

Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

"Engage Others with Jesus."



The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

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From the President

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

Is truth knowable? Juries have to deal with this. Pilate had doubts about this. The world today says it is absurd to assert having any corner on truth, especially in the religious sphere. The post-modern era has its own tenacious “truth”—namely, real truth is unknowable! Searching for truth without ever arriving is deemed a great virtue. Living in this murky milieu, even a well-versed Christian can be lured to ask: Is it right for me to make the truth claim? Is it a sign of arrogance to say, “What I here confess and believe is the absolute truth”?

The 1992 doctrinal statement of our synod contains an interesting paragraph:

We confess that it is possible both to know the truth of God’s Word and to profess it, and that God requires us to do both. Taking one’s stand on the Word in matters of doctrine, after diligent study of the Scriptures, is not an act of human pride but of humble submission to God’s authority.

Two verses from Scripture are provided for support: “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); and “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13).

The Bereans in Acts 17 were commended for studying Scripture to determine if what Paul was preaching and teaching agreed with the Old Testament. We are to do the same. It is not pride, but humble submission to Christ’s authority to study diligently both Old and New Testaments and then boldly confess the truth. Confession of the truth also means rejecting error.

When we take our stand as Luther did (e.g., his “Here I stand!” at Worms in 1521), we strive to confess in a compassionate manner. When asked to give answer to what we believe, we wish to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Believers in Jesus Christ are found within the many various Christian denominations. The Lutheran Church does not decree itself to be the one Holy Christian Church on earth. To acknowledge such, however, is never an excuse to become complacent in examining Scripture daily and rendering the confession Christ calls upon each of us to make (Luke 12:8).

Reflect on how all God’s teachings—great and small—relate either directly or indirectly to the Bible’s main message. That message is that we are saved by God’s grace through faith in the forgiveness of sins won by Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Want to be of service to others in knowing truth? We help one another by directing our focus to the Word of God in its entirety.



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

The Four Uses of the Law

Series Introduction: This year, the Lutheran Sentinel will feature articles that highlight the six chief parts of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism. In his "Preface" to the Large Catechism, Luther encourages Christians to study their catechisms. "Many regard the Catechism as a simple, silly teaching which they can absorb and master at one reading." "As for myself, ... I too, am a doctor and a preacher. ... Yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism." "I must still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish. ..." (Book of Concord, Tappert, pages 358-239). The Bible remains the source of God's revelations to mankind; the Lutheran Confessions express in clear words what God teaches in the Bible.

In our culture, philosophy and lifestyles have given God's moral law a severe beating. His laws regarding life and marriage (Commandments five and six) are regarded as "un-modern" and "un-enlightened." Commandments four and seven have been ignored by those who disrespect authority and private property. With the long prosperity our nation has experienced, many people think that greed and displaying wealth are good virtues. Foul language becomes "power words." Fewer people are attending worship services and polls indicate that there is a growing, though still small, percentage of people in the world who claim to be atheists.

If modern society has turned away from God's Law, what use is it to us? What purpose do His Commandments serve? The Explanation teaches the purposes, or uses, of the Law: a curb, a mirror, and a guide. Whenever God's Law is proclaimed, it serves all three uses. However, each use has a different intended hearer.

God's Law works as a curb to all people in the world. Along with our conscience, it declares to all people what words, actions, and thoughts are pure and true and which are wicked in God's sight. The curb highlights the second table of the Law by forbidding murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and greed—and also requires protecting life, marriage, property, a good name, and the house and business of others.

The most important use of the Law is that of the mirror, where people see themselves as God does. The Law exposes sin, as St. Paul wrote: "I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:7). This use of the Law kills man's pride and enlightens him to the impossibility of keeping it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the mirror to show sin, stating, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat-

thew 5:20). Jesus then taught that not only our actions are condemned by the Law, but also our thoughts—hatred is murder, lustful thoughts are adultery, and taking false oaths is forbidden, as is vengeance. Jesus then declares God's requirement of the Law: "You shall be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

The third use of the Law is addressed to believers, giving them a guide as to how they are to live as forgiven children of Christ. This use is for only those who have repented of their sins and received God's forgiveness in absolution, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. St. Paul writes to believers, "Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, and offering and a sacrifice to God... for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Ephesians 5:2, 9). Walking in the light of truth means avoiding what is evil and serving our neighbor in Christian love. These are not self-chosen works, but those God has given us in His Law.

St. Paul identified a fourth use or purpose of God's Law: "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). God's Law declares that everything we do is tainted by sin so that "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Since the Law cannot save us, but produces only death, God sent Jesus to keep His Law perfectly and to sacrifice His life in our place to pay sin's punishment.

Each day we should thank God for His Law—the conscience that protects us from evil, the condemnations that show us our sins, and the commandments that guide us to how we can thank God for His mercy, forgiveness, and salvation.



A New Heart

At a school chapel service about a year ago, we prayed for the brother of one of our students who was waiting for a heart transplant. Something had happened to the five-year-old's heart and it didn't work the way it was supposed to anymore. He had to be connected to all sorts of machines and live at the hospital until a new heart could be found for him. But this past summer, after six months of waiting, Alex's brother Ramone finally got a new and healthy heart and was able to come home.

In Psalm 51:10, King David writes, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Just like Ramone, King David had a bad heart. But the problem with David's heart wasn't that it was unhealthy, it was that it was filled with sin. And David was frustrated because he trusted in God his Savior and he wanted to do right, but he would keep doing wrong because of the sin in his heart.

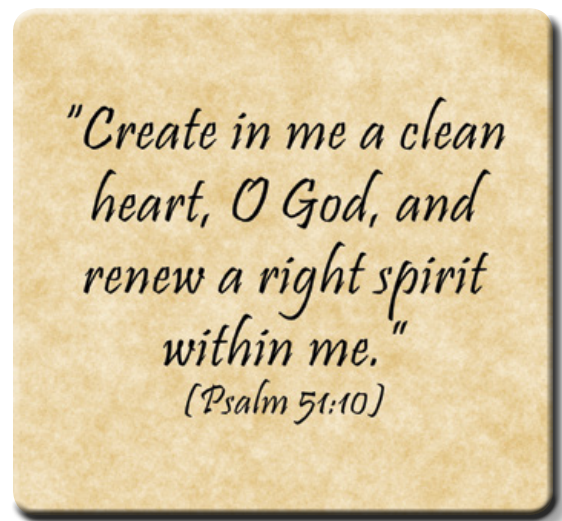
Don't we often have the same problem? We know what the right thing is do. We know that we should love each other, that we should obey those in authority, that we shouldn't cheat or lie or steal, but as hard as we try not to do them, we fall right back into doing these bad things. And we see that we have a broken heart, a heart filled with sin.

Like Ramone, we have a serious problem—we need a new heart. And how do we get that new heart? The only way Ramone could get a new heart was if someone died. And tragically, a young child did die, but his death meant life for Ramone.

Just as someone had to die so that Ramone could get a new heart and become healthy again, someone had to die for us to have new hearts washed clean from sin. That person was Jesus, who suffered and died on the cross to make us clean before God again.

After Ramone received his heart transplant last summer, he planned to start kindergarten at Peace Lutheran School. But the doctors didn't think it was a good idea yet because his body wasn't strong enough to handle all of the germs that he might come in contact with being around other children. He had a new heart and it was working, but he has to be careful to stay away from things that might make his heart sick.

We too have been given a new heart to believe God's forgiveness in Jesus, but there are many temptations and dangers around that can make our heart sick again. Knowing that Jesus died to give us a new and clean heart before God, we want to keep it that way. Just as little Ramone needed the help of his parents to keep him away from things that would make him sick, we need God's help to keep us from danger and temptations and evil. And when we do sin, we know that we can come to him and ask him to forgive our sins, to wash our hearts clean, and to help us put off sins and live for him. Amen.



Matthew Moldstad is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Kissimmee, Florida.

Be Ready to Give an Answer:

Know What the Bible Says About God, Sin, and Salvation

During 2015, the Board for Home Outreach will present a series of articles with the theme “Be Ready to Give an Answer.” This title is drawn from 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect....” As Christians, all of us are to be on the lookout for opportunities to tell others about Jesus, our true basis for hope in this seemingly hopeless world. It is the board’s prayer that these articles will help you in your witnessing efforts.

Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark. Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night. Samson killed the Philistines with the axe of the apostles. The epistles were the wives of the apostles.

Sure, we may chuckle at these nuggets of “knowledge” as reported by children, but how many adults know very much about the Bible? One survey found that 12% of adults believed that Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark! Many of us who were raised going to Sunday School and church take for granted certain facts from the Bible and assume that most of the people we know have the same knowledge we do. But that’s an assumption that may be a roadblock to us telling someone about what we as Christians believe. If we’re going to tell people about the “hope we have,” we ourselves need to know all the facts.

Let’s start with God. God is not just a nice old man who has a moderate interest in us. He is powerful, creating the entire universe out of nothing (Genesis 1-3). He is the perfect judge who demands that we also be perfect (Matthew 5:48). Anyone who is not perfect, He will destroy eternally since He demands that anyone who sins must die (Ezekiel 18:20).

Sounds pretty mean, doesn’t He? And that’s the picture that some people have of God: a vindictive judge who punishes us even when we sin just a little. But is that all there is to God? As Christians, we know the “other” side of God. We know He is also a God of love (1 John 4:8) who did not want to send us to hell. So to rescue us, to get us out of the damnation we deserve, God sent His Son to take our place, to live a perfect life that we can’t and to die instead of us. Jesus, true man yet also true God, is the ultimate solution to sin: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

The result of Jesus’ work is simple: salvation. And the best news is that we don’t have to do anything to get that salvation! God gives us salvation completely by his grace, washing us clean in our baptisms and creating a new man within us (Romans 6:4-5). When God makes us his own children through faith, we are headed for an eternity in heaven instead of hell.

You may have breezed through the previous three paragraphs because you know these facts so well. But how can you express these “givens” to your family member or friend who doesn’t know them or doesn’t know them as well? Don’t make it harder than it has to be. When you get the opportunity, simply use your own words to tell someone what you know, what God has taught you from his Word. Let God take care of the results. All he asks is that you be ready to give an answer when asked!

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



Are You Spiritual or Religious?

“Do you consider yourself to be more religious or more spiritual?” This was an interesting question posed by FOX News some years ago. The answers were what you might have expected. Some people said they did not see any difference between the two. However, most people claimed they were more spiritual than religious. In fact, one woman claimed that she was now a “born again Christian” who no longer needed “organized religion” because she was truly spiritual inwardly.

Lauren Green, one of the commentators on FOX, created her own definitions to try to distinguish between being religious and spiritual. She claimed that being religious had to do more with liturgies and worship rituals, while her description of spiritual was more a state of being. Another commentator, Julian Phillips, who seems to have some Bible knowledge, remarked, “Well, Jesus himself said that those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

We might note that there are shards of truth in the distinction some people make between being religious and being spiritual. St. Paul told the people of Athens that they were altogether too religious because they had built altars to honor every god under the sun, including “THE UNKNOWN GOD” to whom they had erected an altar lest they leave out any deity and thereby offend it. However, those religious people did not believe in the only true and living God.

The word spiritual is used 25 times in the New International Version, and with only one exception, it is used in relationship to God. When Paul, for instance, speaks with reference to “spiritual” people in 1 Corinthians 2:15 and Galatians 6:1, he equates them with Christians, in particular those who are mature in their faith, even spiritual leaders of others. In that context, being spiritual means to be connected spiritually with Christ by faith.

However, we must be very wary of making false distinctions. There is a reason why most people claim to be spiritual but not religious. It is the self-righteous, sinful nature in all of us that says, “I am good inside and do not have to prove it by what I do. I know what I know, I believe what I believe, and I don’t need to be accountable to anyone. I don’t have to go to church to

be a Christian.” There is the idea that faith is a private matter, just between God and me, and it’s no one else’s business.

God tells us in the Third Commandment and in the words of Hebrews 10:25 that we are not to give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. When the first New Testament disciples of the apostolic age were converted on Pentecost, their immediate reaction was to meet together with other Christians, to pray, to worship, and to celebrate the Lord’s Supper with other believers. That is what spiritual people do; they practice their religion. The truth is, it is not possible to be spiritual without being religious, too.

The way in which the term “spiritual” is used on Oprah or the way it was applied to George Harrison when Paul McCartney referred to the follower of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as “the most spiritual of all the Beatles” denotes spirituality of a different kind. Jesus once met up with a man in Gadara who was full of spirits, a legion of them. However, they were not spirits from God, but from the devil. John in his first letter tells us to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. In fact, the same Greek word that Paul uses elsewhere to describe the Christian, he uses with reference to the devil and his demons in Ephesians 6:12. Being spiritual in and of itself is not necessarily good.

Christian spirituality is fundamentally connected with the Christian religion. God wants us to show our spirituality by the way we put it into practice. The confession of our hearts will also be the profession of our lives. St. Paul wrote to the Christians of Rome: “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). Religion is the fruit of our spirituality. What we believe will be shown by what we do. As Christians, the root and cause of our spirituality can only come from knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

It is not by our own power and will that we are able to follow Christ. It is because the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Gospel in the spoken Word and in the Sacraments. It is He who shows us that even though we

are by nature sinners doomed to hell, Jesus Christ came to this earth in order to live a perfect life in our place and to die on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. It is the Holy Spirit who causes us to be born again through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. It is He who teaches us that we are forgiven, not because of anything we have done, but by God's grace alone. It is also He who enlightens us through the message of God's love and mercy, and shows us the way through the gates to heaven itself. As we embrace all of this by faith, faith that is given by the Holy Spirit Himself, the result will be a life that follows Christ, and does so religiously.

May we never attempt to separate our spirituality from our religion, for when we do, we fall into the devil's snare. We make excuses for not worshiping. We shy away from studying God's Word. We become lazy about spiritual things and our religion becomes a focus on what we do for God rather than on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.



Erich Hoeft is pastor of five congregations in Northern Iowa.

**Announcing the 98th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod
and the 58th Annual Meeting of Bethany Lutheran College Inc.**

“Engaging One Another With Jesus’ Teachings”

**June 21-25, 2015
Mankato, Minnesota**

Synod Sunday - June 21, 2015

3:00 - Synod Sunday Service
4:30 - Supper (free will donation)

Monday - June 22

9:00 - Opening Convention Service

Tuesday - June 23

1:00 - Convention Essay
5:00 - Memorial Service

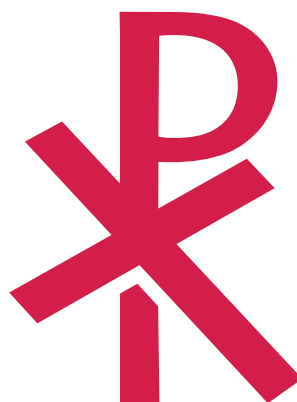
Wednesday - June 24

1:00 - Convention Essay
3:30 - Anniversaries Observed
7:00 - Communion Service

Thursday - June 25

8:30 - Unfinished business

Rev. Craig A. Ferkenstad, Secretary
Evangelical Lutheran Synod



**Evangelical
Lutheran
Synod**



On the Synodical Scene...

The Rev. Robert Harting Installed

On December 7, 2014, the Rev. Robert Harting was installed as pastor of Richland Lutheran Church, Thornton, Iowa, and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa. The Richland church was filled with members and guests for the afternoon service. Vacancy pastor, the Rev. Theodore Gullixson, conducted the liturgy; the Rev. Wayne Halvorson, Circuit Visitor, served as lector; and Pres. John Moldstad performed the rite of installation. The Rev. Martin Hoesch preached on the texts Matthew 3:1-3 and Isaiah 40:4 with the theme “Blessed Communion.” The pastors of the circuit sang “Lord of the Living Harvest.”

After the service, the Rev. Michael Sheppard, representing the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, spoke words of greeting to the new pastor. Evangelical Lutheran Synod President John Moldstad also addressed the congregations. A delicious meal was served by the ladies of Richland with the help of Prince of Peace members.



(Back Row, L to R): Reverends Michael Smith, John Moldstad, James Kassera, Shawn Stafford, and Theodore Gullixson. (Front Row, L to R): Reverends Wayne Halvorson, Michael Sheppard (WELS), Robert Harting, Ron Pedersen, Matthew Brooks, and Martin Hoesch.

The Rev. Jesse DeDeyne Installed

Rev. Jesse DeDeyne was installed as pastor of Redeemer, New Hampton, Iowa, and Trinity, Calmar, Iowa, on December 14, 2014. The installation occurred at the Redeemer congregation. The Rev. James Kassera preached the sermon and the Rev. Wayne Halvorson, Circuit Visitor, performed the rite of installation.



(Back Row, L to R): Reverends Ron Pedersen, Wayne Halvorson, and Matthew Brooks. (Front Row, L to R): Reverends Theodore Gullixson, James Kassera, Jesse DeDeyne, Robert Harting.

Jeffrey Londgren (1955–2015)

The Rev. Jeffrey Kurt Londgren was born in Marshall, Minnesota, on July 29, 1955. He attended schools in Marshall, graduating from Southwest State University. Jeffrey attended the pre-seminary program at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, and graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin.

Jeffrey was ordained into the public ministry in 1983 and served WELS churches in Abilene, Texas, Payson, Arizona, and Petoskey, Michigan. At the time of his death, he was serving three ELS congregations in East Jordan, Hillman, and Rogers City—all in Michigan.

On August 16, 1981, Jeffrey married Elisa Maria Boniek in Holly, Michigan. The Lord blessed their marriage with six children. He was an accomplished musician and singer.

The Lord called Jeffrey to His home on February 2, 2015, at the age of 59. His funeral service was held at Faith Lutheran Church, Hillman, Michigan on February 7, 2015, with the Rev. Paul Schneider officiating. He was preceded in death by his parents, Duane and Shirley Londgren of Marshall, Minnesota. He is survived by his wife Elisa, six children, four grandchildren, two sisters, and many nieces and nephews.



Mark Harstad (1948–2015)

Mark Oliver Harstad was born on September 15, 1948, in Princeton, Minnesota, to parents the Rev. Adolph and Martha (Tjerna-gel) Harstad. He was the youngest of ten children. He grew up in Watertown, Wisconsin, where his father became chaplain at Bethesda Lutheran Home in 1953. He graduated from Northwestern Preparatory School and Northwestern College in Watertown. In 1974, Mark graduated from Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. While a vicar and assistant pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin, Mark earned a Masters of Arts degree in Hebrew and Semitic studies from the University of Wisconsin. In 1976, Mark was called to serve as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Brewster, Massachusetts (Cape Cod). In 1980, Mark began teaching at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and in 1986, he taught at Bethany Lutheran College until he retired in 2014 due to his Lymphblastic Leukemia condition. Mark served the Evangelical Lutheran Synod through his six trips to Latvia and his work with the ELS Historical Society.

In 1974, Mark married Peggy J. Sorenson. The Lord gave them four children. Mark was involved in several music programs in the Mankato community.

After a trip to Alaska in 2014, Mark was diagnosed with Lymphblastic Leukemia. He died at the age of 66 years on January 17, 2015, in Mankato, Minnesota. His funeral service was on January 20, 2015, at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato with the Rev. John Petersen officiating.

Mark was preceded in death by his parents and two sisters. He is survived by his four children, three grandchildren, three sisters, four brothers, and many nieces and nephews.



Mark and Peggy Harstad

Address to the Family of Professor Mark Harstad

Dear Peggy, children, grandchildren, siblings, other family members, brothers and sisters of Mt. Olive and community members of Bethany Lutheran College, how our hearts ache with you for your grievous loss this Sabbath past.

Let the devil be damned for all the misery and grief he introduced to our race with his opening question: “Did God really say...?” Our synod now mourns the passing of one the Church’s premier teachers and a truly humble churchman. Mark was bold in his teaching of “Thus saith the Lord...” and meekly bore up under the various crosses he was placed under during his time of service to Christ’s Church. God used him as an example for all of us.

When our Lord called Professor Harstad to his position at the seminary, I was skeptical. I did not know him at all, but wondered who this upstart might be that was coming to fill the shoes of our beloved Hebrew Professor, Rudy Honsey.

It did not take long for the student body to conclude that the Lord of the Church had provided an exceptional teacher. We had many faithful and dedicated teachers as sons of the prophets. However, none were more prepared for their classes than Professor Harstad. While he could lead us to examine the veins of every leaf, whether in exegesis or church history, he had a way in all his presentations to lead us to see the entire forest of the subject at hand.

Professor Harstad encouraged reading primary sources like the ancient church fathers and especially Dr. Luther. He repeatedly highlighted the latter’s distinction of Christ’s and the Spirit’s work for us under the clarifying categories of Salvation Won and Salvation Distributed. He also taught us second year homiletics and followed to the letter what we had received from Professor Otto in our first year homiletics.

One of the more unique experiences we had in his classroom was the day we read aloud a dialogue between St. Anselm and Boso the monk. Professor and students alike ended up laughing uncontrollably so that tears were streaming down our reddened cheeks and we struggled to catch our breath for at least 15 minutes. Dry, boring lectures were not his style.

Our synod has been blessed for decades as Mark was used by our Lord to prepare future pastors, laymen, and women in the Church. In addition, he quietly, often behind the scenes, used his talents and interests to record and preserve the history of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod by serving various committees, observing significant anniversaries, and leading our historical society to acknowledge with gratefulness the evangelical heritage we all so truly cherish. We thank our Lord for these many contributions with which Mark gladly served our synod.

It is through just such educators that the lies and deceptions of Satan are challenged and opposed within the Church. The study of the truths as revealed by our Lord were more than an academic exercise for Mark—he personally believed and trusted them and was set free by them just as Jesus had promised. When circumstances in life took unexpected and disappointing turns for Mark, by the grace of God he did not wallow in self-pity, but served the Lord wherever He placed him.

Though Satan and our sinful natures vex us Christians to labor and to be heavy laden under the temptations to self-righteousness, Mark, again by God’s grace, clung to Jesus, who promised to give him Sabbath forevermore. Jesus was and is his Sabbath. So while your brothers and sisters in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod grieve and mourn with you over the loss of this good and faithful servant, God is to be praised for keeping His promise to Mark – he is now blessed having died in the Lord and now enjoys Sabbath rest from all his labor forevermore. For Jesus’ sake, may his many accomplishments in his vocations still bless his family and church. Blessed be his memory for Jesus’ sake, indeed!

Remarks made at the funeral of Mark Oliver Harstad on January 20, 2015, by the Rev. Glenn Obenberger, pastor of Parkland Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington, speaking on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Pastor, I Have a Question...

Question: *The Bible says divorce is wrong, but what if a husband is mentally abusive to his wife and kids, blaming everyone else for his actions? The kids can't wait to leave home. I really don't know how much more I can take.*

ANSWER: "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless" (Malachi 2:16). Earlier editions translate the verse, "I hate divorce," says the LORD."

And yet, God granted Moses (the law) authority to regulate divorce (Deuteronomy. 24:1-4, Matthew 19:3-9). Moses spoke to the man because he was more likely to divorce. His words seem to protect women. However, it is clear in the New Testament that women are included (Mark 10:11-12, I Corinthians 7:13).

Sin breaks up marriages. Civil law curbs our sins. People still sin, so God grants civil authorities the power to regulate divorce. Jesus spoke to us about situations in which one spouse suffers from the particular sins of the other. Adultery by its very nature breaks the bond of marriage (Matthew 19:3-9). Also, one spouse may refuse to remain married by abandoning his or her spouse. The law does not compel the other spouse to stay in such marriages (I Corinthians 7:15).

We are not obligated to divorce under these circumstances. Damaged marriages have endured by God's grace, trust being restored by the power of God's forgiveness and Christians who learn to forgive as God forgives us. Yet many marriages are broken beyond repair. In those cases, guilty spouses need to repent and receive God's forgiveness in Jesus.

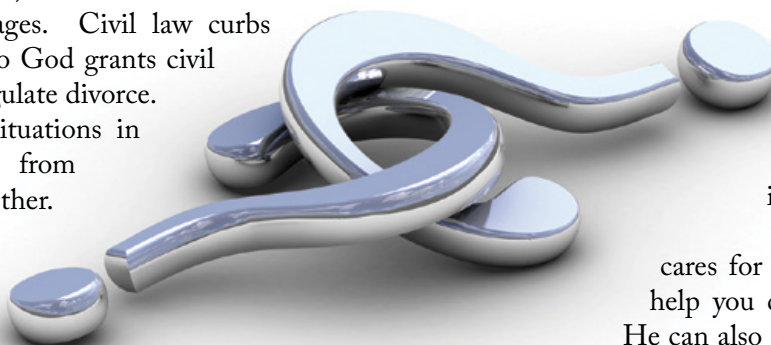
You, with your family, are living in an abusive situation. Should a husband be violent, a loving wife should remove herself and her family from danger. The violence you describe is mental and emotional to the point at which you say your children are anxious to escape and you are at the point you can't take it anymore. It is difficult to know exactly what you mean that you can't take it anymore. One might assume an emotional collapse, breakdown, or worse. With such a danger, it would be appropriate for you to remove your family from danger.

Without knowing more about the situation, it is difficult to give definitive advice. You may or may not be able to support yourself and your family without the help of your husband. You may think there is no other place to go, et cetera.

Should you choose to leave, there are options. The action might encourage your husband to join you in consulting with your pastor or some other counselor. God could certainly use this as a means of repairing your marriage and teaching your husband proper behavior toward those he claims to love.

Paul also speaks about remaining separate (I Corinthians 7:10-11). There is no rush to divorce. A time might come when there is no other choice.

Speak to your pastor. He cares for you with Jesus' love. He can help you determine your best options. He can also remind you that Jesus is with you even in those difficult situations. Your God loves you, your family, and your husband. He shed His blood so God could forgive us all and grant us holiness and eternal life by faith in Jesus. Turn to Him always in prayer, asking Him to call your husband to repentance and to give you strength and wisdom to do His will. He will be with you and take care of you.



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The City of God

Most Christians alive today are aware of the vast cultural, moral, and religious changes that are happening in the United States and in the world. The open acceptance of living with partners without marriage, children born to unwed mothers, the coarsening of television programs, the acceptance of the drug culture and gambling, the rejection of the voice of God's Word as any answer to society's problems, and the pandering of churches to speak what people's itching ears want to hear—all point to a difficult future for the Christian Church.

Such a realization by Christians can become a bitter pill to swallow, both for the future of the true Gospel and for the future faith of more generations. Many have already concluded that God's Word has failed the Church. They have begun catering the message and the music to suit what people want to hear. Others despair of any hope for the Church. They hide behind their sanctuaries and watch the world pass them by. Some might even be angry at God for allowing this to happen in a "Christian nation."

Then consider how the generation of faithful Israelite parents felt when they realized that their grandchildren were growing up and did not know God (Judges 2). Consider how Christians in Russia felt when communism took over and they were persecuted, killed, and sent to asylums or to Siberia. Consider the Christians in Rome when in AD 400, Vandals invaded the city to loot it. Anarchy arose in the lands once ruled by the Roman Empire. Christians were accused of destroying that empire by turning the people away from the Roman gods. Even the Christians wondered if God had deserted them.

Augustine was the bishop of Hippo, a city in north Africa. His book, *The City of God*, was written to defend God's will and to remind people of God's truth. In this book, Augustine stated that God's Church was not identified by the earthly churches, the powerful bishops, or the church in Rome. He taught the biblical distinction between the church on earth, which is visible and frail, and the Church of Jesus Christ, which is invisible, glorious, holy, eternal, and united with Christ through Baptism.

This distinction of the outward visible church and the Holy Christian Church is important for God's people to understand today. The congregations, schools, synods, and denominations are living in this sin-infested world, on the one hand needing to fight against temptation and Satan's attacks, while on the other hand proclaiming the praises of God, who rescued all people from their iniquities through Jesus'

suffering, death, and resurrection. And while we work together to keep these outward institutions as lights in a world of dark unbelief and pray that God would preserve them, we also understand that they could cease or change and that Jesus' Holy Christian Church will continue until He comes, as Jesus promised.

Many a time in history, the Holy Christian Church has been reduced to a remnant—eight people when the Flood came, 7,000 in Israel during the days of Elijah. Throughout history, many a believer has sat down by "the rivers of Babylon" and wept over the ungodly conditions in earthly churches (Psalm 137:1). But God has always preserved His Word and true believers living in the midst of the enemies of Christ.

God "raised up Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" and "gave Him to be head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:20, 22). As Lord of His Church, Jesus directs all history for the spread of the Gospel into all the world. He allowed Saul to persecute Christians in Jerusalem so that believers "who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). St. Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome, wrote, "I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains, but the word of God is not chained" (2 Timothy 2:9). Jesus can even bring about the suffering of Christians and the cruelty of ISIS in Iraq to lead people to want to hear the Gospel. In all circumstances, God's Word declares, "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19), and that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).



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

Parade in Green Bay

On Saturday, December 6, Christ the King Lutheran in Green Bay, Wisconsin, entered a float in the 2014 annual Howard-Suamico Christmas Parade. The float was entitled “Tuning in to God’s Plan of Salvation.” Members walked along with the float, handing out candy to the kids and Christmas outreach postcards to the adults. In all, about 800 cards were distributed, promoting the worship times for the church’s Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. The float received the 2014 Optimists’ Award, which, in all the years of the church’s participation in the parade, is the first time Christ the King has received any kind of award.



Jesus Cares Christmas service

A special Christmas program was held by the members of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church working together with the people who participate in the Jesus Cares Ministry at the church. Participants played handbells, sang Christmas songs, and read the story of Christ’s birth.

