



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



Fasting
Prepares
Us for
Feasting

pg. 8



FINDING JOY IN VARIANCE?

A season filled with many family and churchly rituals has just passed. These traditions play an important part in our lives shared with others. We learn that Jesus' family had its tradition of annually going to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41-42). Such events give shape and meaning to our Christian lives together. We can well imagine the recounting of that trip when Jesus was twelve, maybe with some embellishments by Mary and Joseph.

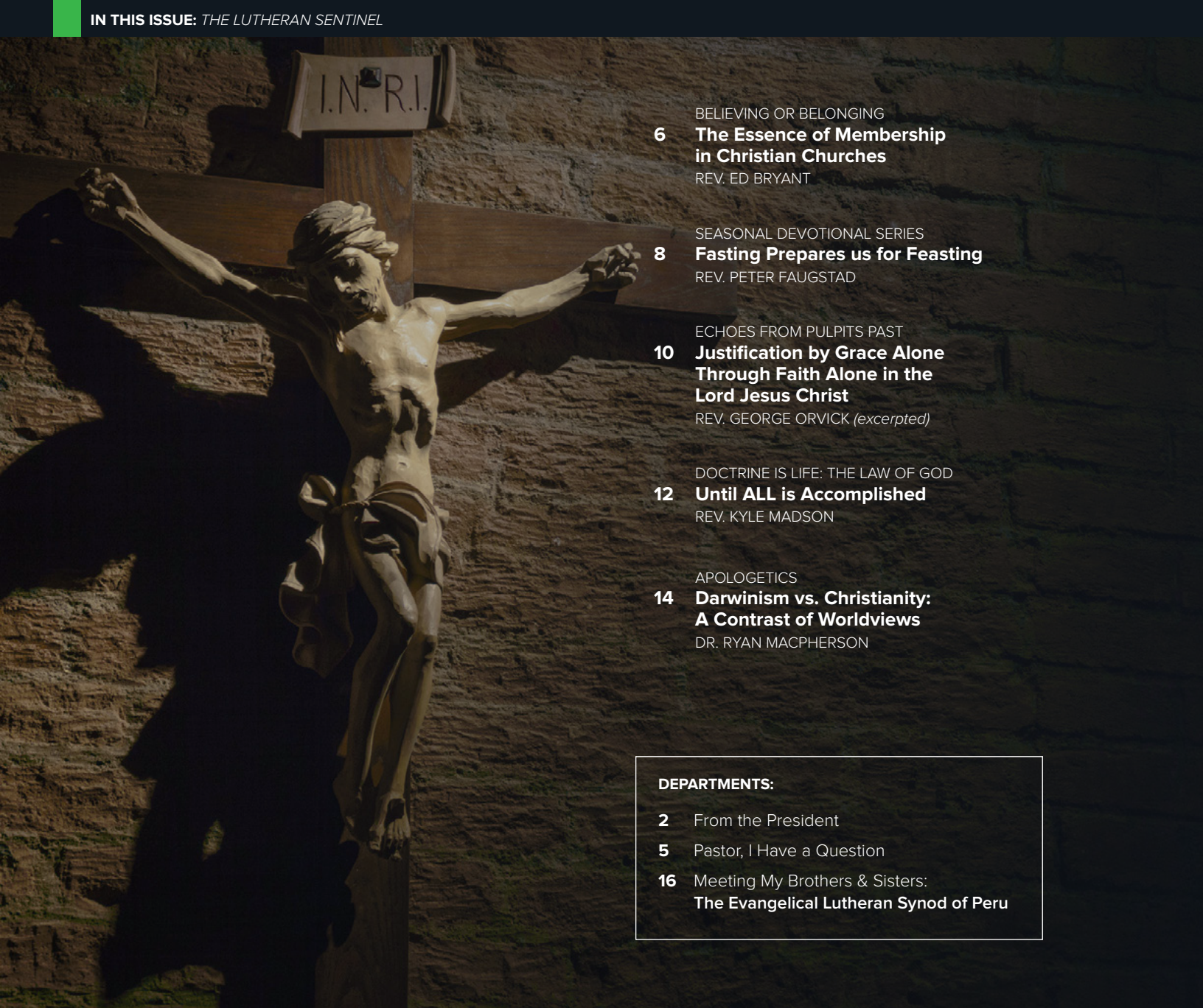
It is pleasant to hear members speak of their favorite rituals in church. I have heard such things as "My favorite service of the year is the Christmas Eve Candlelight; the Good Friday Tenebrae; the Easter Sunrise in the cemetery; Good Shepherd Sunday; the Reformation Festival; etc." Also: "I love Lenten Soup Suppers; congregational Christmas Dinners; Easter Breakfast; etc." To hear why they are viewed as favorite rituals gives helpful insight to our gathering together. Even if the ritual doesn't resonate with you personally, you get to cherish your support in making it happen for your brothers and sisters. Discovering this kind of shared meaning among us makes our relationships become more rewarding to us and our fellow brothers and sisters.

Married couples at the beginning of establishing their lives together will often find it a helpful exercise to review their personal rituals from their youth and perhaps choose some to be observed in their new home together. Very likely they will develop new traditions uniquely their own. Throughout our married lives, a review of old and putting into practice new rituals will enhance our lives and relationships. We find it helps in many ways: to feel the comfort and trust that comes from relying on regular routines, turning towards each other in trust, building stronger bonds, and inevitably deepening emotional connections.

A pastor arriving in a new parish would do well to learn what its longstanding rituals are and seek to reinforce them. While respecting those local traditions, new ones may be developed over time, expanding the sense of a loving, supportive community. All such rituals and traditions should support the mission of the Church, fulfilling what Christ has commanded us to do by proclaiming His good news of salvation. However, it has happened that churchly traditions have been given undue authority, promising fake blessings beyond what our Lord promises (e.g. the church of Rome's use of holy water or genuflecting while entering the sanctuary to reverence a piece of consecrated bread left over from a previous observance of the Sacrament of the Altar).

Christian and familial traditions and rituals can be good and wholesome. It may be time to review them to deepen appreciation and possibly enhance or even discontinue them. Perhaps it is time for your congregation to add a semiannual new-member welcome event or relieve the few who labor over the traditional holiday lutefisk dinner. (If you still have one, let me know. I will try to attend!) Maybe it is time for your family to start making an annual road trip vacation to create long-lasting memories or drop the occasional "airing of grievances" which began as a time of humorous reflections but has become hurtful.

When you hear of other rituals which may not be appealing to you, refrain from writing them off or ridiculing them. Rather, recognize with joy that there can be a wide variety of customs and practices that bring meaning to Christian congregational and family life. Cherish these opportunities for shared meaning at church and in your homes to God's glory. He gives you these relationships in which you find His love in Christ in your mutual conversations and consolations as Christians.



BELIEVING OR BELONGING
6 The Essence of Membership in Christian Churches
REV. ED BRYANT

SEASONAL DEVOTIONAL SERIES
8 Fasting Prepares us for Feasting
REV. PETER FAUGSTAD

ECHOES FROM PULPITS PAST
10 Justification by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone in the Lord Jesus Christ
REV. GEORGE ORVICK *(excerpted)*

DOCTRINE IS LIFE: THE LAW OF GOD
12 Until ALL is Accomplished
REV. KYLE MADSON

APOLOGETICS
14 Darwinism vs. Christianity: A Contrast of Worldviews
DR. RYAN MACPHERSON

DEPARTMENTS:

- 2** From the President
- 5** Pastor, I Have a Question
- 16** Meeting My Brothers & Sisters:
The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru



THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL / FEBRUARY 2023 / VOLUME 106 / NUMBER 1 / ISSN 0024-7510

PUBLISHED BY:
The Evangelical Lutheran Synod
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

ADDRESS EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
Rev. Paul Fries
6 Browns Court
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

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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During several televised sporting events this past year, I noticed a series of ads that talked about Jesus and made many comparisons between His life here on earth and ours. The ad campaign is called “He Gets Us.” I am curious as to the goals of the campaign and who is behind it. What is the “He Gets Us” campaign all about?

Answer:

A series of black-and-white photos flash across your screen, depicting people with hands on their heads, looking down-cast, filled with anxiety and despair. Then the screen goes black and the words, “Jesus suffered anxiety, too” appear, followed by, “He gets us,” which fades together into “Jesus.”

The ad only lasts fifteen seconds, but the powerful imagery burns itself into your memory. This particular television spot, entitled “Anxiety,” is just one of a series of short videos exploring aspects of Jesus’ humanity. “The Rebel,” “Outrage,” and “Dinner Party” are some other titles. The videos draw attention to the life of Jesus in the hopes of engaging people who have heard of Jesus, but do not know much about Him. Videos direct viewers to a website where they can read about Jesus’ life and ministry, begin a Bible reading plan, connect with others, and request prayers.

The videos are part of a campaign entitled, “He Gets Us.” He Gets Us is backed by an organization called Servant Foundation, also known as The Signatory, a 501c3 charity that has reported over a billion dollars in contributions. The ad campaign officially wrapped up at the end of 2022.

According to their website, “He Gets Us is a movement to reintroduce people to the Jesus of the Bible and his confounding love and forgiveness. We believe his words, example, and life have relevance in our lives today and offer hope for a better future.” The people behind “He Gets Us” state that they are not associated with any particular denomination or church, but describe themselves as Christians “who believe [Jesus] was more than just a good guy and a profound teacher... that Jesus is the son of God, who came to Earth, died, and was resurrected, then returned to heaven and is alive today.”

We confessional Lutherans can find much to applaud in the efforts of a campaign like “He Gets Us.” Their videos have drawn over 30 million YouTube views and 10 million prime-time television ad views. Roughly 10,000 people have signed up for Bible reading plans as a result of the campaign. Their videos have indeed raised awareness about the life of our Lord and Savior, making Jesus’ life relatable to the struggles and hardships that many in our world face today.

Still, the content of the “He Gets Us” message often falls short. In their article entitled, “Who Was Responsible for Jesus’ Death?”, they rightly point out that everyone was responsible: the religious leaders, the crowds, Pontius Pilate, and the Roman soldiers. Yet they cannot bring themselves to point the finger at the reader and say, “Because of your many sins, Jesus’ death is your fault.” Nor do they speak of the forgiveness of humanity’s sins that Jesus accomplished by His death. Instead, the authors moralize what took place on Good Friday: “When Jesus was the object of injustice, he chose forgiveness... In a world of finger-pointing and blame-placing, Jesus’ approach is radical. We think living by it would change everything.” This approach to Jesus’ life is consistent with the stated mission of “He Gets Us” from their website:

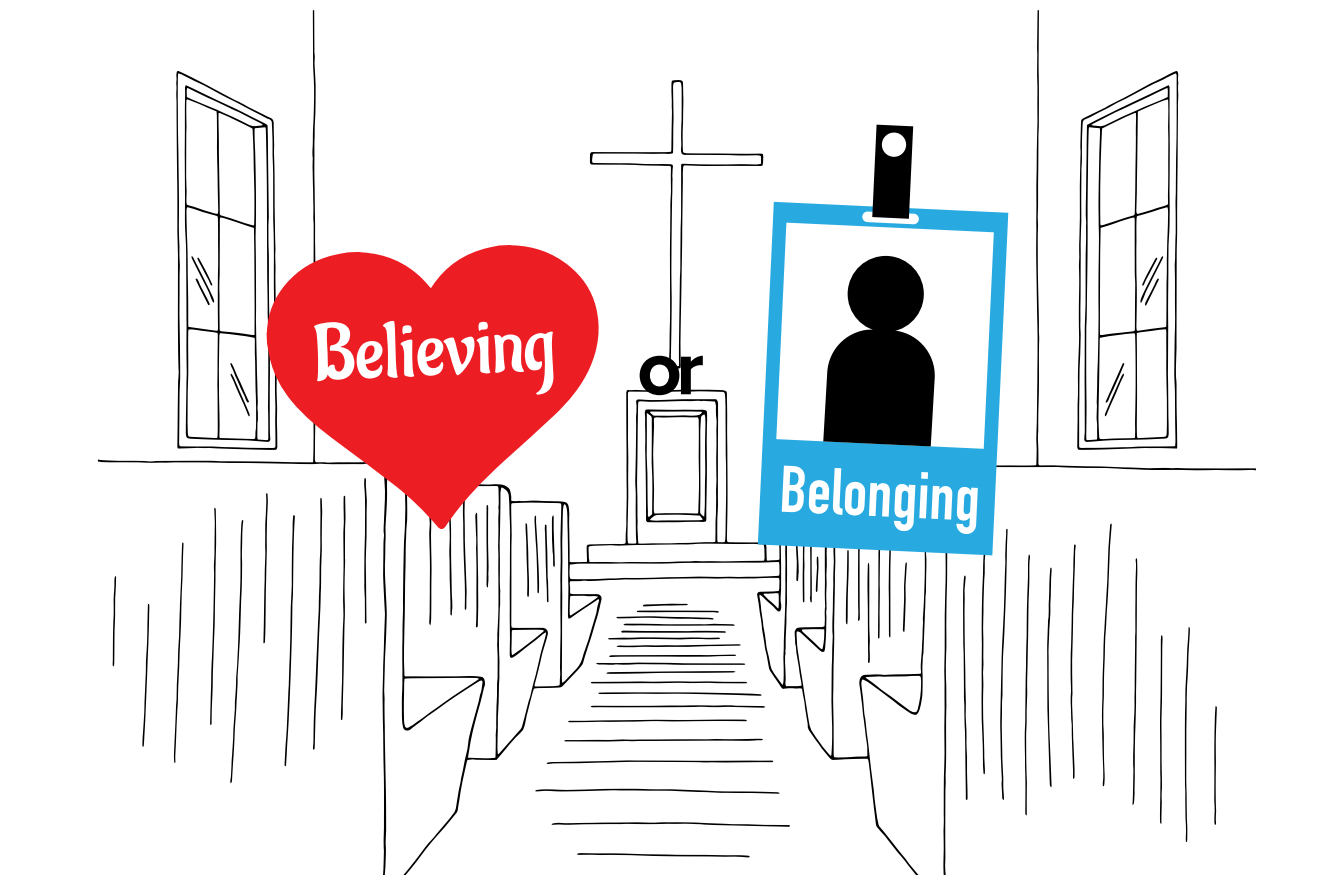
“Ultimately, we want people to know [Jesus’] teachings and how he lived while here on earth. And this will be a starting point to understand him and his message... We’re simply inviting you to explore with us at He Gets Us how might things be different if more people followed his example.”

While their material can often make a suitable “starting point” for further study, in the end, “He Gets Us” offers something other than the pure gospel that has been handed down to us in Scripture. “He Gets Us” claims to offer a path to a “better life” in Jesus—not eternal life with our Lord, but rather a better, more moral life here and now that follows Jesus as a lawgiver and not a Savior. For that reason, while we give thanks that people are led into Scripture and the knowledge of Jesus, we cannot support or recommend “He Gets Us.”



Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

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The Essence of Membership in Christian Churches

by **REV. ED BRYANT**, Contributing Writer
FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, Medford, Ore.
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In many parts of Asia and Africa, Christians risk life and well-being to attend church services¹ while in traditionally Christian countries, confessing Christians skip services to protect a little more sack time, some extra work, or the kids' soccer game. The lack of faithful church membership has reached such a crisis that congregations are declining and closing their doors. In the ELS alone, seven congregations closed their doors in 2021-22.² That's about 5% of the congregations in the synod.

Why do people who confess to be Christians neglect church services? I think it has a lot to do with the way they think of "church membership," so I intend to explore it in this and the next few articles.

Young Americans Aren't "Joiners"

In America, we are told that organizations of all kinds are declining and aren't being replaced. Veterans' Organizations like the V.F.W. and the American Legion, service organizations like Rotary International and Kiwanis, and common-interest organizations like gun clubs, gardening clubs, and model railroading clubs are all generally declining. The average age of these organizations is rising also as fewer young people join. Not surprisingly, a parallel is drawn between these organizations and churches. If younger generations aren't "joiners" and if they think of their church like a club, then why should anyone expect them to join?

However... *Churches Are Fundamentally Different!*

1. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/january/christian-persecution-2021-countries-open-doors-watch-list.html>, accessed January 19, 2023.
 2. ELS Commission on Congregations at Critical Mass, Comprehensive Report, p. 6 (unpublished)

We Join a Church Like We Join the Human Race

Do you remember filling out a membership application to be a human being? Of course not. We “joined” the human race by virtue of our birth, and along with our “membership,” we shoulder certain responsibilities, such as providing for our food, clothing, and shelter, caring for our families, showing love and compassion and any number of other virtues covered by terms like humane or humanitarian. Failure to do so is to be inhumane or even criminal.

We are “members” of the *Una Sancta* like we are members of the human race. If we are members of the human race because we are born, then we are members of the body of Christ, His invisible church, because we are born again by the Spirit of God through water and the word. Just as our birth into the human race comes with moral obligations toward God and our neighbor, so also our new birth into the family of Christ comes with obligations toward Him and toward our brothers and sisters in the faith. **We are members of Christ by believing, not by choosing to belong.**

The writer to the Hebrews summed up some of these obligations fairly simply: *Let us also consider carefully how to spur each other on to love and good works. Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing. Rather, let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (Hebrews 10:24–25, EHV). To fail to encourage one another as the Day of Wrath approaches is to desert our fellow members of the body of Christ. And we really need one another!

Consider what Scripture teaches about the coming of the end. For one thing, there will be a great apostasy, a great falling away: *Let no one deceive you in any way, because that day will not come until the falling away comes first* (2 Thessalonians 2:3, EHV). It will be a time of terrible deceit and spiritual peril: *“For false Christs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders to deceive even the elect, if it were possible”* (Mark 13:22, EHV). In such a time as this, we owe the Christian family into which we have been born all the encouragement we can give.

Yes, It Is a Crisis

To say that something is at a crisis is to say that it is at a critical point: It can go either way, but especially toward disaster. Church membership (we will see what that really is) is at a crisis in America.

So long as people see “church membership” as an optional choice for believers rather than an essential part of what it means to be Christian, then Satan has successfully fragmented his opposition. Just as wolves shear the weakest off the herd to devour them, so the Devil separates vulnerable believers from the safety of the flock. Within the church, Christ is present in

Word and Sacrament. There the under-shepherd instructs the flock so they might escape the latest scams and deceits that undermine faith and lead souls into the indifference and unbelief that characterizes our age.

What is “church membership,” after all?

- Let’s take the Schwartzes, for example (names fictitious). When the new pastor met them, he found that they were lifelong Lutherans, faithful in attendance, but they informed him that they were members “back home” in a congregation of our fellowship, where they hadn’t attended more than half a dozen times in the last five years. No, they didn’t want to transfer membership. It seems a cemetery plot was the issue. Were they really members back home?
- We’ve all met Andy Deresiewicz, who comes to church with his wife and hasn’t attended a Roman Mass in 20 years, but considers himself “a Catholic through and through.” Is he? Or is he more a member where he and his wife attend?
- Malcolm and Marlys Peabody were listed on the church roster, although they never attended anymore. They never answered the phone if they knew it was the pastor calling, and they ignored two letters he sent them asking to get in touch. In a third letter, their pastor stated what church membership is and pointed out that they clearly were not members. Of course, they spoke spitefully about the pastor for “kicking us out of the church.” Or, had they left themselves?

In the next few articles, we will see that church membership is when a believer, in obedience to Christ and His word:

1. regularly gathers with fellow believers (*communion/community*)
2. to receive God’s gifts through word and sacrament
3. in confessional harmony with them,
4. living a repentant, Christian life,
5. served by a pastor
6. whom they recognize as a shepherd accountable for their soul.

“Keep the Faith” Is Connected with Christ’s Word

As the churches decline, it underscores the necessity to “keep the faith,” for those who lose the faith are no longer part of the church. Believing is connected with belonging, belonging where the word and sacrament are found. *So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17, EHV). And Christ Himself declares, *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples”* (John 8:31, EHV).

3. Bryant, Edward, “The Essence of Church Membership,” ELS General Pastoral Conference Paper, 2021.

4. Jesus answered, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God! Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh. Whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5–6, EHV).

A photograph of a white ceramic plate, a green plant with long, pointed leaves, and a silver fork and spoon resting on a burlap placemat. The background is a light-colored, textured surface.

Fasting Prepares Us for **Feasting**

by **REV. PETER FAUGSTAD**, Contributing Writer
SAUDE, JERICO & REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCHES, NE Iowa

Some people give up dessert during Lent. Some give up TV. Some give up social media. Roman Catholics are required to give up meat every Friday of Lent. Are you giving up anything? While this can be a useful practice, the Bible does not require it. Some suggest that we should rather add things during Lent—more Bible study, more prayer, and so on. I think these things go together—whenever we give up one thing, we have space to add another. So if you give up time in front of the TV or smartphone, you are adding time that can be spent in other ways, such as Bible reading or prayer.

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus talks about the practice of fasting, of giving up food for a time: *“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

Jesus speaks here about the spiritual benefits of fasting. This wasn't a foreign concept to the people of the Bible. The Israelites often fasted in Old Testament times and always on the Day of Atonement. In New Testament times, Luke tells us about the widow Anna, who “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37). John the Baptizer and his disciples fasted in preparation for the Messiah's coming (Mark 2:18).

Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness as He began His public work. The Christians in Antioch fasted when Barnabas and Saul were sent off as missionaries (Acts 13:2-3). And when pastors were appointed in Asia as a result of these mission efforts, we are told that “with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).

So why don't we all have the habit of fasting today? In part, it's because we don't want to demand something that God has not. He did not give a law of fasting in the Ten Commandments. But it may also be that we don't fast because we never have; it is a foreign concept to us.

It hasn't always been a foreign concept among Lutherans. Think of the words of our Catechism: “Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, ‘Given and shed for you for the remission of sins’” (Proper Reception of the Sacrament).

We are right to say that fasting is not required, but that does not mean it is to be rejected. Luther wrote that “Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training.” What makes fasting “a fine outward training”? Fasting prepares us to receive. It uncovers our hunger. It reveals our weaknesses. It can help expose the idols of our heart. The purpose of fasting is not to offer it to God as a good work, which is often the way “giving something up for Lent” is understood. Fasting is rather a preparation to receive the good gifts of God.

Jesus promises that “your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” God does not reward us because we are so deserving. He always rewards us according to His grace.

The humbling of our body through fasting along with the humbling of our spirit in repentance is seen by our merciful Father. He knows who we are. He knows our needs and our struggles and our sorrows. And He knows exactly how to address them.

He sends His Son Jesus to come to our aid. Jesus lived a holy life for us, including perfectly fasting for us. And He was forsaken and rejected by

the Father and swallowed up by death so that we would be delivered from God's eternal wrath and punishment. Jesus brings us these gifts of His righteousness, forgiveness, and life when He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments.

Through these means, Jesus addresses the sin, the weakness, and the hunger that fasting exposes. He does not come to punish us or lecture us. He comes to heal us and comfort us and strengthen us. When Jesus comes, we receive exactly what we need. He never leaves us empty-handed. He fills us with the gifts of His grace, and He gives us a taste of the heavenly treasures that we will enjoy in fullness for all eternity.

We fast now in joyful anticipation of the feast to come.

“Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, ‘Given and shed for you for the remission of sins’”
(Proper Reception of the Sacrament)

echoes

from **ELS PULPITS**
past

OCCASION:
CLOSING SERMON OF THE FOUNDING OF THE
CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONFERENCE
OBERWESEL, GERMANY, APRIL 29, 1993

EXCERPTED FROM PRINT:
FORGET NOT ALL HIS BENEFITS - 2007 (The Reverend George M. Orvick)

Justification by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone in the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 3:24

Edited: **REV. RON PEDERSON**, Ret.
Member of **MOUNT OLIVE LUTHERAN**, Mankato, Minn.

Fellow redeemed, brothers and sisters in Christ from many lands and nations, grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This has been a remarkable week! That eleven different church bodies from all sides of the globe could come together and form the new Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference is indeed something to behold. In this day and age when diversity in doctrine is so taken for granted, yea, even held up as praiseworthy by some, it is amazing that representatives from so many different churches could arrive here at Oberwesel, speak with one voice, express unity in all the doctrines of scripture, and pledge their allegiance to God's holy word. Yes, that is amazing.

We therefore come together this evening in a spirit of great rejoicing! We are experiencing the truth of the psalmist's words: *Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity* (Psalm 133:1).

We have, as it were, launched a new ship to sail on the sea of this turbulent world. The name of the ship is the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. The rudder which determines the direction of the ship is the Word of God. The passengers are people from many lands and nations. And flying high atop the mast is a flag. There is an inscription on the flag. It reads: "Justification by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ".

The holy scriptures guide us as we journey through life. They clearly tell us what we are to believe and teach. But there is one doctrine that stands out above all others. It is like the sun in comparison to the stars. It is the chief article of God's Word. Without it, there can be no salvation, no forgiveness, no church. In fact, our Lutheran Confessions call it the "articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae" —the "article upon which the church stands or falls". This is, of course, the blessed doctrine of justification. Of this article, Luther wrote: "It is this article alone which begets, nourishes, sustains, keeps and defends the church. And without it the church could not subsist for an hour."

Our text reads, "Being justified freely by his grace." In the first three chapters of the letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul has laid bare in scathing terms the total depravity of the human heart. His description is as applicable today as it was when he wrote it. Paul says: *Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their way. There is no fear of God before their eyes* (Romans 3:15-18).

As we gather here this evening, we come not just to lament the wickedness that is in the world. We come to examine our own hearts. Let us remember to apply the Law to ourselves. The fact that we had faithful forefathers does not justify us. The fact that we may have suffered on account of these actions, the loss of friendships, the loss of income, and so on, doesn't justify us.

No, we are made of the same clay as are all other people. We are victims of that hereditary sin from which no one has escaped. Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles: "This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation of the scriptures." But in the total darkness of sin as described by the apostle, in the complete blackout of all human merit there burst forth a "brilliant light." It shines through these words: "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Oh, this justification did not come cheaply. There was a price to be paid. The justice of God had to be satisfied. His wrath against sin had to be appeased. And that is why our text says, "Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The Bible says, *Without the shedding of blood there is no remission* (Hebrews 9:22). And so we know what our gracious heavenly Father did for us. He gave His only begotten Son. In patience and lowliness, our Jesus went about fulfilling the law for us. He showed humility where we show pride. He felt perfect love where we feel anger and hatred. His thoughts, words, and deeds were perfectly pure where ours were polluted. Then in His great love, He took upon Himself the punishment for our sins. He endured the lash of Pilate's soldiers, the pain of the crown of thorns, the cruel mockery and finally death upon the cross. And so our justification is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. There is no justification without the vicarious atonement. No forgiveness without the shedding of the blood of Christ. Not only did He die, but He rose again triumphantly from the grave also for our justification, as the scripture tells us. *He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification* (Romans 4:25).

The word "justified" is of paramount significance. It simply means "to be declared righteous". The Formula of Concord assures us that even with our weakness and failures, we can be certain of our salvation. Listen to the words of the Formula of Concord: "We also believe, teach and confess that although the genuinely believing and truly regenerated persons retain much weakness and many shortcomings down to their graves, they still have no reason to doubt either the righteousness which is reckoned to them through faith or the salvation of their souls, but they must regard it as certain that for Christ's sake, on the basis of the promises and the Word of the holy Gospel they have a gracious God" (FC Epitome, III 6).

Our new Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference has a tremendous message to proclaim to the world, the message of justification by grace alone through faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ. Only as we continue to proclaim this message can our existence be justified. May that ever be the flag under which the ship of our new conference sails. Amen.



“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17-20)

“Until **ALL** is Accomplished”

by **REV. KYLE MADSON**, Editor
THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL

NORSELAND LUTHERAN, St. Peter, Minn.
NORWEGIAN GROVE LUTHERAN, Gaylord, Minn.

What’s for dessert tonight, Mom?

How many more bites of my vegetables, Dad?

What time is devotion, Dad?

Within the questions we ask are often embedded the basic ideals and foundations (we might call them “beliefs”) by which we live and carry on. What’s for dessert? “believes” that dessert is certain. How many more bites? “believes” there is something shy of “all” that will do. What time is devotion? “expects” that family devotion is a given.

The same is absolutely true of one’s religion, beliefs about right and wrong, and especially right status—justification with God and God’s Law. The questions that make their way to Jesus in the Gospel records reveal this over and over again:

*Then a certain ruler asked (Jesus), “Good Teacher, **what must I do** to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18)*

A certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus replied “Love the Lord your God ... and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself... “Do this and you will live.”

*²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**” (Luke 10:29)*

*Then Peter came to (Jesus) and said, “Lord, **how often shall** my brother sin against me, and **I forgive him? Up to seven times?**” (Matthew 18:21)*

When Luther composed what he would call his “little bible” — *The Small Catechism* — he started with the Commandments – God’s Law. As you well know, there are ten commandments given by God at Sinai (even if the numbering gets debated among Christians). And while all ten are worthy of our attention and study individually, Luther follows Jesus’ lead and boils them down to two simple commands:

Love God above all else, &...

Love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

These commands—are the foundation for what God calls good and holy and right. At their most basic level, the commands serve **as a “curb”** for all humanity—they abruptly jolt the human conscience when mind or mouth or members are “trespassing”—going beyond what is good OR stopping shy of what is good.

More specifically, these commands to “love” serve **as a guide** for the Christian conscience. They direct the Christian’s desire to “love” God and the commands of God teach a discernment in “loving neighbor”:

Love: keeps no record of wrongs... (1 Corinthians 13)

Love: sacrifices life for friends... (John 15:13)

Love: cares enough to discipline (to rebuke)... (Hebrews 12:6)

But it’s the last—and what Luther calls the primary—working of the Law of God that cuts against our most basic human beliefs. You can hear the natural foundation come out in the questions noted earlier:

What must I do? (rich ruler)

Who is my neighbor? (expert in the law)

How many times must I forgive? (St. Peter!)

Our natural belief is that God has written His Law in stone for us because we can, with some special attention and a bit of willpower, finish it. Check it off our list of “things to do” or maybe even carry it with us like a medical record, one that says for any interested parties, “I’m good/I’m healthy.” Luther calls this basic human religion by its Latin name: the opinion legis—the “opinion of the law.”

In some of my Catechism instruction materials, I picture this basic human belief this way: It’s a worn out-looking person walking along in a human-sized hamster wheel. This is intended to picture the cumulative work of God’s demands on our “natural opinion”. While we foolishly

imagine the Law is showing us how to get ourselves from here to heaven, it actually is wearing us down bit by bit, all the way to our graves. Luther summarized the Law’s primary work on us this way: “the Law says ‘DO THIS’ and it is never done” (*Heidelberg Disputation; thesis 26.*).

The Law of God in this primary function is not a “life coach” that gives us big pep-talks and inspires (breathes into us) the “best version of ourselves”. The Law is, as St. Paul says, “*the Letter that kills*”(2 Corinthians 3:6).

Jesus didn’t come as giver of the Law. God sent Moses for that. But neither did Jesus come to “relax the Law,” like a grandparent might “relax” bedtime rules with their grandkids. Jesus came neither to give the Law nor to relax it. He came to fulfill it—to ensure that what you and I haven’t accomplished, are not accomplishing, and never will finish accomplishing **IS ALL accomplished!**

And this accomplishing of ALL of the Law by Jesus, this isn’t merely a nice example for us to strive to attain ourselves, as much of popular Christianity mistakes it to be. Jesus fulfilling His Father’s unrelaxed demands is gifted righteousness for you and me to live in—perfectly fulfilled. St. Paul writes to the Romans:

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

(Romans 10:4)

The Commands of God jolt our old-Adam consciences to keep us all from being Cains to our brother Abel. The Commands of God instruct and guide our sanctified Christian consciences, forming our desires and directing our actions. What these Divine Commands of God will never do, however, is show us fearing and trusting God above all things. What they will never do is provide us a report card that says we’ve loved our neighbor as ourselves. The Law doesn’t relax for us. It accuses us of all manner of sin and it is just when it does so. It kills us. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

There’s only one question left for convicted hearts and consciences to ask at this point: Where IS the Law accomplished – ALL DONE?? Only in Christ Jesus. God’s Christ came and accomplished every demand of the Law and donates His law-full, righteous record to us by faith:



There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Romans 8:1)



DARWINISM

vs.

Christianity

A Contrast of Worldviews



The Bible has much to say about ancient history, cultural differences, and human commonalities—all of it accurate. Unfortunately, evolutionary assumptions hold great sway in modern thinking. Those assumptions shape the worldview espoused by textbooks, teachers, and television specials concerning our origin, early history, identity, and destiny. God's Word reveals our true identity, protecting us from such errors.

Shame, Clothing, and Climate

Clothing, according to evolutionary theory, is a cultural adaptation to cold climates. Evolutionists speculate a three-stage history: first came a cold climate, then came clothing, then came the shame of nakedness. When European winters became intolerable to Neanderthals, they made clothing from animal skins. People who felt ashamed to be naked were more likely to clothe themselves, which aided their survival in colder climates. Thus, morality evolved to favor modesty.

Scripture reveals that the opposite is true. First came shame, for after Adam and Eve sinned, they no longer could look upon each other's nakedness innocently (Genesis 2:25, 3:10). Then came clothing—initially from fig leaves and later from animal skins (Genesis 3:7, 21). Finally, Adam and Eve left the comfort of Eden for other climates (v. 24). Their descendants in the Near East experienced frost, ice, and snow (Genesis 31:40; Exodus 4:6, 16:14; 2 Samuel 23:20; Job 6:16, 37:10, 38:29; Psalms 78:47, 147:16; Jeremiah 36:30).

Violence and Warfare

Lord Tennyson poetically summarized the evolutionary worldview as millions of years of "nature red in tooth and claw." Evolutionary anthropologists theorize that an ape-like creature named *Homo habilis* began to use tools 2.5 million years ago, evolving later into *Homo sapiens*. They say it was only natural for *Homo* to wield his tools in violence, which eventually led to warfare among the ancient civilizations that evolved from his tribe. According to Karl Marx's theory of social evolution, war erupts because two groups compete for the same scarce resources.

Scripture teaches quite the opposite. First, animals did not precede humans by millions of years, but by less than one day. Both kinds were created on Day 6 of creation (Genesis 1:24-31). Second, violence in the animal kingdom, as well as among humans, resulted from sin. Violence never was "natural" in the sense of God's original creation, which God called "very good"

(v. 31). Violence now is "natural" only in the perverted sense of a fallen human nature, in which the holy image of God has been corrupted.

The first recorded instance of violence between men did not result from competition over scarce resources, but rather from jealousy concerning God's favor—the most abundant resource ever. Specifically, Cain and Abel each presented offerings to the LORD, Abel in faith, but Cain with an impure heart (Hebrews 11:4). When God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's, Cain slew his brother Abel (Genesis 4:3-8). Jesus referred to this as the first case of religious persecution by a hypocrite against a believer (Matthew 23:35).

Human Longevity

An evolutionary view of history suggests a long-term trend toward improvement: People are smarter, healthier, and longer living than ever before. Modern medical science has eradicated many diseases and found ways to alleviate many others. The average lifespan for a person living in Rome during the time of Christ was about thirty years. Today most Americans live twice that long.

Behind this appearance of progress, however, lies the biblically revealed reality of decline. Recall that Adam was created to live forever (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). His life was cut short by the "wages of sin" when he died 930 years after creation (Romans 6:23; Genesis 5:5). After the Flood, human lifespans declined to about 120 years by the time of Moses (Genesis 6:3, Deuteronomy 34:7). In King David's day, people typically lived into their 70s (Psalm 90:10). The Prophetess Anna was in her 80s when she greeted the Christ Child (Luke 2:37).

Even if recent improvements to medical care or food supply have extended the average lifespan, the brute fact remains: "dust [we] are, and to dust [we] shall return" (Genesis 3:19). The wages of sin is still death. No amount of "evolutionary progress" can escape divine judgment. Our best hopes are hopeless, unless we hope in Christ.

Racial Unity and Equality

Evolutionary theory demeans "inferior" races and ultimately dehumanizes all people. From Darwin's day (the mid 1800s) through World War II (the mid 1900s), it was fashionable to rank the races according to supposed evolutionary advancement. Scientists

usually placed their own race at the top and other races at the bottom. Nazis applied this framework when asserting that Aryans were superior to Jews.

The Nuremberg trials condemned Nazi leaders for the Jewish holocaust, and the American civil rights movement similarly judged white supremacists for their racism against African Americans. Trends in evolutionary theories tend to adapt with changing politics. The new fashion is to emphasize genetic similarities for all races. But evolutionary theory exaggerates the case by also asserting a fundamental unity between humans and apes. Philosopher Peter Singer has gone so far as to claim that fish have a right to life on par with human rights.

The Bible can restore our sanity. Scripture teaches that God created humans distinctly, not as part of the animal kingdom. Humans of all ethnicities are to exercise dominion over animals (Genesis 1:24-28). Everyone's ancestry ultimately comes from one race: Noah's (Genesis 10:32-11:9; Acts 17:26). All humans were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

A careful study of Scripture clears up common misconceptions, such as that Africans were cursed with black skin as punishment for Ham's disrespect toward Noah (Genesis 9:20-27). Ham's descendants included not only Africans, but also Canaanites and other Near Eastern tribes (10:6-20). Noah cursed only Ham's son Canaan, not Ham's children who settled in Africa (9:25, 27). Nothing in Scripture suggests that the curse had anything to do with skin pigmentation.

Scripture consistently communicates God's love for all people. Baptism and the teaching of salvation in Jesus' name are for "all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Having been baptized, believers are "neither Jew nor Greek," but all part of one family of faith (Galatians 3:27-28). This New Testament inclusion of all ethnicities into one

and the same church began already in Old Testament times. God told Moses how to incorporate foreigners into the Passover celebration (Numbers 9:14). Rahab of Jericho and Ruth the Moabitess, like so many other Gentiles, were grafted into the family of Abraham (Romans 4:17-18).

Modern racial theories, reinforced by the false teachings of Darwin and Marx, pit one group of people against another, but John's vision of heaven witnessed believers from "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" restored to the unity of God's creation by the grace of His salvation, even while continuing to enjoy their God-given diversity (Revelation 7:9).

Providence or Purposelessness?

Evolution knows no purpose aside from survival for survival's sake. Bestselling author Richard Dawkins, a leading proponent of both atheism and evolutionism, says we have "selfish genes" that want to reproduce themselves. He speculates that biological survival of the fittest drives cultural evolution as kingdoms rise and fall in competition with one another. If this theory holds true, then Joshua conquered the Promised Land, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, Cyrus conquered Babylon, and Alexander the Great conquered Persia simply because the victorious party had better weapons, better soldiers, better food, or some other survival advantage.

But God's Word reveals clearly that the LORD directed the affairs of those nations (Genesis 15:13-21; Jeremiah 25:8-14; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Daniel 8). Through the rise and fall of civilizations, God's work of redemption has taken place. Ancient history was not a random series of happenstances, but God's own stage for salvation history, culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Luke and Acts).



- Presenting evidence for the truth of Christianity
- Critiquing worldviews that oppose Christianity
- Fortifying believers with a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture
- Engaging unbelievers in conversations leading toward the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness in Christ

ELS Apologetics Resources els.org/apologetics

"The Doctrine of Creation in Lutheran Apologetics"

"Are Creation and Evolution Compatible?"

"Q&A Leading to Christ" Flyers els.org/apologetics/qalc

"Can the Biblical Account of Creation be Harmonized with Evolution?"

"Did God Put My Gender into My Genes?"

San Antonio Biblical Worldview Conferences (Faith Lutheran Church)

www.flc-sa.org/worldviewsa/2018-biblical-worldview-conference
"Defending Biblical Creation and Sexuality"

www.flc-sa.org/worldviewsa/2019-biblical-worldview-conference
"Science: Distinguishing a Classical & Biblical Education from an Evolutionary Education"

Fifth Annual ELS Apologetics and Worldviews Conference
www.blc.edu/apologetics/events
Bethany Lutheran College
June 21-22, 2023

MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru

by **REV. THOMAS HEYN**, Administrator
ELS BOARD FOR WORLD OUTREACH

A little over 50 years ago, the first ELS missionaries went to Peru to begin work in what would be the first world mission field of the ELS. Outreach began in the poor neighborhoods of the capital city, Lima. The work expanded to the mountain areas north of Lima and to Chimbote, a coastal city about 250 miles north of Lima. Additional American missionaries were added to the team. By 1991, three Peruvian men had been trained to become pastors.

In 1999, one of the Peruvian pastors explored the possibility of working in the Amazon jungle. Work which began among the Shawi tribes continues to this day. About eight Shawi men make the long trek to study in a seminary program in Tarapoto.

Two elementary schools operate in Peru. Martin Lutero is located near the Lima airport in a more prosperous neighborhood. About 200 students are enrolled. In the Shawi village of Louis Terry, there is an elementary school with 25 students and a high school with about five students.

In 2010, a new seminary building was dedicated with its first Peruvian president, Rev. Segundo Gutiérrez, who also serves as pastor of the con-

gregation in Chimbote. The seminary seeks to expand its program by offering online instruction for students in remote parts of Peru.

The mission in Peru has reached out to the World Heritage city of Cajamarca, located in the Andes between Chimbote and Lima, where 15 to 20 people gather for worship.

The last ELS missionary left Peru in 2018. Through the Board for World Outreach, our synod continues to offer financial support and other ministerial counsel. However, the administration of the Peru work, its seminary program, and its mission outreach to the Shawi people are all conducted by Peruvian pastors. We thank and praise God for his blessings on our fellow believers in Peru.

