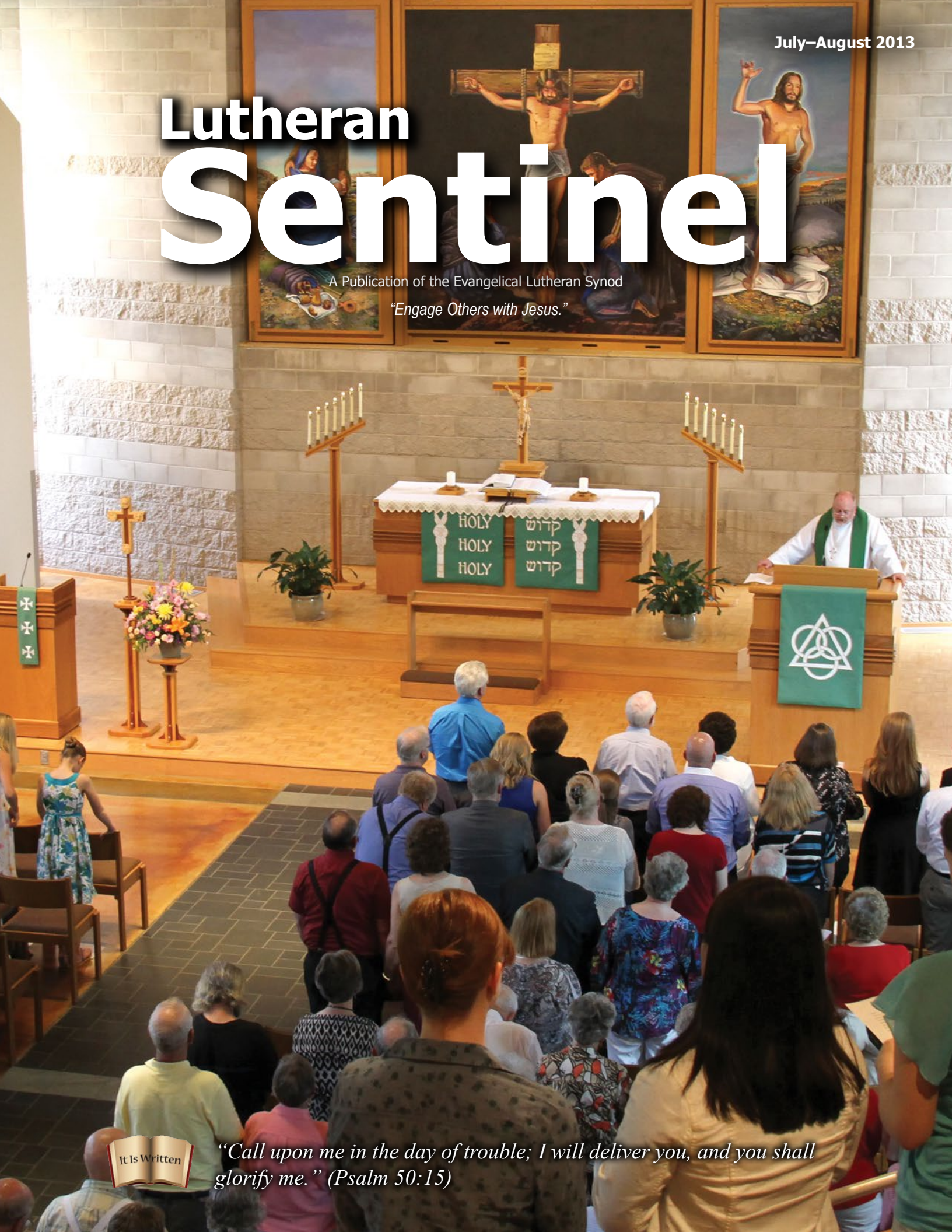


# Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*"Engage Others with Jesus."*



It Is Written

*"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." (Psalm 50:15)*

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**Lutheran Sentinel**

July–August 2013

VOLUME 96  
NUMBER 4  
ISSN 0024-7510

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Published by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 6 Browns Court, Mankato, MN 56001.

The *Lutheran Sentinel* is the official publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and is published six times per year. The subscription price is \$12.00 per year, with reduced rates available for blanket subscriptions at \$10.00 through a member congregation.

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**Periodical Postpaid at Mankato, MN 56001 and additional offices.** Postmaster: Send changes (Form 3579) to *Lutheran Sentinel*, 6 Browns Court, Mankato, MN 56001.



[www.els.name/ls](http://www.els.name/ls)

# From the President

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

“Isn’t it just a matter of interpretation?” That is a familiar remark. Christians who carefully follow the words of the Bible are confronted both by non-believers and other Christians who question the clear statements of God’s Word. For many people, the expression, “That’s just your interpretation!” becomes an out—a convenient way to dismiss what God’s Word really says.

True. A wide range of Bible interpretations are used by religious groups and individuals. You can expect such variety when their approach to the Bible from the outset is less than that of the sacred writings of the prophets, apostles, and evangelists. The webpage of a large Lutheran church offers this opinion: “Because biblical writers, editors and compilers were limited by their times and world views, even as we are, the Bible contains material wedded to those times and places. It also means that writers sometimes provide differing and even contradictory views of God’s word, ways and will.” People in the pew can be expected to question what is truthful in Scripture if leaders prejudice their minds to see the Bible only as inspirational but humanly fallible.

The wide gap existing in biblical interpretation does not mean one can never be certain of which interpretation is correct. There is only one Spirit-intended meaning for each passage in Scripture. God is never the author of confusion. When He speaks to us in His word-for-word inerrant and inspired Book, He is using human language to convey specific truths for our lives.

So, how can a person be sure of the proper meaning? By the Berean method. The Berean Christians in Acts 17 were commended for their conscientious study of the Word. Notice how they approached the Old Testament writings as transmitting truth. This was a given. In our post-modern era, the concept of absolute truth—primarily in religion—is mocked. But God is not mocked. He has delivered His foolproof truth to us in writings over many centuries by men He chose as His instruments. Jesus directed all to this Word of God when He said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32).

It is not necessary for every individual to know Hebrew and Greek before being assured of the truth. Our pastors are trained in the original Bible languages, but they also know that the entire body of Christian doctrine is revealed in passages clear enough for the average layperson to understand.

What beauty is in the Book! Our God tells us sinners of our salvation from damnation. He tells us how His own Son came in human flesh to be our Savior. He tells how through faith in Him we have an amazing future in store for us: eternal life with Him!



*John A. Moldstad*  
John A. Moldstad, President of the ELS

# The Triune God Assists with Our Prayers

How is your prayer life these days? Do you talk to God regularly? Have you shared your thoughts or needs or joys with the Lord today? As Christians we know that God loves to hear our prayers!

When I consider the triune God assisting with our prayers, the Scripture that first comes to mind is what St. Paul wrote: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:26–28).

Certainly there are days (and sleepless nights) in the lives of Christians when people do not know what to say to God, or cannot find the right words to express our thoughts to Him. I’m reminded of when our children were very young and were learning to talk. They often had their own babbling vocabulary. As parents we would glean from their words, gestures, and context what they were trying to communicate. My wife and I would then have to “translate” for others, especially visiting grandparents! On a much grander scale with perfect ability, the Holy Spirit interprets and speaks for us to the Son and the Father, expressing our needs and desires.

In our *ELS Catechism & Explanation*, we are reminded that “God commands us to pray, God promises to hear us, we constantly need His help, and we want to thank Him for His blessings” (p. 155). When Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray, He assured them: “For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8; see also Matthew 6:31–33), and “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16:23; see also Matthew 21:22). The work of the Trinity is then described: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). It is fascinating and humbling to think about how the three Persons of God are involved with our prayers.

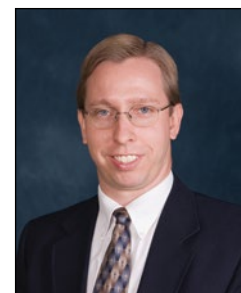
The importance of prayer is highlighted by St. Paul: “It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is

even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Romans 8:34, see also Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1). This tells us that our Lord Jesus is praying for us and interceding for us with the Father in heaven. Another way to describe it is that in a holy, almighty manner, the Son always has His Father’s ear. He has His undivided attention. Note that in Romans 8:26–28, the Holy Spirit is interceding within us, expressing our longings for God and His blessings. The Spirit also presents our longings to God. Again there is a perfect, divine interaction going on between the Persons of the Trinity, even in our prayer life. Jesus continually talks and consults with the Father regarding our needs and blessings that the Holy Spirit perfectly and accurately conveys to them.



Another example of how the triune God assists with our prayers is to consider the account of Abraham praying for Lot and Sodom in Genesis 18. Recall that Abraham had three visitors—the text describes them as the Lord and two of His angels. Our God is triune. The Holy Spirit strengthened Abraham’s faith and also guided him in the words he spoke in his prayer. Abraham carefully and thoughtfully pleaded with the Lord (pre-incarnate Jesus) to spare the city for the sake of the believers there. The Son consulted with the Father and the Holy Spirit regarding justice for the city and salvation for Lot and his family. The triune God answered Abraham’s prayers with almighty wisdom and graciously provided a way out for Lot and his family before the city and its wickedness were destroyed by God’s perfect justice.

What a powerful, yet gracious and loving God we have! As the apostle Paul reminds us, “Pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The Lord God is listening and will answer your prayers in His good time. And never forget that our triune God loves us dearly for Christ’s sake and will work everything out for our good!



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**Andrew Palmquist** is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Luverne, Minnesota.

# Praying with Faith in God's Promises

“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” (Matthew 21:22)

So as long as I believe, does God give me all things in prayer? Yes, God wants His children to pray to Him: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble” (Psalm 50:15).

However, Scripture teaches that the things we ask for must be in accordance with God's gracious will for us. As St. James wrote, “You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives” (James 4:3). God wants us to have His gifts, but always according to His will. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

In His Word, God explains that believers are to pray for all things. Prayer is not reserved for only special occasions, but on all occasions: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

So how do we ask the Holy God for His gifts? There is a story told about a country that was crowning its new king. The crowds had lined the streets to see the new king. A 12-year-old boy began pushing his way through the crowd. He was able to get as far as the guards and tried to pass them too. But the guards stopped him and said, “You cannot get through here; don't you know this man is the king?” The boy replied, “He may be the king, but he is also my dad!”

We can approach the Holy God, our heavenly Father, with the same confidence as the 12-year-old boy. Luther put it this way

in the explanation of the Introduction of the Lord's Prayer: “God would hereby tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him with all boldness and confidence, as children ask their dear father.”

Consider the prayer of the prodigal son in Jesus' parable: “Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:21). But in mercy and forgiveness, the father embraced and kissed him. In spite of our sinfulness and unworthiness, our heavenly Father is always ready to forgive us. Why? Jesus is the key.

Through Jesus Christ we are adopted, children of God. He makes it possible for us to speak with God. He has removed the sin-barrier between us and God. As Jesus told His disciples when He taught them to pray, so also He tells us that because God is our loving Father we can always approach Him with confidence.

God our loving Father has invited us to come to Him in prayer, and we should pray because He commands us, “Ask and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). God promises to hear us, “For everyone who asks receives” (Matthew 7:8). We constantly need His help, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time” (Psalm 145:15). And we want to thank Him for His blessing, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His love endures forever” (Psalm 106:1).

God speaks to us, His believing children, through His Word; He invites us to speak to Him in prayer. As His children, we should want to talk to Him regularly in prayer, for this is pleasing to God. We know that He hears our prayers and answers them.

We close with the words of “Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above:”

Amen! That is, so let it be!  
Strengthen our faith and trust in Thee  
That we may doubt not, but believe  
That what we ask we shall receive.  
Thus in Thy name and at Thy word  
We say: “Amen. Now hear us, Lord.”  
(ELH 383:9)

**John Merseth, Sr.**, is pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Weston, Ohio.



# Developing a Rich Prayer Life

It was my first year of teaching, and we had just finished with the closing prayer for the day. One of the students came up to me after the prayer and said, “Pastor Ring, how come we never have any real prayers?”

