



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



**MARTIN LUTHER'S
SEPTEMBER
TESTAMENT**

**Luther's Translation
of the New Testament
from Latin to German**

pg. 6



What Can I Say to a Dying Person?

What can I say to that person who is on hospice care and is facing imminent death? The afflicted person may be in a coma. What can or should you say, if anything?

You do not need to say much, but make it worthwhile. Even the comatose person most often can hear to the very end. Sometimes, no longer able to speak, you can ask the person to squeeze your hand or blink his/her eyes to let you know hearing is taking place. I have “heard” confession of sin and profession of faith in Jesus as Savior through such alternate means of communicating as these.

But if there is no response, we do well to assume that the comatose person can hear and we should speak something short and meaningful. If they were not hard of hearing before, there is no need to shout now, but speak clearly and distinctly.

Recently I prepared some short daily texts for a brother-in-law by the name of Ken with whom I had the opportunity to speak in person about matters of salvation before he entered his final days in hospice care. He was a lapsed baptized Roman Catholic. In these last days of his life, we were separated by hundreds of miles and I heard he could no longer use his phone even for texting. So I sent these short devotionals to another brother-in-law by the name of Ray—a Lutheran brother in Christ (a WELS layman). Ray went to Ken’s bedside and read them to him every few days.

I share them with you, if you should be wondering what to say to someone who is facing death. Keep in mind, a person in such a state is comforted by your presence even in silence. So if you have the time, besides reading one of these short devotionals, pull up a chair close to the bed, perhaps even hold the dying person’s hand.

The only words that are needed are the words of God’s love for us in Jesus our Savior, i.e., the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. I encourage you to speak them to the dying person you know. They are written for one who is baptized. If the person you are visiting is not baptized, you may have to adjust the wording a bit. If alternate forms of communication can take place, ask if your pastor could come for a visit and possibly baptize.

1 [Name], St. John writes: “*The blood of Jesus God’s Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:7-9). [Name], may this simple truth from God’s Word give you comfort and peace in Jesus. Amen.

2 [Name], you might remember the 23rd Psalm. Here are a few verses for your comfort today: “*The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in*

green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: ... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." [Name], Jesus is your Good Shepherd through faith in Him as your Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

3 [Name], yesterday we heard about the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23. In John 10, Jesus declares, "*I am the Good Shepherd*" and then promises: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*" You are safe in Jesus' hand now and forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

4 [Name], St. Paul writes: "*By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it [faith in Jesus as your Savior] is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). You believe in Jesus, not by your doing but the work of the Holy Spirit alone. We boast only in the work of salvation accomplished by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for us. All has been done for you. Rest in peace in Jesus' name. Amen.

5 [Name], Jesus declared, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*" (John 3:16-17). Therefore, St. Paul also writes: "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1). [Name], you are safe in Jesus, your Savior. Amen.

6 [Name], God's prophet Micah observed this of Him: "*Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression? He has compassion on us; He treads our iniquities underfoot. [Name], He casts all your sins into the depths of the sea*" (7:18-19). Salvation is yours for Jesus' sake. Amen.

7 [Name], the Apostle John was given a glimpse into heaven by Jesus with all His believers present. Here is its description: "*[T]he dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe*

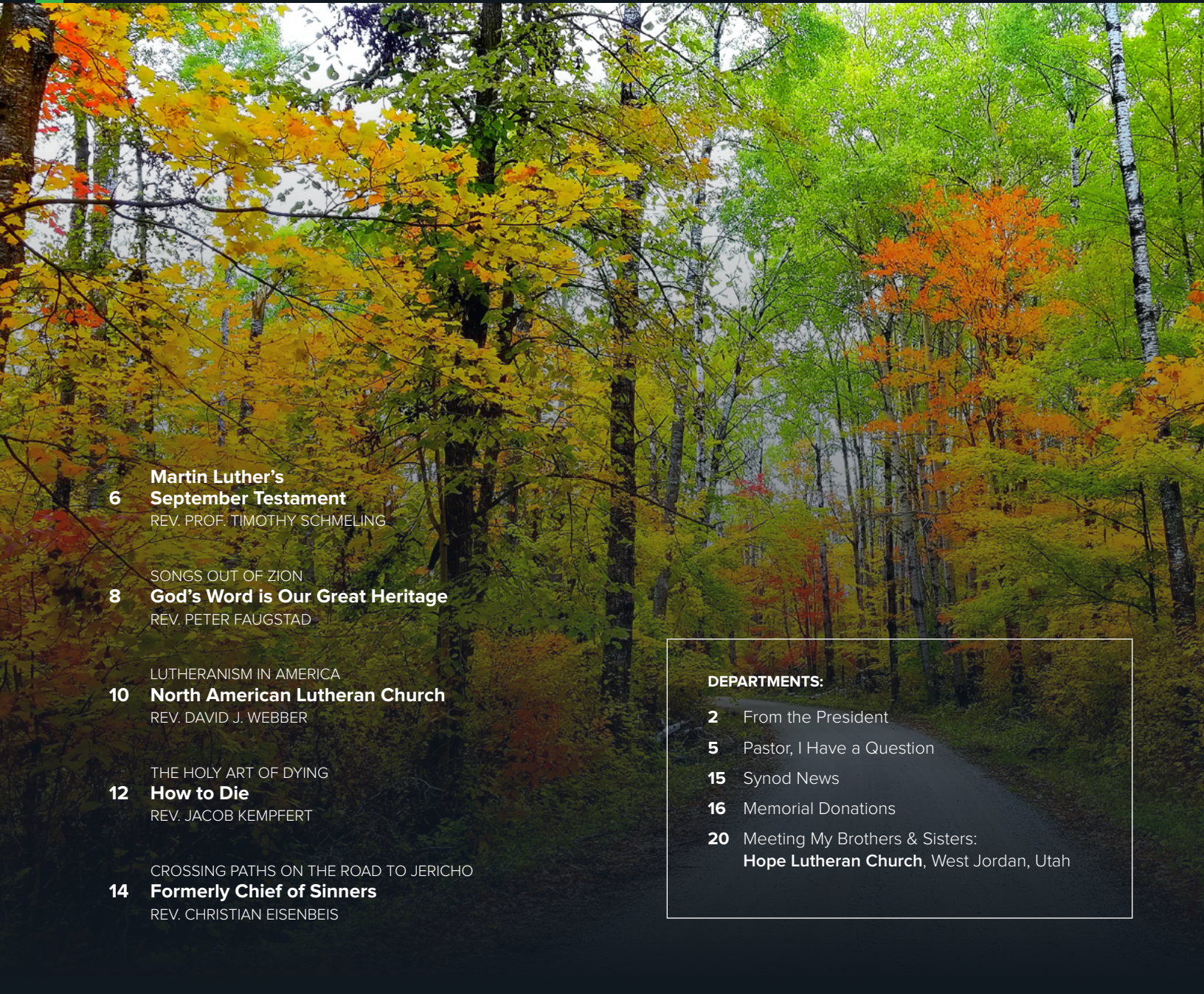
away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4). [Name], here we are but strangers. Heaven is our everlasting and perfect home for Jesus' sake. Amen.

8 [Name], Paul observed that through faith in Jesus as Savior "whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (Romans 14:8-9). [Name], you can also say with Paul: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... which shall I choose ... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Philippians 1:21-23). In Jesus' name, Amen.

9 [Name], Jesus promises, "Whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24). [Name], this passing has already happened for you through faith in Jesus. You possess eternal life for Jesus' sake right now. Amen.

10 [Name], you know that Jesus, your Redeemer, lives, just as Job professed in this midst of his great suffering: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself" (19:25-27). [Name], the last day is fast approaching when Jesus will return and redeem your body from your grave, restoring it to perfection so that you will live the full life Jesus secured for all sinners. In Jesus' name. Amen.

There are two handfuls' worth of very brief daily devotions here. Should you have more opportunity with the dying one, go back to the beginning or reuse your favorites. It is also good at some point in your visit to pray the Lord's Prayer, read the Apostles' Creed, and even close with the benediction at the end of our divine services. I have seen it when there is no evidence of the person being able to hear that they will move their lips in an attempt to speak those familiar words with you. Bring a hymnary with you so that you can read them, lest something happens, e.g., a loud noise coming from the other patient in the room or in the hallway, to distract you.



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Recently, the federal government released video footage of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAPs for short) recorded by various military aircraft. Meanwhile, at the University of Puerto Rico, astronomers at the Arecibo observatory have developed a growing database of potentially habitable planets orbiting other stars.

These developments raise a question:

Is there life on other planets?

Answer:

I remember when my parents took me to see the movie E.T. As a child, it was enthralling to consider the possibility that life existed elsewhere in the universe. Yet the answer to the question of life existing on other planets depends largely on the definition of “life”. Are we thinking of life in general or specifically of intelligent life?

The Possibility Of Life In General

Even in the twenty-first century, the wonders of God’s creation still have the power to astound. Here on earth, biologists continue to discover on average one new animal species per day. The universe still contains many wonders beyond our understanding that point to the wisdom of our Creator.

That includes the heavens as the work of God’s creation: “*The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork*” (Psalm 19:1). As of today, life has not yet been discovered on another world. Yet it should not surprise us to learn one day that one of the rovers on Mars has discovered a species of bacteria that can survive the harsh Martian climate. Nor would we be shocked if scientists discovered single-celled organisms surviving under the ice of one of Jupiter’s moons. We would recognize that life, wherever it is found, is one of the wonders of God’s creation.

The Possibility Of Intelligent Life

Human beings may discover life on other worlds, but Scripture would seem to preclude the existence of other intelligent alien life. The Bible speaks of human beings as the crown of God’s creation. When God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His own image and likeness and gave them dominion over His creation (Genesis 1). Later, in order to redeem all of creation, God the Son takes on human flesh and blood and becomes a man—not something else (John 1:14). No other creature can claim this special status before God; it is a mark of His love for us. King David is humbled by that fact as he looks up and sees evidence of God’s handiwork in the moon and stars. “What is man that You are mindful of him,” David says, “*And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor*” (Psalm 8:4-5).

Yet since the 1940s, military pilots report encountering objects that seem to maneuver faster than physics would permit. UFOs (now they’re called UAPs) are spotted in some places on an almost daily basis. In some cases, people report direct contact with otherworldly beings. So what’s happening?

Do not overlook the spiritual aspect. For many, a UFO sighting is a religious experience associated with messages of enlightenment and prophecies of catastrophe. Witnesses of UFOs often tend to have some involvement with the occult—spiritism, magic, or witchcraft. Add to that everything Scripture reveals to us about God’s invisible creation, describing angels and demons as intelligent creatures who clearly are not human. Many Christians see all this and conclude that at least some of the unexplained UFO phenomena is the work of Satan. Why wouldn’t “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2) manifest himself to the world in a way that lures gullible human beings away from the truth of Christ? After all, Satan can transform himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Why would he not choose to appear to some as a benevolent extraterrestrial?

Thankfully, we have nothing to fear—of extraterrestrials, UFOs, UAPs, or the devil—because the Lord is with us. He has not left us to face the devil by ourselves. His angels watch over us and protect us. He armors us with His Word so that we can withstand the devil’s attacks and see through his lies. He comforts and consoles us with the good news of His Son, who is coming soon to deliver us into the kingdom of His eternal glory, where we will find life everlasting. As we continue to learn more about the universe God has created, may we always stand in awe of the wonders of God’s creation—and in even greater awe of the wonders of His love for His creation in Jesus Christ.



Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

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MARTIN LUTHER'S SEPTEMBER TESTAMENT

Luther's Translation of the New Testament from Latin to German

by REV. DR. TIMOTHY SCHMELING¹

This year marks the five hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's (1483–1546) translation of the New Testament into German. He titled it *The German New Testament* (*Das Neue Testament Deütsch*). Since it was published in September of 1522, it was also called the “September Testament” (*Septembertestament*). Luther's German Bible was without a doubt his greatest literary achievement. He himself is reported to have said as much (LW Companion 408). His translation not only proved to be a bestseller, it significantly altered the ecclesial landscape, German culture, and the modern world. With the advent of digital technology, anyone can now flip through an original copy of *The German New Testament* online. See the following link: https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/luther_septembertestament_1522.

To understand the significance of the reformer's *The German New Testament*, one must remove some misunderstandings about it. First, Luther's translation was not the first into German. Fourteen High German and four Low German translations of the Latin Vulgate had already been published by 1518. But his German Bible was the first based on the original languages (i.e., Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). In fact, Luther's creative mind, linguistic genius, and extensive knowledge of the German people helped him produce a highly idiomatic translation that outshone the more wooden translations of the day. He followed the Renaissance humanist convention of translating a text's sense (i.e., *ad sensum*) rather than its mere letter (*ad litteram*). For instance, Luther added the word “alone” to Romans 3:28 to capture its full meaning: “Thus, we hold that the human being is justified though faith alone (*alleyn*) without doing the works of the law.” His translation used the language of the Saxon

court in Meissen because it could reach the widest German-speaking audience possible both in terms of geography and social class. Luther, furthermore, used punchy, rhythmic, and concise language in his Bible to give his translation a captivating oral quality.

Second, the Sacred Scriptures were by no means absent from medieval life. To be sure, medieval worship services were largely celebrated in Latin, and the Gospel was far from clear in medieval preaching. However, the Bible was regularly read in Latin worship services, preached in German, and illustrated in church art and theatrical performances before Luther's arrival.

Third, Latin Bibles were not chained in the Middle Ages to keep people from reading them. Medievals did indeed chain Bibles in churches and libraries, but they did this to keep these very costly books from being stolen. The average German, moreover, was not literate enough to read the Bible in German, let alone in Latin. Luther certainly did everything possible to make the German Bible as accessible as possible. Nevertheless, it was not until the eighteenth century that German Bibles could be printed cheaply enough and the common people were literate enough that the average German could own and read the German Bible.

Fourth, Luther never advocated for an unbiblical subjective interpretation of the Scriptures (i.e., the Bible means whatever it means to me). In the Middle Ages, