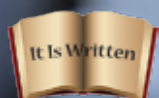


January–February 2014

Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

"Engage Others with Jesus."



"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22)

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VOLUME 97
NUMBER 1
ISSN 0024-7510

Lutheran Sentinel

January–February 2014

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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.

Address Editorial Correspondence To: Rev. Theodore G. Gullixson, 145 Meadow Lane, Mankato, MN 56001.

Address Circulation Correspondence and Address Corrections To: *Lutheran Sentinel*, 6 Browns Court, Mankato, MN 56001.

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

From the President

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

What's the diagnosis? Medical tests are done, and we want to know the results. With regard to physical health we, with help from the medical profession, appear to be experts at diagnosing problems and prescribing a reasonable course for cure.

Beginning the new year, how do we diagnose the health of the church as it strives to fulfill its mission of the Great Commission? Listing obstacles doesn't require much effort. Ask any group of Christians in a Bible class, and the adversities are predictable. Externally, the church in our American culture confronts challenges that *seem* so unique and ominous when compared to those of previous generations. Immorality is openly celebrated. We find open disregard for natural law. Even "New Atheism" has gained fervor and adherents. An obvious lack of respect—no, disdain—awaits all those who take the Bible seriously.

Are these challenges really *new*? One Christian writer diagnoses them by writing, "Nearly all of the problems and challenges have been put in one form or another for decades and even centuries, but now they are becoming more and more hostile." In "Attacks on the Christian Faith: Who, What, Why?" (*Issues in Christian Education*, Summer 2013, Concordia University, Seward, NE), Dr. Okamoto suggests there is a pervasive societal fear that "religious belief is seen to justify oppression, violence, and even terrorism." Another factor: "Christians have lost their assumed place in society. . . . Now there is more openness to other ideas and more readiness to listen to criticism."

Regardless of how we size up the obstacles, isn't the reality a simple one? There are ones led by the Spirit who see Christ as the heart and center of life now and the guarantee of the great life to come and there are many who do not yet have the Spirit and so cannot be expected to treasure what Scripture teaches. The apostle Paul diagnosed the age-old divergence: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1 Corinthians 2:12, 14).

So the diagnosis of a sick society, loaded with sin-sick individuals needing forgiveness and hope, ought to provoke our empathy. For you and I also have the same diagnosis. Before God touched us with water and the Spirit, we too were among the unregenerate. But now, as people who have received God's healing cure, opportunities abound around us for sharing the Good News of a perfect Redeemer. We have wonderful news to share! The Spirit will do His work as we seek to engage the lost with a Savior who spared no cost. May God grant us many promising opportunities in 2014!



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

Confession and Absolution:

What Sins Should We Confess, to Whom, and How Often?

The world would like to believe that sin does not exist. Nothing is more offensive to our sinful nature than to hear that we are infected with sin. The proclamation of God's Law shows us just how far we have fallen short of God's will for our lives. Like an x-ray at the doctor's office, the Law has exposed the sickness lurking within all of us. What are you going to do with that information? What do you do when your sin weighs heavily on your conscience? Perhaps it has started to affect your relationships. Maybe the embarrassment, shame, and guilt of that sin have begun to take their toll on your career or home life.

God has given to His church the Office of the Keys: the special authority to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. Your pastor has been called by your congregation to exercise those keys on its behalf and in the stead and command of God. His work is to preach Law and Gospel to you. The practice of private confession and absolution is one way that the church uses this God-given Office of the Keys.

When you confess your sins to your pastor or even to another Christian, their primary purpose is to engage you with Jesus through the good news of the Gospel. Consider the pastor not as a detective investigating your private life, but rather as a physician who is there to diagnose your illness and to give you the medicine that brings spiritual healing. He is bound by God to keep anything you tell him confidential and will not share anything you say with others.

If you have never used private confession and absolution before, you might feel nervous and have some reservations. What sins are you to confess and how often should you go? It is not necessary or even possible for you to list every sin that you have committed (see Psalm 19:12). However, even if you cannot think of any particular sin that you have committed, consider the vocation that God has placed you in, whether that be as a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, or employee. How does your life measure up to the Ten Commandments? Have you been

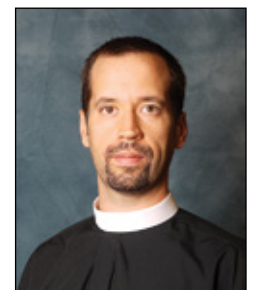
rebellious, disrespectful, dishonest, or lazy? Have you hurt anyone by the things you have said or done? Are you guilty of stealing, being neglectful or wasteful? If you examine your life truthfully in light of the Commandments, you will find no shortage of sins to confess.

Using private confession and absolution is a good way to humble yourself under God's holy Law and Gospel. Confession keeps you from hiding from your sins, as David did, and from living with a guilty conscience. Confession may also be used as an important preparation for the reception of the Lord's Supper. God has not placed a limit on how often you may confess your sins and receive absolution. Whenever you feel the burden of your sins, use

this powerful gift that God has given to His church. If your pastor is not available at the time, you may also confess your sins to another Christian (James 5:16). Our ELS' *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* even has an order for you to use to aid you in this practice (p. 222).