“What do you mean?” I said. “We have a prayer every morning, at lunch, and before we leave for the day.”

“I know, but you always use a prayer out of a book.

Why don’t we ever have any *real* prayers?”, this time emphasizing the word “real” so I would get the point.

I got her point. When a person stands up and begins praying from the heart, it often seems more spiritual, more real, than when a prayer is being read.

Except when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, what did He do? He did not give them a list of steps on how to become better prayers, He gave them an example, a model to follow. “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven...’” (Luke 11:2).

This is a good lesson for us too. When people have confided in me that they think their prayers are inadequate, I often suggest a good prayer book. This is not a crutch, I tell them, but a tool. They are good prayers not only in themselves, but they can provide a framework for our own prayers. When we are praying these written or memorized prayers, we often can’t help but think of other needs as well, and that becomes part of our prayer, spoken or not.

With that in mind, here are some good tools for you to use as part of your own prayer life:

- **The Hymnal.** The hymns are often prayers set to music. Pick one from Sunday and use a stanza each day as a prayer. The hymnal also has morning and evening prayers for each day of the week, as well as the prayers for each Sunday.

- **Lutheran Book of Prayer.** This little book has been in print a long time, and for good reason. It also has prayers for each day of the week, as well as prayers for different occasions and situations. It is also now available in an electronic format, so you can carry it with you on your phone.



- **The Psalms.** These have been the prayerbook of God’s people for many years. You can work through them from 1 to 150, but I think more helpful is to look in the hymnal for the psalm of the week and use that one all week. In the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* this chart is on pp. 202–203. Other hymnals have similar charts.

Most important, don’t be discouraged when you forget to pray. I confess I often get hurried and forget to do my prayers. Rather than trying to make up for lost time and do all the prayers I missed, I simply pick up where I should be and continue. God blesses our prayers even in our weakness. It is His grace, not our zeal, that makes our prayers real and acceptable to Him.



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

# 2013 ELS Convention Essay

## “Engaging Families with Jesus”

When the wonderful knowledge of Christ touches the heart, there is a new Spirit-driven impulse awakened toward our loved ones. Our children are the most precious earthly gifts we have. The Gospel brings with it the power to produce its own evangelists.

The central purpose of Biblical instruction is not to have strong marriages and morally upright children; our focus must remain on the work of Christ to redeem us from sin and death.

The Christian home is heaven’s little embassy. The Christian home serves God as the primary place for passing on the Gospel. Where families embrace Christ and His Word, these homes will also become Gospel outreach centers in the community.

God frequently uses images of family to depict our relationship with Him. God is our “Father,” Christ is our “Brother.” Through Baptism, we are the “Bride of Christ” and “children of God.”

Christian parents are engaged in the highest heavenly work and need to understand the extreme importance of their roles. Parents are the very representatives of God in the lives of their children. Ancient Jews saw children as a great blessing and teaching them about God as a high duty. The synagogues had numerous rituals and traditions connected with various stages of a child’s education. A Jewish child’s identity came from one’s relationship to the religious community and the established traditions of the faith. Young Timothy benefited from the religious training of his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5).

Through His institution of marriage, God intends the Christian home to provide the foundational footings for heaven’s earthly embassy. The early patriarchs were concerned about their children marrying others who believed in the Messiah. While Esau grieved his parents by marrying pagan Hittite women (Genesis 26:34–35), Jacob was told to find a wife from the house of Bethuel (Genesis 28:1–2).

Many children have been turned from Christ by a parent’s poor choice of an unbelieving mate. Teenagers need to be instructed to think about the faith of their future children. Norwegian Bishop Nils Laache wrote, “The devil knows that when he spoils marriage, he undermines all order of society and makes us like Sodom and Gomorrah” (*Book of Family Prayer*, Luth. Synod Book Co., 2000, p. 117). Even where one spouse is an unbeliever, God instructs the believing spouse to remain married in order that he or she may teach their spouse and children God’s Word.

Christian fathers play an important role in Christian education. Fathers who despise God and His Word may bring God’s wrath upon the “third and fourth generation of those who hate [Him]” (Exodus 20:5). This is why Martin Luther wrote, “No one should become a father unless he is able to instruct his children in the Ten Commandments and in the Gospel.” A 1994 study in Sweden about the role of fathers concluded, “In short, if a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful his wife’s devotion, only one child in 50 will become a regular worshiper” (*Touchstone*, June 2003). Americans have generally lost respect for the office of fatherhood; this brings great negative consequences for society and for the church.

Christian mothers are blessed with the gift of touching the deep emotional aspects of a child’s spiritual life. Proverbs contains many passages addressing the important role of mothers (see Proverbs 12:8–9 and 6:20–22). The New Testament takes note of believing mothers: Mary the mother of John Mark; Eunice, Timothy’s mother; Salome, the mother of James and John. Christian mothers have daily contact with their children, have practical applications of Biblical truths, and foster

devotional life. Sometimes a mother does not have the spiritual support of her husband or raises children alone. She needs to be encouraged to keep her children loving Christ.

Grandparents can provide tremendous support and encouragement to their grandchildren with regard to their faith. They can offer spiritual wisdom and direction to parents. Single Christians and married couples without children also have a role in Christian education. They may have the time to be teachers and leaders in the congregation, to pray for others, and to support parents in their work. The congregation also has an impact on the Christian family that engages children with Christ. Supporting a Christian school builds on the Christian instruction in the home.

One corrosive danger to Christian instruction in the home is parents who do not strive to live holy lives. Hypocrisy in a parent is like wearing a T-shirt that says, “God’s Word is not important,” while encouraging children to go to church. Since all parents are sinful, God’s answer to this problem is repentance and grace. Children need to see their parents seek God’s grace every day. If they sin against children, parents need to seek their forgiveness. Children need to see that their parents listen to God’s authority in the Bible. When they act contrary to God’s Word, parents are teaching their children not to care about it either.

Satan continues to attack God’s embassy in the home. He uses the spiritual apathy of our culture to attack the values of Christian marriage, the roles of fathers and mothers, and Christian living. Television shows openly mock Christian beliefs. Christian youth are being shaken to the core. A shallow faith will not survive these cultural pressures, where Christians are called “bigots” when they stand up for Biblical morality. Satan has used the easy divorce to break down the family and drive spouses from the church. Divorce also shakes a child’s foundation and erodes confidence in life and truth. Satan attacks children in the public schools through “twisted education,” which often stands against the Christian instruction in the home. Ages 14–24 are critical for young people to retain the faith of their parents. Satan also attacks the home through the internet, that is, the anonymous adultery of visual lust or seeking wrong friendships. This has become a spiritual epidemic that destroys marriage and the soul. People become trapped by internet pornography or live under a cloud of self-loathing, which tends to push them from Christ.

Because of these attacks, the home needs a firm foundation. One such foundation is Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*. Parents could use the catechism for their own devotions and to instruct their children. Children should first memorize the words, then be taught the meaning. Daily devotions and prayers enhance family life and spiritual education through the Gospel. The home should be a place where the young can ask spiritual questions. Singing hymns places God’s truths in a child’s heart.

Christian training is a balance of presenting God’s Word without cramming religion down a child’s throat. Such training is pulling the child through the example of the parents’ love for Jesus and His Word. May the comforting Word of God guide and direct us so that our homes may be embassies of the eternal kingdom God has prepared for us by the work of Jesus Christ.

*Convention essay by Chaplain Donald Moldstad, Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota. Summarized by the editor.*

# 2013 ELS Convention Resolutions Review

## President's Message and Report

The Rev. Wayne Halvorson, the late Lois Halvorson, and Mrs. Arline Walker were thanked for their past work for the *Lutheran Sentinel*. The Board for Home Outreach was encouraged to complete the remaining regional evangelism retreats and to implement the strategies it presented to engage others with Jesus.

## Doctrine Committee

The committee members were asked to identify apologetics resources useful for Bible study and evangelism and/or to develop such resources. On Bible translations, the committee was asked to develop and distribute materials that compare different translations and that discuss issues in Bible translating. The committee was asked to produce a brochure to explain the differences between the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the ELS, the committee was asked to produce a Bible study on how the ELS is a continuation of the Reformation theology and practice.

## Finance Committee

The congregational contribution portion of the 2014 budget was set at \$760,000. This represents a \$10,000 increase over the previous year. The synod President and the Communication Director were directed to present the work of the synod to its members. Synod members and congregations were encouraged to establish first-fruits giving to the synod in their respective budgets.

## Higher Education

The Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary reports of enrollment and activity were adopted. Mr. Tim Thiele's Type "B" appointment to the Board was ratified. The memorial regarding more classes in Biblical languages at Bethany Lutheran College was adopted.

## Board for Home Outreach

Congregations of the synod were encouraged to use the Board's online clearinghouse of evangelism ideas. They were also encouraged to use the materials, resources, and tools that were presented at the evangelism retreats. The Board was encouraged to fill the call of Evangelism/Missions Counselor. The nomination of Mr. Robert Smith to a Type "B" membership was ratified. The 2014 home mission salary scale was ratified.

## Board for World Outreach

The synod thanked those individuals and organizations that supported the Board's mission work during the past year. The Rev. John Vogt was thanked for his faithful service to Thoughts of Faith, Inc. and to the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

## Parish Services

It was resolved that the Board for Youth Outreach conduct a survey at the 2013 General Pastoral Conference on the practice of Bible history instruction. The Board for Christian Service was instructed to establish guidelines regarding ministry to military personnel and families. Congregations were encouraged to reach out to those in the military.

## Synodical Membership

The following pastors were accepted into permanent synodical membership: the Rev. Nathanael Abrahamson, co-pastor of Abiding Shepherd Lutheran Church, Cottage Grove, Wisconsin; the Rev. Peter Heyn, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, Lakeland, Florida; the Rev. Luke Willitz, pastor of New Life Lutheran Church, Sebring, Florida. Mr. Daniel Aswege was received into permanent membership of the synod. Hope Lutheran Church of Williamson County, Texas, was accepted into synod membership. The Rev. Daniel McQuality was granted his request to remain on the synod clergy roster.

## Elementary Education

The Board for Lutheran Schools of America was asked to study its financial models with the goal of retaining the best Lutheran school teachers. The synod thanked the Rev. Edward Bryant and Mr. Allen Labitzky for their service on the Board. Dr. Jennifer Wosmek was thanked for her work in developing the program "I'm Called." The Board was asked to make resources available to assist parents who home-school their children.

## Miscellaneous

The delegates resolved that a two-year Anniversary Thankoffering be gathered starting in 2017, that an ad hoc thankoffering committee be formed, and that this committee recommend a designation for the offering. The Synod Review Committee was directed to conduct a review of the Synod Handbook. The delegates resolved that the 2014 convention meet June 15 through June 19 at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

*Summarized by the editor*

# President Moldstad's 2013 Message

These are trying times for the Christian faith. Contending for the truth is a struggle. Arrows from Satan's arsenal appear countless: the lack of concern for human life, disregard for marriage as God intended, disdain for biblical teaching, and unspeakable inhumanity all around us.

Passing legislation to solve society's problems is delusional. While Christians want to assist society in moral living, they also yearn for the world to come that God promised. For Luther said, "There is no helping the world...it wants to belong to the devil."

The most dangerous enemy of the Gospel is our own sinful flesh, which is opposed to God. Where is our escape from sin and evil, assorted trials and troubles? A ransom was paid for all people—not to the captor, but to God. That is where justice had to be met. Our Rescuer became our "neighbor," yet is in every way fully God! This Rescuer did not lead us out, He gave His holy lifeblood as our ransom.

By faith in Jesus, we need not fear the torturing darts of the devil. God gives us the shield of faith that extinguishes the flaming arrows of the evil one. "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). And whenever our hearts condemn us, the Bible says, "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:20).

Where do we receive such faith that overcomes? The Bible answers, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). This is why we meet annually at our convention; why we gather each week where a sermon on sin and grace is heard, where a Table of Christ's body and blood is given, and where a font of living water refreshes.

Our wonderful Savior, the Lord Jesus, entered our world. He lived an immaculate life in our place. He yielded His life on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for all sin. He has risen from the tomb as our glorious Victor. He ascended into heaven with promises to return and grant all believers in Him eternal life forever!

The focus of our convention and worship is always on our Redeemer. Each member needs to be fully engaged with Jesus, even as we work together to reach others with the Gospel. The more we see Jesus in Word and Sacrament, the more our faith is increased, and the more we are prepared to deal with the challenges in the world around us. Our prayer is not that we be taken out of the world, but rather that we would be so sanctified through the Word of truth that we have an impact on the lives of those around us.

This sanctified life includes the way we interact with our families. While we share the mission to proclaim the saving Gospel to all nations, it is most natural that our lights

shine (Matthew 5:16) in our own homes, and there we praise Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Families are seeking help for raising and training children in God's Word. The sincere interest of our preschools, Lutheran elementary schools, Sunday schools, youth programs, Bethany Lutheran College, and our congregations in the lives of young people assists parents in their teaching "the one thing needful" (Luke 10:42).

Christians are often described as "the body of Christ." The late Rev. Bo Giertz wrote, "God has incorporated us into a family, a community, a congregation, and mankind for the sake of others. In other words, God had a purpose when He put me in the situation I'm in right now."

Our synod is two years into the strategic plan: "In the next five years, we will learn more faithfully to engage others with Jesus." One key goal was outlined: "View each congregation in the synod as a mission congregation." We need to assess how we are doing. There is much work to be done in Christ's kingdom.

Our synod also faces a serious financial challenge. Several funds are not able to support this work. Yet, bringing the good news of Christ's redemption to many more souls is vital. Let each congregation pray for God's blessings on our mission efforts. Let each congregation consider increasing the amount of financial support for our synod work. Encourage more young men to pursue studies for the pastoral ministry.

Since adopting our "Engage Others with Jesus" plan, new challenges have arisen in the moral decay of our culture: non-religious youth growing in number, competing worldviews, government encroachment on religious freedoms, acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and a new "spirituality" that rejects organized religions. At the same time, new opportunities also abound. Dedicated Christians speak about their faith, and churches are concerned about protecting religious freedom, remaining aware of mission fields, and educating our youth in the Christian faith.

The ELS has something to offer such a world—Law and Gospel preaching that deals with the problem of sin and God's solution of salvation. Through personal and congregational study of God's Word, stressing sacramental worship and a compelling love for souls, the Holy Spirit will be at work. We are planting and watering, and God alone gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7).

May our gracious Lord Jesus give us an extra measure of His Holy Spirit as we carry on the blessed work before us.

*Summarized by the editor*



# Cross-stitch Meeting

The annual meeting of the national Cross-stitch organization was held on June 17, 2013, at the Sigurd K. Lee Theater in the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center. Mrs. Anita Smith introduced seminary student Daniel Ruiz, who began the meeting with a devotion. He spoke about the life of Norwegian hymn writer Hans Borson, and the members sang several of his hymns, accompanied by seminarian Andrew Soule.



*Seminarian Daniel Ruiz delivered the opening devotion.*



*Rachel Kerkow spoke to the Cross-stitch meeting.*

“Boots, Bugs, and Bless Your Heart” was the title of Mrs. Rachel Kerkow’s presentation. Rachel spoke about her life as a home missionary’s wife in Leander, Texas. She told how 90 people attended the first worship service on Easter Sunday. They worship in a rented facility. Everything is loaded into a rented U-Haul for each service. A six-acre piece of property was purchased for a new church. It already has a house on the land that the Kerkows moved into. It is necessary to wear boots because of bugs and snakes. Your prayers and support are much appreciated.

Anita Smith spoke about the projects that Cross-stitch supported during the past year. About \$10,000 was given to: students in India, scholarships in Peru, orphan school fund in India, funds to feed Amazon Lutheran High School students for a year, medical relief fund, and ESL support in Chile. All money donated to Cross-stitch is used for these projects, as there is no overhead.

Daniel Ruiz and Andrew Soule provided a humorous routine to entertain the audience. They have been performing together for a few years.

Anita Smith urged people to attend the regional Missionary Rallies around the synod. She announced that Rachel Kerkow’s presentation was recorded on video and would be available.



*Seminarians Daniel Ruiz (l) and Andrew Soule (r) provided entertainment.*

*Summarized by the editor*



# On the Synodical Scene...

## New Pastors Ordained



Benjamin Wiechmann was ordained and installed at King of Grace in Golden Valley, Minnesota, on June 23, 2013. Pastors pictured are (left to right): Jon Ladner (WELS), Tim Hartwig, Erwin Ekhoff, Craig Ferkenstad, Joshua Skogen, Ben Wiechmann, Matthew Brooks, Rodney Flohr, John Petersen, David Russow, Bruce Janisch (WELS). Rev. Joshua Skogen preached the sermon, while Rev. Rodney Flohr served as liturgist. Rev. Erwin Ekhoff, Visitor for Circuit 9, performed the rite of ordination/installation.

On June 23, 2013, Jesse DeDeyne was ordained and installed as pastor of Messiah Lutheran, Omro, Wisconsin. Rev. Paul Welke, Jesse's father-in-law, preached the sermon, while Rev. David Locklair served as liturgist. Rev. Robert Otto, Visitor for Circuit 6, was the lector for the day, and Pres. John Moldstad performed the rite of ordination/installation. Pastors pictured are (left to right) Roger Holtz, Paul Welke (WELS), Robert Otto, David Locklair, Jesse DeDeyne, Roger Knepprath (WELS), Carlton Sielaff, Michael Smith, and John Moldstad.



## Finn Installed in Australia

The Rev. Daniel Finn was installed as pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, on June 30, 2013. Pastor Finn and his wife, Carrie, recently moved to Australia from Iowa, where Pastor Finn served Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Waterloo.



## Hartwig Installed in Okauchee, Wisconsin



(L to R): The Reverends Theodore Gullixson, Kenneth Schmidt, Kenneth Mellon, Gaylin Schmeling, Bradley Homan, Daniel Hartwig, Steven Ristow (WELS), James Kassera, Nathan Krause, Jonathan Madson, and Bernt Tweit

The Rev. Daniel J. Hartwig was installed as associate pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Okauchee, Wisconsin, on June 23, 2013. The Rev. Jonathan Madson, Holy Trinity's administrative pastor, served as the liturgist. The Rev. Gaylin Schmeling, a former pastor at Holy Trinity, served as lector. The Rev. James Kassera preached the installation sermon based on 1 Timothy 1:12-17 with the theme "The Lord Appoints His Servants." The Rev. Kenneth Mellon, alternate Circuit Visitor for the ELS Southern Wisconsin Circuit, performed the rite of installation. Mrs. Hannah Scharf served as organist. After the service the members of the parish served an excellent dinner to the many members and guests who attended the service.

# Pastor, I Have a Question...

**Question:** How do we know that King David wrote Psalm 51 in repentance for his sin with Bathsheba?

**Answer:** The heading of the Psalm states that King David wrote the Psalm. Most English translations of Bible include the words, as in the New King James Version, “To the Chief Magician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

There is some question about the authenticity of these superscriptions. Many modern scholars believe they were added later. The New English Bible does not include them at all. You may be taught that the original Hebrew and Greek Bibles do not contain everything we find in translations. Book titles, chapter headings, chapters, and verses were not part of the original writings.

And yet, the Psalm headings are very old. The *Biblia Hebraica* (the Hebrew Bible Masoretic text) used by this pastor includes the headings. Professor John Brug wrote, “The standard Hebrew text of Psalms, the psalms found among the Dead Sea manuscripts and the Septuagint translation of the psalms into Greek all include the headings” (Brug, *J. Psalms*, Vol. 1, p. 15). Professor Brug also points to the antiquity of the spelling of David’s name in the headings as authenticity. He concludes: “The headings were attached to the psalm by the authors or by the person to whom the author delivered the psalm. It is possible that some headings were added by the person who collected the psalms into a book, but in either case we are confident that they provide reliable information about the origin and purpose of the psalm and that they are part of God’s inspired word.”

Lutheran Christians treasure Psalm 51. Its words are included in our divine service. We know many of its verses by heart. We kneel with King David as we use it to confess our sins: “Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin” (verses 1–2).

The Psalm affirms our understanding of original sin: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my

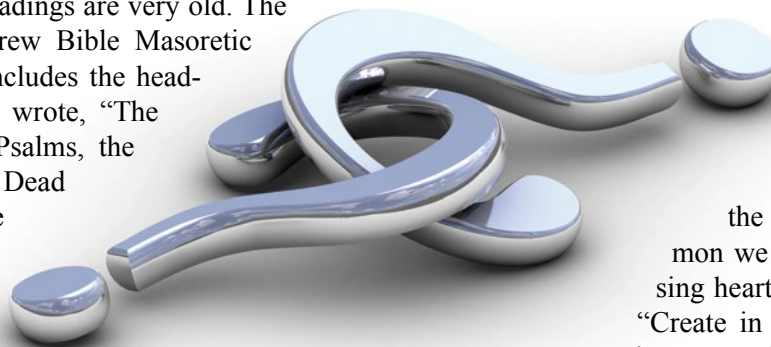
mother conceived me” (verse 5). When our babies, conceived in sin, come into this world we rush to bring them to the saving waters of Baptism. We give them rebirth in the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Our gracious God, through the public ministry, proclaims to us the good news of Jesus. His Son was born in this world to live a perfect life, to keep every aspect of God’s Law, and to resist temptation on our behalf. Jesus allowed sinful men to abuse, scourge, and execute Him. He took from us all our sins, suffering the anger of God we deserve. Dying, He endured hell’s fury in our place.

By His resurrection, God declared us to be innocent and holy by faith.

Week after week, we hear this good news from the pulpit. Following the sermon we rise with joyful hearts and sing heartily the words of the psalm: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (verses 10–12).

That adulterous and murderous king, David, confessed his sin to God before his prophet/pastor, Nathan, who then absolved David of his sin. Knowing this grace of God can fill our daily and weekly confession and absolution with greater meaning. God forgives all of us our terrible sins because of the ransom Jesus Christ paid and the grace God gives!



**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.

# No Longer Rag Dolls

**Read: Ephesians. 4:11–14**

Dear Christian parents and grandparents,

Perhaps you've seen it: six, eight, maybe even ten young children harnessed together as they walk the sidewalk. At the head of the harness is the teacher, leading the gaggle of children to the library, the pool, the rec center, etc. If you have seen this relatively new practice (it wasn't around when I was in kindergarten), you may have had varying thoughts. Some may object to this new practice, suggesting that it seems dehumanizing. Others may object on the argument that it prevents a child from being his or her own individual; skipping, exploring, engaging in child-like activities.

Nothing is quite so "sacred" in American society right now as individualism—the right to be your own person—march to your own beat—do your own thing without the possibility or presence of any harness to impede you.

One can argue about the merits of using a child harness versus individualism. However, the harness can be an illustration of how God blesses and sustains His "gaggle," the Christian Church, on its way to heaven. He gave the blessed Anchor of Christ, His Son, to a world of individual sinners. In His mercy, God secures individual sinners (you and your children, me and mine) to Christ in the faith. That's right, you are harnessed to Christ. In Christian faith, the best thing going for you or your child(ren), me and mine, is NOT that we remain individuals. Individualism may make a great entrepreneur or a successful artist, but it robs the Christian of many blessings.

Consider the means of grace. Holy Baptism takes an individual sinner, born in sin and an enemy of God by nature, and makes that individual sinner a member (a

small part) of God's family in Christ. The Lord's Supper is distributed to individual sinners like you and me, your confirmed children and mine, but its gracious and glorious result is NOT a huge mass of individual holy people but a Holy Communion—an assembly of saints in Christ.

Where the devil roams, the world waxes wise, and sinful flesh simmers, individuals (yes, "individual Christians") are easy prey, susceptible to the prevailing winds of false teaching, thinking, and believing. Just as the Good Shepherd knows the dangers of a single sheep wandering about alone, so too, Christian faith and teaching acknowledges that "individual Christians" are rag dolls, prime to be tossed to and fro even to their spiritual death.

Christianity by its very nature does not foster or allow for spiritual individualism. It kills it—for your good and the good of your children! Paul says to the Christian, "You have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

We are born as individuals, as rag dolls. And left to ourselves, we would remain the same—like a small child left to be an individual on the perilous streets of the big city. But in God's grace He has given you and your children rebirth—a new life—a life in Christ. Hidden in Him and bound together by the harness of His life, death, and resurrection, that is where we individual rag dolls find refuge. Harnessed together in Christ and the true faith that shares Him from generation to generation, that is where rag dolls are found rejoicing like the saints that they are.

## Series Title: *Growing Up into Christ*

This series is produced on behalf of the ELS Board for Youth Outreach. The aim of the series is to invest in the youth of the ELS by building up the households and parents of those youth in the "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13). While there are many cultural chasms between adults and adolescents, the body of Christ (the Church) provides us one marvelous location where post-pubescent teens and parents are meant to be together: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5)—in short, together Growing Up into Christ.

## NEXT TIME: "One Out of Two IS Bad"

**Kyle Madson** is a home missionary in Weatherford/Hudson Oaks, Texas.



# 2013 Historical Society Meeting

The 17th annual meeting of the ELS Historical Society broke all attendance records. Prof. Mark Harstad, president of the Society, began the meeting in the Sigurd K. Lee Theater in Bethany's Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center, on Sunday, June 16, at 5:30 p.m. In the business portion of the meeting, Prof. Erling Teigen and Mrs. Lois Jaeger were elected to the board. They replace outgoing board members Dr. Ryan MacPherson and Dr. Marguerite Ylvisaker.

Prof. Erling Teigen next discussed the historical situation of the play *The Oak Trees Still Stand*. He told about the transcript of a 1919 court case in Northwood, Iowa, held in the ELS Synod Archive, and how it was used in the play.

## *The Oak Trees Still Stand*

Following a church merger, a congregation and pastor are forced to go to court to try to maintain claims to a parsonage that had long been property of their parish. This was the 1917 pan-Norwegian Lutheran merger that formed what was later known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Ten congregations and 13 pastors refused to join that merger. The merging church bodies had compromised the truth of God's Word when they allowed people to teach that God chose people for salvation "in view of their faith."

Does this story sound like it would make compelling drama? To kick off the ELS convention, the ELS Historical Society presented the play *The Oak Trees Still Stand*, written by Bethany seminarian Michael Lilienthal. Using the transcript of the court case in which the Northwood, Iowa, congregation and pastor were trying to maintain their property rights as those whose had remained faithful to the doctrines subscribed by the congregation founders (they lost the case), *The Oak Trees Still Stand* gives an excellent overview of the election and conversion controversies in the old Norwegian Synod. The play emphasized the biblical truth, as Pastor Bjug Harstad says in the play, "I know that when I am saved it is all the acts of God."

Figuring prominently in the debate early on was Missouri Synod President C.F.W. Walther, who wrote in an essay on election, "God has from eternity chosen a certain number of persons to salvation; He has deter-



mined that these shall and must be saved; and as surely as God is God, so surely these shall be saved, and none except them." A Bethany professor, Dr. Ryan MacPherson, played the role of Walther, growing out his hair and sideburns.

Not only did *The Oak Trees Still Stand* make our church history and past doctrinal debates come alive, it also taught important lessons about remaining steadfast in our doctrine and practice, even when you're in the minority.

*Information supplied by Prof. Mark Harstad and the Rev. Shawn Stafford.*

# Make the Most Out of the Time You Have

There is a time between Easter and Advent that we refer to as the non-festival season of the church year. Aside from Pentecost, Trinity, and the celebration of the Ascension, we do not have any high religious festivals during those days. The festivals and celebrations of Christianity serve as oases during our journey through life and grant us refreshment and renewal as we reflect on the gospel promises connected with them.

Of course, we should not be under the impression that once the festival season of the church year has ended, it is a time to take a vacation from worship or from the study of God's Word. Nor does it mean that we have nothing left to celebrate until Advent rolls around again. On the contrary, our Christian lives are full of celebration every day as we keep before us the miraculous work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who came to this world to deliver us from Satan, sin, and death.

In fact, it is for such times, when we go about our everyday lives in our busy world that we need to remember that we are not always in the midst of carrying on a festival or celebrating a special event. Most of the time our lives are about doing the everyday things like going to work, making dinner, taking care of our children, driving kids to sporting events, and doing various mundane chores. But the Word of God is still just as meaningful and important in the non-festival season as it is on Christmas or Easter.

St. Paul reminds us: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Paul addresses people who are the people of God, and yet, at the same time, sinners. He tells us to be careful how we live. It is so easy for us to become lackadaisical when it comes to the things of God. How easy it is for us to let down our guard and become complacent when we don't "have to" be in church or go to Sunday School or Bible class.

Summer especially can be that time when it's easy to forget about Bible study. And when we don't have the high

festival reminders, we might see it as a time to take a vacation from worship and the Word of God. But Paul reminds us to make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. The devil is not taking a summer vacation. He will do his worst to try to separate us from God's Word and make every attempt to undermine and destroy our faith.

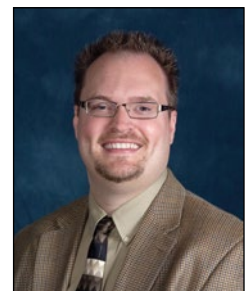
Let us therefore remember what the will of the Lord is. God's will is that His kingdom come and His name be hallowed. God would have all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. God wants us to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. He wants us to worship Him.

He wants to own us, because he loves us and cares for us. He created us to have fellowship with Him. He does not want any to perish, but everyone to come to a saving knowledge of His grace and mercy.

Our motivation to do this comes from God's Word alone. The gospel promise in the Word and Sacraments teaches us that we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life in our place, and then died on the cross for our sin to remove our guilt forever. This is the message through which we are born

again. This is the promise that moves our hearts to live to the glory of God. That is why we need to be connected daily to the Bible and to worship. We need to spend time in prayer, making our requests known to God and reflecting on His goodness to us.

Every day is not a party for us. In fact, most days are pretty ordinary. But because we have an extraordinary Savior, we still live every day in celebration of His grace. May we then make the most of every opportunity by living our lives to the glory of God and making His Word our top priority. It was made certain to us that we are His top priority, because He did not spare His only-begotten Son, but sent Him to live and die for us.



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**Erich Hoefl** is pastor of five ELS congregations in northern Iowa.

# Failure in the Church

“The church has failed the country. Where it once provided a voice for morality and influenced generations with God’s Word, the church’s voice is not well heard. The church no longer speaks with authority. The church is no longer relevant in the everyday lives of citizens. The church struggles to address modern life. The church has no answer for modern atheists.”

It is not unusual for people to think this way, even long ago. Consider the time of Abraham, 2,000 years before Jesus, when the people around Sodom and Gomorrah did not listen to God’s admonitions, nor did they repent. The prophet Elijah thought that he had failed at Mt. Carmel, and he wanted to die. God told him that 7,000 people in Israel had not bowed down to idols (1 Kings 19:4–21). About 600 years before Jesus came, the territory around Jerusalem failed to listen to God’s prophet Jeremiah and repent. Read Ezekiel, chapters 4 through 21, to see how a majority of people turned away from what God said to listen to false prophets. Because they worshiped idols, the Babylonian army took some into captivity and killed most of the rest.

When Jesus began His ministry, most of the Jews were either indifferent to Him or hostile. Did the church of believers fail? Was it their fault that the message of God’s Law and promise was so forgotten? Or had the worldly Sadducees and the puritanical Pharisees so twisted God’s law and promises that the people no longer heard the truth?

History continues to repeat itself in modern times. One hundred years ago, the Christian message was changed into doing good for the poor and you will find favor with God. Fifty years ago after World War II, materialism became the dominant “god” to fulfill life’s objectives. Since then, churches and theologians have jumped on one bandwagon after another. They abandoned Bible teachings for science “truths,” changed biblical morality for situation ethics, and abandoned Bible truths for relativism.

So did the church fail, or did the people fail to listen to God’s Word about repentance, faith in Jesus’ work of salvation, and living a holy life under God’s will? The prophet Ezekiel describes the reality of church history: “So [my sheep] were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered” (Ezekiel 34:5). Those who were supposed to be shepherds no longer considered the Bible as God’s inerrant Word, did not preach that Jesus is the only way to heaven, and did not tell the people about their sins or their need for Jesus as their Savior. The sheep have wandered into many new religious ideas and leaders looking to find their own paths to spirituality.

St. Paul prophesied that this would happen: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

So, has the Christian Church failed? In reality—no. Jesus continues to send out faithful pastors and teachers, who teach the truths of God’s Word. God lets His Word shower upon many people in our nation and in the world. His Word does not return empty-handed, but accomplishes His will. God continues to call people to repentance, to create faith in sinful hearts through Baptism, and to sustain that faith with the Lord’s Supper. God hears our prayers and watches over His sheep, to feed them and protect them from evil. He has promised to bless those couples that remain in their marriages, nurture their children in the Word, and lead them by example to worship God each Sunday.

Certainly, we could do more to speak to others about Jesus, to shine the light of God’s love on our neighbors and friends, to send out more missionaries through the prosperity God gives us. However, God has not promised us how successful our efforts will prove. He has promised that His Word will accomplish whatever He wills (Isaiah 55:11).

This year’s convention essay emphasized the importance of the Christian family engaging children with Jesus. A greater emphasis on Christian education at home, at church, and in Christian schools will hold the next generation to God’s Word where they can influence others with the Gospel message.

Those who continue to hear, believe, teach, and confess the truths of God’s Word cannot fail. Jesus says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). May we never fail to hear the comforting Word about Christ’s salvation and live in our baptismal grace.

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



# 2013 Seminary Commencement

The Commencement Service for Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, which included both the assignment of calls and graduation of students, occurred on Wednesday, May 15, 2013, at 7 p.m. in Trinity Chapel. The Rev. Paul Welke (St. Matthew, Winona, MN [WELS]) served as preacher, President Gaylin Schmeling served as liturgist, and the Rev. Dr. J. Kincaid Smith represented the Board of Regents. The sermon was based on 2 Timothy 3:14–17 with the theme “God Has Equipped You for Service.”

Jesse DeDeyne was assigned as pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Omro, Wisconsin; Benjamin Wiechmann was assigned as pastor of King of Grace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota; and Thalia Pollard was assigned as teacher at Scarville Lutheran School in Scarville, Iowa. The following graduated from the seminary with a Master of Divinity degree: Jesse DeDeyne and Benjamin Wiechmann.



**2012–2013 Seminary Students** Back (L to R): Daniel Ruiz, Joshua Mayer, Jesse DeDeyne, Benjamin Wiechmann, Andrew Soule. Front (L to R): Paul Webber, Michael Lilienthal, Paul Lange, Matthew Behmer, Jeffrey Hendrix, Michael Willitz.



The graduation and call service was held in Trinity Chapel at Bethany Lutheran College.



Bethany Lutheran College graduate Thalia Pollard was assigned as teacher at Scarville Lutheran School.



Jesse DeDeyne (l) and Benjamin Wiechmann (r)