Jesus said that the healthy don't need a doctor, but the sick do (Luke 5:31). While we

may not like admitting that we have the sickness called sin, the Bible says that all have fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Our souls need God's medicine—God's Son Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that He promises in the Gospel. His comforting Words can also comfort us: "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2).



Trent Saari is pastor of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Lake Havasu City, Arizona.

Vocation Serves God and Man Because of Christ

During 2014, the Lutheran Sentinel will feature articles on our Christian vocation.

Christ's Hidden Love Blesses Us with All That We Need

God has a vocation! We confess it with these words from Luther's explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; ... 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" (*ELH*, p. 32). Through His unflinching love toward us sinners and the faithful keeping of His promises, we have been blessed with more than we need. During the new year, we should thank God for His many blessings of 2013 and trust Him to continue to help us each day.

The children of Israel experienced God's direct providence. As they traveled in the wilderness for 40 years, God supplied over two million people with manna, quail, and water. God also supplied the widow of Zarephath, her son, and Elijah with food during a Three-year famine. However, most people receive God's providence through the vocations and efforts of the people around them.

Through the skills, learning, experience, and wealth of others, God works to provide the things that we need. God hides His providence behind the vocations of others! This truth has two consequences. First, God blesses people with a purpose in life. In God's providence, no human life is without purpose—some are given the purpose of being objects of our help and love. Second, because God's work is hidden, many people boast in themselves or thank people or the state for their blessings. Instead, we are to believe God's Word and thank God for His providence.

Because God works through the vocations of all people, this also means that He gives each one of us vocations so that we can be a blessing to our families and serve our

neighbors in the love of God (see the article on the next page). We are to realize that God has given everyone many vocations—husband, wife, child, citizen, pastor, teacher, employer, employee. God also gives us skills, interests, and experiences so that we can pursue our vocations in the workplace.

In our lifetimes, we may have several different "jobs".

Through each one, God calls us to carry out His will as we provide goods and services to others. Because of sin, our "jobs" will carry with them the griefs and troubles of this world, as God promised to Adam (Genesis 3:17–19). On the other hand, because our vocations come from God and we live in the forgiveness of Christ, our work becomes a service to God and our neighbor.

Consider the thousands of people and the many operations that are required to fill grocery stores with food and necessities. It is a tribute to the human planning and ingenuity in our economy

that so many things are provided. However, we should never forget that God supplies the sun and rain for crops to grow, He gives people health and abilities to reap what was sown, He supplies the wisdom and understanding of His creation to use materials to warehouse and transport goods to the stores, and He provides us with vocations to earn money so that we can purchase what we need to live.

God's vocation as our Provider is truly astounding. His providence, in spite of our sinful attitudes, is amazing. His love toward us in these material things should move us to worship Him and thank Him for providing us with forgiveness through Jesus and eternal life.

The editor



Christians in Vocation Serve Their Neighbor

The word “vocation” comes from the Latin *vocatio*, which means “to call, summon”. We use the word “vocation” to state the truth that God has called us to serve Him in our various duties. All people have a calling from God, whether or not they recognize it.

When Lutherans use the word “calling,” they often refer to the divine call of men into the ministry of the Gospel or to “the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.” What a blessing God has given us that He sent ministers to proclaim His Word so that the Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus through His Word. And through Baptism, God washes away our sins and adopts us as His children. This adoption opens up a new life to us—a life of worship and service to God and to our neighbor. This life is called “sanctification” because the Holy Spirit moves us to live holy lives according to God’s will and leads us to glorify God as we help others.

The concept of vocation is important. First, it shows how Christians worship God in their various callings. Faith in Jesus and love for God move spouses to faithfully remain in their marriage vows, help husbands and wives to serve each other and their children in love, motivate workers to obey bosses and love the work they do, and grant strength to forgive the sins of others.

Second, vocation keeps us from the idea that we must follow some “plan” of God in order to have a good life and please Him. So many teachers of religion promote the idea that we must somehow find what God wills us to do and follow it, and only then will God bless our lives. Vocation teaches us that God will bless us in whatever He calls us to do—as parent, student, worker. Yes, some things people do are inherently sinful—abortionist, robber, swindler, drug dealer, oppressor—and God’s children are not to do them. Yet, as we serve others in our different vocations, God considers what we do out of love for Him as worship to Him.

Third, vocation teaches us how we can serve our neighbor. It has been said that God does not need our worship or service. He is pleased when we, out of love for Christ, do something as little as giving a glass of water to a child. The work of our vocations is what Jesus will point to as evidence of our faith in Him (see Matthew 25:31–40).

The Bible has many things to tell us about how we as God’s children are to carry out our vocations. Even though people may speak against us as Christians, our conduct is to be honorable and full of good works toward others (1 Peter 2:12). By doing good, we put to silence those who oppose God (1 Peter 2:15). We are not to return evil for evil, but blessing, “knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9). Paul instructs workers to serve “not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Ephesians 6:6).

What a blessed work God has called us to do. For by being faithful in our vocations, we are serving people in the world, fulfilling God’s hidden work of providence, worshiping God and glorifying His name, and setting examples of honest labor to others. Through vocation, God gives us a purpose to living—serving Him and our neighbor. In our vocations, we can put to use the skills and abilities that God has given to us. On the last day, Jesus will say to all who believe in Him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

The editor



Be Ready to Answer

Know What God's Word Says About Sin and Grace

“Ryan, how do I put this picture in my email message to Aunt Susan?” “Oh, Grandma, that’s easy. You just open this, highlight that, and click this. There!” “Ryan! I need you to slow down and show me. I have no idea what you just did!”

Maybe you have lived out this scenario. Were you Grandma or Ryan? Inserting a picture into an email is easy – once you know how! That is true for many things, including evangelism.

Being ready to answer when asked about the reason for the hope that we have is easy. We often make evangelism far more complicated than it is. We make it more complex because we want to have all of the responses to all of the possible objections that a person can raise. It becomes burdensome because we approach evangelism with the attitude that we need to create faith; we think that if we have just the right answers, the person will be convinced to believe. This makes evangelism about our words and not God’s. But God’s Word says, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1Co. 12:3) and “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is God’s work and created by God’s Word.

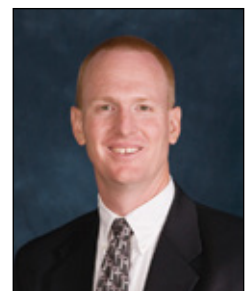
Don’t complicate evangelism. Keep it simple. Know what God’s Word says about sin and grace.

To this end, Romans 6:23 is a great short verse to memorize: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This verse contains the simple message of God’s Word about sin and grace in all its fullness. What does sin earn? Death—temporal and eternal. What does God give us in Jesus? Eternal life! Can we earn eternal life? No. All we can earn is death. God sent Jesus to earn eternal life for everyone. Jesus lived a perfect life. Jesus paid

our debt by suffering the death that we deserve. Jesus rose triumphant from the grave, proving that He has earned eternal life for all people. It is that simple.

Many things in our lives are easy once we know how. Don’t complicate evangelism. The message of salvation is simple—sin and grace. Know what God’s Word says about sin and grace and you will be ready to answer.



Timothy Hartwig is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in North Mankato, Minnesota.

In View of God's Mercy

The giving and receiving side of Christmas is all but over. Now, where do we put everything? A typical American answer: "Rent a storage unit!" Public storage units have popped up everywhere and nearly all have access to them. But what good does it do to store things we may never use?

The apostle Paul gives us a list of God-given gifts, but points out we dare not store them. Our life in Christ with all its accompanying gifts is not something we hang on a wall or place on a shelf only to be forgotten. These gifts are to be used. And our motivation is not to be self-centered but Christ-centered. Paul tells us, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

What is our motive to perform this "spiritual act of worship"? It is God's mercy. Our service is based in the pure joy and thankfulness of a heart recognizing by faith God's mercy in Christ.

Let's face it, if we were to receive what we deserved in the economy of God's holy Law, we would deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment. Yet, in our Lord's economy of grace and His undeserved love and mercy toward us, we receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus instead. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

This earth-born Son of God came in flesh, lived a perfect life, and was placed under the just wrath of God, all in our place. His death on the cross, the all-sufficient sacrifice, redeemed us. To believe that Jesus did all this for us is to know the mercy and love of God. St. Paul tells us that we respond and offer ourselves "in view of His mercy". Our earthly gifts, especially our time and talents, are actually to be viewed as instruments of divine worship to be used in service to Him and His kingdom of grace. Even our earthly treasure of wealth can then be viewed differently and appreciatively. It can then be used cheerfully to worship Him who gives us all things.

The apostle goes on to elaborate when he states, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" (Romans 12:6). The gifts that Paul lists in this section are gifts God gives to each of us. As His living instruments, we are to use our gifts to help build up His Church.

Paul follows each gift with the basic exhortation to

"use them". This emphasis attached to each gift shows that we would be remiss to store them away. In other words, do not stick them away in some dark and remote storage unit, out of sight and out of mind. Use them to God's glory.

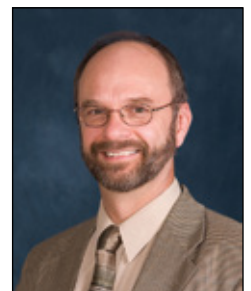
As you plan your new year of Christ-living, please note that like the other gifts, the gift of generosity is to be used also. We have all benefited from those who have been generous before us. Those who came before us shared their gifts in service to Christ and others. Many gave of their earthly wealth to generously support the proclamation of the Gospel. Our very existence as believers points to the fact that they were generous.

The reality is that without the gift of generosity, the likelihood of keeping the lights on in our churches would soon fade. Without the gift of generosity, our pulpits and church offices could soon be vacant. Without generosity, the Great Commission itself would be in danger of not being fulfilled. So quite simply, as you recognize your God-given gifts and especially the gift of generosity—don't just store them somewhere—for Jesus' sake use your gifts, all to the glory of God.

As we exemplify generosity, we teach it to our children, and nurture it in our midst. Know that through this "spiritual act of worship" this prayer to God is fulfilled:

"Grant, we beseech you, Almighty God, unto Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom which comes down from above, that Your Word, as becomes it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and in the confession of Your name abide unto the end." Amen. (ELH, p. 86)

In need of estate planning or stewardship assistance? Contact Rev. Dan Basel: dbasel@blc.edu.



Daniel Basel serves as the ELS Giving Counselor, whose office is in Mankato, Minnesota.



On the Synodical Scene...

Gloria Dei Hosts Mission Rally

On September 21, 2013, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Saginaw, Michigan, hosted the Circuit 3 Women's Mission Rally. Fifty-five women and men representing twelve congregations in Circuit 3 came together under the rally theme "Lift High the Cross". The Rally began with a worship service led by the Rev. Homer Mosley, the host pastor.

Next, the Rev. Steven Petersen spoke about the many missions of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Lunch was followed by musical entertainment by members of the Gloria Dei bell choir and a violin soloist.

During the afternoon session, the attendees heard presentations from Amazing Grace Book Store in Bay City, Michigan, and from the Saginaw Pregnancy Counseling Center in Saginaw.

The offering given for the Rally amounted to \$2,020.00. This was distributed between the Pregnancy Counseling Center, ELS Board for Home Outreach, and

Cross-stitch. The following Rally officers were elected: Flo Brueggemeier from Abiding Word Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, Ohio, as president and Ellen Hiesrodt from Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Holland, Michigan, as vice president. The project for next year is for the members to save their change for the benefit of medical expenses for the family of Shalem, who underwent a liver transplant in India.

Submitted by Carol Kolhagen, outgoing Rally president.

2013 Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Midyear Graduation

A midyear graduation service for Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (BLTS) occurred on Tuesday, December 3, 2013, in Trinity Chapel of Bethany Lutheran College. The Rev. David J. Webber (Redeemer, Scottsdale, Arizona) served as preacher. Seminary president, the Rev. Gaylin Schmeling, presented the diplomas, and the Rev. Dr. J. Kincaid Smith represented the Board of Regents. The sermon was based on Matthew 11:25–30 with the theme "Take My Yoke upon You, and Learn from Me". A reception followed the service in the Great Room.

The following graduated from the seminary with a Master of Divinity degree: Paul Webber and Michael Willitz.



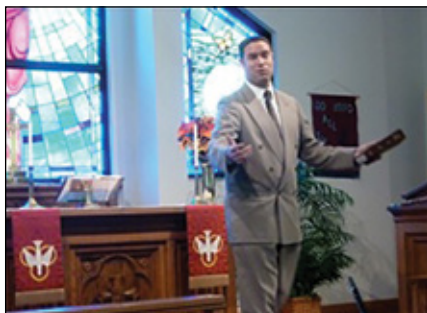
(L to R): Michael Willitz and Paul Webber

Florida Women's Mission Society: 2013 Fall Rally

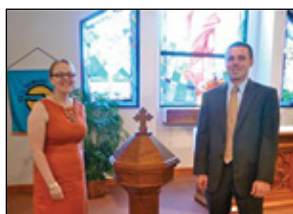
The ELS Women's Mission Society, Circuit One 2013 Fall Rally was held at Peace Lutheran Church, Lakeland, Florida on November 9. The theme was "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Rally registration totaled 53, plus children.



The Rev. Peter Heyn, Peace Lutheran, Lakeland, Florida led the opening devotion based on Psalm 46:1.



Jill and Matt Kanzenbach gave a very moving presentation titled "Miracles Every Day, Always Be Ready." They talked about their five-year ordeal concerning Jill's brain tumor and what it meant for them to trust in Jesus.



Mary Ann McKay, Our Savior Lutheran, Naples, Florida presented a video about their long-term support of an orphanage in India. The Florida pastors received a copy of the DVD.

The Rev. Herbert Huhnerkoch spoke about Florida circuit news and explained his role as the circuit visiting pastor.

The ladies of Peace Lutheran, Lakeland, Florida served a delicious lunch. Afterwards, a group photo was taken and the pastor's choir sang "Abide with Me."

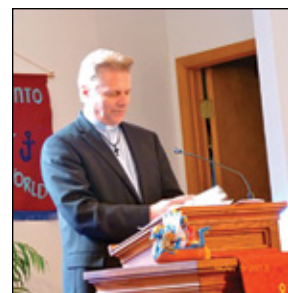
During the business meeting, Ione Lillegard announced her retirement after serving six years as Rally president. Lorie Steinberg, Peace Lutheran, Lakeland, Florida was elected as the new president.

Ione was thanked for her many years of selfless service. The Rally funds collected totaled \$2,807 and were designated for Cross-stitch. The 2014 Spring Rally will be held Saturday, March 8, 2014, at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Lakeland, Florida.



The Rev. Steven Petersen thanked the ELS Women's Mission Society for their support of mission work through Cross-stitch and discussed the ministry and its mission. He gave a very informative video presentation on our missions in Peru, Chile, Korea, India, Ukraine, Czech Republic, and Latvia.

The Rally concluded with a devotion given by the Rev. Andrew Burmeister of Our Savior Lutheran, Lakeland based on Psalm 46:1, "God Is Our Refuge," all sang "Be Still My Soul" throughout the devotion, and Pastor closed with prayer.



Submitted by Denise Macauley, Rally secretary.

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iola, Wisconsin Celebrates 40th Anniversary

Redeemer Lutheran Church of Iola, Wisconsin, celebrated their 40th anniversary on November 17, 2013. Pastor Fred Theiste was the guest preacher, with Pastor Roger Holtz leading the service. Redeemer president Tom Hoyord gave an historical photo presentation. A fellowship dinner followed the service and presentation.

Submitted by Kim Hutchinson



(L to R): Pastor Fred Theiste and Pastor Roger Holtz.

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iola, Wisconsin.

Pastor, I Have a Question...

Question: *What does it mean to be spiritually blind? I did not think our spirit has physical features. Please clarify.*

Answer: We often contrast the spiritual with the physical. We also employ the term “spiritual” to refer to our religious life, our relationship to God. When we say we were born spiritually blind, we mean to say that we had no natural ability to see the great things God does for us. We are using a figure of speech.

Paul wrote: “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds **the god of this age has blinded**, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

When His disciples asked why He taught in parables, Jesus answered, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them’” (Mark 4:11–12).

In His Word, God reveals to us the natural condition of all people at birth. We were born blind to God (spiritually blind), dead in transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2), and God’s enemies (Romans 5:10 ff). The Bible teaches that people are born with a body and a soul or spirit. The spirit is synonymous with soul. Body and soul together make up the human being. They are separated by physical death.

The above passages teach about our sinful nature before coming to faith. It is not that our spirit is blind. Rather, our natural body and soul cannot see God and the good things He has done for us. Jesus performed many miracles, some of which were seen by His enemies. They could not realize what those miracles meant. They claimed that He did these miracles by the power of Satan.

Those who are spiritually blind are not just blind in their souls. Jesus, God’s only begotten Son, was born, lived, and died to earn forgiveness for all people. When He rose triumphant on Easter, He declared that a world of sinners was justified, that is, they are not guilty of their sins before the holy God. Through His Word, God reaches out to all people, inviting them to **see** all He has done for us. But the Spirit of **God must give us eyes to see** that which we can’t see by nature because we are blind to God (spiritually blind).

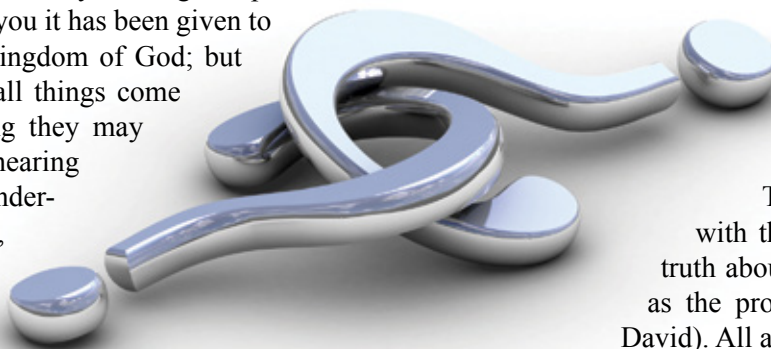
As Jesus prepared to enter Jerusalem for His passion, He met two blind men sitting by the roadside.

They cried out to Him, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!” (Matthew 20:31).

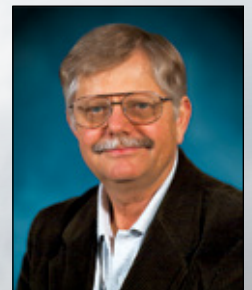
These two, who could not see with their physical eyes, knew the truth about Jesus and recognized Him as the promised Messiah (the Son of David). All around Him, Jesus met people with good eyesight, but they couldn’t see.

They were blind to God. They were blind spiritually. Seeing, they could not see, and hearing, they could not hear.

We thank God that He has resurrected us, who were dead in trespasses and sins. He declared, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20). But God has given us a new spiritual birth in Baptism for both body and soul, with eyes that can see all that Jesus did for us. The Bible defines spiritual sight: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).



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.

The Miracle of Water

Water! We use it every day for drinking, washing, and cleaning. Water is one of the most abundant chemical compounds on earth. But have you ever thought about what water is? I am not a chemist, nor did I take anything more than basic chemistry in high school, but I know this: water is made up of two elements, hydrogen and oxygen. I also know that each water molecule contains not one, but two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen. That is about the extent of my chemical knowledge. But think about what I just said. Water contains two atoms of hydrogen. Hydrogen is a highly inflammable element. Chemists know this and have invented the hydrogen bomb. Chemists have learned not to use hydrogen in blimps after the Hindenburg disaster in the 1930s. They now use the lighter-than-air helium to lift balloons and blimps.

The third atom in the molecule of water is oxygen. But the water molecule contains only **one** atom of oxygen. Two atoms of hydrogen, a highly flammable element, coupled with oxygen, the very ingredient needed to allow the hydrogen to burn and explode when a flame is applied. So, we drink, wash, and cleanse with two elements that, when brought together with fire, produce a tremendous explosion and burst. And when man tries to put these two elements together near a fire or flame, the outcome worsens because of the volatile nature of hydrogen. Remember the Hindenburg.

OK, now think about this. When God puts these two elements together in His arrangement of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen, we get what we call “water”. And when this arrangement is used around a flame or fire, this substance **puts out fire**. Think of that: hydrogen coupled with oxygen puts out fire rather than exploding. This is nothing short of a miracle, the miracle of water

which we drink and use to wash our bodies and cleanse so many things in our daily life as well as put out fires. Is this not a wonder, indeed, one of the great wonders of the world which God created?

However, there is another miraculous aspect to this substance we call “water”. When God adds His Name to His arrangement of the two atoms of hydrogen and one

atom of oxygen, we get an even greater miracle, the miracle of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. This “compound,” if I may humbly call it that for the sake of this discussion, saves us, for it cleanses not the body, but the conscience from guilt as the Apostle Peter describes: “Baptism now saves us, not by washing dirt from the body, but by guaranteeing us a good conscience before God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). Here is the real miracle of water.

Water can be a most destructive force. The Flood of Noah’s day reveals this. Water carved out the Grand Canyon.

Water can move huge boulders and destroy entire cities in a matter of a few moments. Just think of the tidal wave that enveloped Japan a few years ago. But God uses the water of Holy Baptism to destroy our sin and the power of the devil. Baptism destroys death and brings life, as the Apostle Paul says, “(God) saved us by the washing (Baptism) in which the Holy Spirit gives us a new birth and a new life” (Titus 3:5). Praise God for His miracle of Water and the Word.



Joseph Burkhardt is pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Helens, Oregon.

One Out of Two *IS* Bad

To review, Jesus gave the ongoing service of His Gospel (the Holy Ministry) so that an intergenerational body of sinners (the church) would be continually built up into one common and united faith (Jude 23). This ministry is His method by which His body (the Holy Christian Church) “grows up into Christ”. Through the ministry of the Gospel that unites His body in the one true faith, Jesus stabilizes His body against the prevailing winds of “fad-driven” Christianity—a faith that is “tossed back and forth” with every whim of the world and every will of the heart.

But Jesus didn’t leave this “growing up into Himself” merely to be passively guarded. The true faith, built up by the ministry of the Gospel, is also proactive—a dual action carried on among its members. And so **one action out of two is bad.**

Martin Luther boils the character of the Christian and of the body of Christ down to two actions: *faith* and *love*. **Faith** receives the truths about Jesus Christ and His forgiveness publicly from the pastor or privately through our fellow Christians. **Love** gives the truth about Christ and His forgiveness to our neighbor. While faith precedes love in order, neither has continued existence without the other.

What does this truth in love have to do with Christian families? Consider which of the following scenarios is better: 1) A family that is routinely in church to receive God’s forgiveness on Sunday morning, but in their home life, the husband never communicates that same loving forgiveness to his wife, the mother never shares this forgiveness of Christ with her often-disobedient children, and the children, having never heard such words exchanged between Christians, only harbor grudges and anger toward one another; **or** 2) The family that routinely forgoes church in favor of spending loving time with one another in camping, fishing, eating, and laughing. Here the word “forgive” easily rolls off the tongue because it really serves to say, “your sin is no big deal, I’ve done the same to you, even Steven.”

If you are perplexed, that’s good. There is no “better” option here. Regarding the first scenario, the truth of God’s forgiveness in Christ is voided by robbing it of truth’s love of one’s neighbor (think of the *unmerciful servant* from

Matthew 18:21–35). In the second scenario, there are human love and togetherness between family members, but they are void of God’s love for other sinners in the truth of Christ. Jesus calls this lip-service faith and He condemns the hearts of those who practice it (Matthew 15:8). The toughest news of all? Many “Christian” families are well-practiced at both.

The great news (the Gospel) is this: Jesus’ holy life is perfect truth, and the fact that He gave His truly holy life into death is perfect love. The truth of Jesus’ sinless life that He submitted with love into death is **yours**: He died for your loveless truths and your truthless love. Through faith, Jesus fills you with the truth of His saving life and death for you,

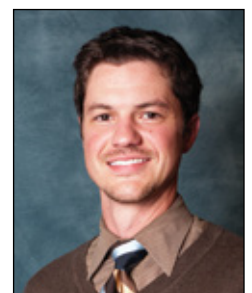
and He gives to you the joyous privilege of communicating this truth with love to your siblings, parents, and children, especially when they sin against you. Jesus has filled you, dear parents and grandparents, with the truth of His forgiveness. He gives you the freedom to give His forgiveness and love to your children. What a joyous freedom!

The Christian family is a wonderful God-given environment in which to

exercise this dual action—*God’s truth spoken in love*. In every Christian family, where sinful words and actions will be evident, there will be many opportunities to proclaim God’s forgiveness. For the truth of God’s love is this: Where sin is plenty, God’s grace in Christ is more plentiful still! (Romans 5:20). And wherever God’s grace in Christ is plentiful, there His Church is growing up into Christ.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, according to your mercy, forgive me my sins of loveless truth and truthless love. In your merciful love to me, compel me to speak the truth of your forgiveness to my family members. Amen.

NEXT TIME: *Building Itself in Love*



Kyle Madson is a home missionary at Divine Mercy Lutheran Church in Weatherford, Texas.

Seminary Celebrates 150th Anniversary

On Sunday, November 17, 2013, over 3,000 people gathered—in person and online—to celebrate Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's 150th anniversary.

"My heart is full and I'm sure yours is, too," said Paul Wendland, seminary president. "This throng and those joining us by live streaming are proof that it takes more than a seminary to grow a pastor. It takes a synod."

In his sermon, Pastor Mark Schroeder, president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), shared how the synod grows a pastor: "This school has chosen not to produce scholars, theologians, and linguists—though it does that to some degree—but they produce shepherds who feed God's flock. For 150 years, very wise men have set aside their own reasoning for the foolishness of the cross."

Special guests also reminded those attending how WELS works together to prepare servants for God's church. The presidents of Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary read

the Scripture lessons. For the first time in the synod's history, the choirs—about 175 singers—from the four ministerial education schools were together in one place. In addition, Bryan Gerlach, administrator for the WELS Commission on Worship, served as the guest organist.



In his letter of congratulations, the Rev. John Moldstad, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, wrote, "Anniversaries give us the opportunity to look back and appreciate all of the blessings God has bestowed upon us and to look forward to the future with confidence and assurance through faith in His providential care."

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was founded in 1863 in Watertown, Wisconsin, with one professor and one student. During the past 150 years, the seminary, now located in Mequon, Wisconsin, has prepared more than 3,500 pastors for the worldwide mission of WELS.

The archived footage from the service is available at: <http://bit.ly/liY2XMv>.

Lutheran Free Conference Meets in New Ulm, Minnesota

The annual Lutheran Free Conference met at Martin Luther College on November 6 and 7, 2013. The conference again brought together three presidents of Lutheran churches: Pres. John Moldstad of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), Pres. Matthew Harrison of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and Pres. Mark Schroeder of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Each one presented papers that had been read at the past three annual Emmaus conferences in Tacoma, Washington.

Pres. Moldstad spoke on "Grace Before, In, and For All Time—The Election Controversy with Application to Inter-Church Dialogue." Dr. Mark Nolan, LCMS pastor in Evansville, Indiana, responded. Pres. Harrison delivered his essay, "The Context and Content of the Free Evangelical Conferences of 1856—1859: Something to Learn for Confessional Lutherans Today?" The response was given by Dr. James Nestingen, professor emeritus of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. Pres. Schroeder spoke on "Walking

Together with Jesus: Church Fellowship and Its Implications for Confessional Lutherans." LCMS Prof. John Pless of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, gave the response.

In addition, Prof. Steven Paulson, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, delivered his paper on Luther's "Bondage of the Will" titled "The Chief Article and the Jugular Issue: Justification by Faith and the Captivated Will." The reaction was presented by WELS Prof. Kenneth Cherney from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

The Lutheran Free Conference brought together many people who are concerned about holding fast to the doctrine and practices of the historic Lutheran Confessions and presenting the pure Gospel to the world. We thank God that the Gospel continues to create faith among people with whom we are not able to practice fellowship.

The editor

Board for Home Missions Update— Texas

Weatherford, Texas

In April 2013, the Rev. Kyle Madson and his family made the trek to Weatherford, Texas, from Frankenmuth, Michigan. Pastor Madson was called to serve as an exploratory missionary to the Weatherford area, meaning that he would work to see if a new congregation could be formed there. Two families in the area had already expressed interest in a new ELS mission, so combined with the growth



First baptism of Divine Mercy Lutheran Church, Weatherford, Texas: Peter, Amy, and Edith Hermanson and Pastor Kyle Madson.

Cedar Park/Leander, Texas

The Rev. Brad Kerkow serves Hope Lutheran Church in Cedar Park/Leander, Texas. Pastor Kerkow moved with his family from Mankato to this northwest suburb of Austin in the summer of 2011 to begin exploratory mission work. The first worship service of the mission was held on Easter Sunday in 2012. The mission organized as a congregation this past spring and was received as a member congregation of the synod at the 2013 convention. Hope Lutheran presently numbers 48 souls.

After worshipping in a local elementary school, Hope Lutheran now worships in a ministry center, which also serves as the parsonage for the Kerkow family. Worship is held on the patio of the parsonage, which was recently weatherized to make for more comfortable conditions year-round. (It *can* get cool in central Texas in the winter!) The

of the area and the lack of other ELS or WELS churches in the immediate vicinity, prospects seem good.

Weatherford is located just west of Ft. Worth and is undergoing substantial growth. Various industries are expanding operations in the Ft. Worth area, and the accompanying residential growth is spilling into the surrounding areas. Pastor Madson has been hard at work surveying the area, including much door-to-door canvassing to introduce the new mission to residents.

“Divine Mercy Lutheran Church” was chosen as the name of the new mission. Pastor Madson’s brother designed the mission’s logo, which is featured prominently on promotional materials. Divine Mercy has already taken part in some community events, including a booth at the “Safe Halloween” held at the local community college and members walking in the Veterans’ Day parade.

Plans are well underway for a “grand opening” worship service at the end of January 2014. The mission will meet at a local middle school on the east side of Weatherford. In preparation for this event, a team of four Bethany Lutheran College students will travel to Weatherford in early January for a week of door-to-door canvassing. A large mass mailing will also precede the opening service for additional publicity.

ministry center/parsonage sits on six acres of land, which will allow for the eventual construction of a permanent sanctuary. The property is across the street from the entrance to a large county park that is well-known to many area residents.

Along with Faith Lutheran in San Antonio, Texas, the ELS presence in the state of Texas stands at three congregations. God be praised for the mission opportunities in Texas!

Michael K. Smith serves as a professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and as chairman of the ELS Board for Home Outreach.



Our Misery Index

What is your “Misery Index” at the beginning of this new year? Are you concerned about paying for last Christmas? Are you troubled about your health or job? Do you feel that you are losing out economically—higher bills and less income? In one sense, our index should be low since we are to trust that during this year, God will provide for our needs, answer our prayers, and guide us with His Word.

The Misery Index was developed by economist Arthur Okun to measure how people feel about life in the United States. The index peaked at 12.87% in October 2011, and in August 2013, it is near 8.82%. Factors such as health care, taxes, unemployment, and inflation all contribute to the rise or fall of this index.

What if we invented a “Church Misery Index”? This is relevant because we perceive that a growing number of people in the United States are becoming less involved with religion and church activities. Each year, we see a greater number of attacks upon Christmas traditions, more vocal proponents of atheism and anti-religious attacks, and an increasing number of people willing to live in lifestyles that once were considered to be in conflict with God’s Word. These trends are a sad reflection of people who no longer listen to God’s Word, do not consider religion and worship as positive activities, and do what is right in their own eyes.

As our Church Misery Index becomes higher, we may despair for God’s Church. Indeed, the Church Misery Index might seem even higher in Europe and other countries in the world because each Sunday, most cathedrals and churches are almost empty of worshipers. The few confessional churches in Europe must struggle to have anyone listen to the pure Gospel.

Now, the Church Misery Index really looks at the glass as half-empty. And it should upset and disappoint us that so many more of our neighbors no longer hear God’s Word. It should concern us that our culture grows increasingly hostile to God’s commandments and Word.

However, God’s children have much to be optimistic about. First, Jesus has promised that His Church will continue as long as this world endures. Even though the Last Days will be difficult times for Christians as the devil is loosed for a short time, Jesus promises that for those who believe in Him, “No one will be able to pluck them from His hand” (John 10:28).

Second, we can be optimistic because the “success” of the Gospel is not ours, but God’s. We confess that the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in

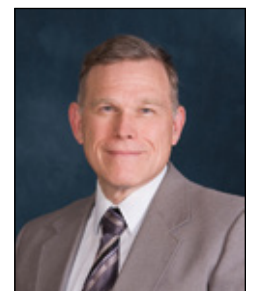
the one true faith” (*ELH*, p. 32). The Holy Spirit uses us to tell others about the hope that we have in Jesus Christ and uses our words to bring people to trust in Jesus.

The third reason to be optimistic is that Jesus Christ has given us a certain hope and promise. Because of sin and wickedness, our earthly existence is uncertain, death-ridden, and hopeless. But Jesus was born to establish peace with God through His perfect life and innocent death. He was tempted in every way, yet He remained without sin. Then Jesus “became sin for us” when “the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6) in order that Jesus might “bear in His own body your sins” and be redeemed “by the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:19). The certainty of Jesus’ work of salvation and promise of eternal life is given to us in His resurrection from the dead. Many people saw the risen Jesus and wrote their eyewitness accounts in the four Gospels. The message about Jesus’ work of salvation is joyful, certain, and full of promise and hope.

Fourth, we can be optimistic because the future belongs to God. St. Paul wrote, “All things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). Therefore, if God’s children live among people who are indifferent to His Word, God will continue to bless those who trust in Jesus. They will need to grow in their knowledge of God’s Word, trust more firmly in His promises, show more clearly how they are in the world but not of the world, demonstrate more to others the love of their Savior, and engage more in prayer and worship in spirit and truth.

The fifth reason for optimism is that Jesus promised to take us out of this vale of tears to His home in heaven—when we die and when Jesus returns in glory. As children of God, adopted through Baptism, given faith in Jesus, and made heirs of eternal life, all who believe in Jesus have their citizenship in heaven and await the glorious life He has provided for us.

On earth, the Misery Index may grow or decrease with the times and cultural situation. Jesus has given us reason to rejoice in His salvation, praise His certain promises, and hope for a blessed future. Our Church Misery Index should be very low indeed!



Theodore Gullixson is an ELS pastor emeritus living in Mankato, Minnesota.

New ELS Logo

A new logo has been designed for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Designed by artist Jonathan Mayer of Scapegoat Studio, the new logo uses the “Chi Rho” from the former logo and adds a cross. The “Chi Rho” is an ancient symbol for our Savior, using the first two letters of “Christ” in the Greek alphabet. This symbol has long been a part of our ELS logos, emphasizing the importance of keeping Christ at the center of our teachings. The crimson color of the logo reminds us of the blood Jesus shed for us on the cross. Mayer is also designing several other logos to be used by various boards and committees of the ELS. The new logo will gradually replace the former logo in all official publications.

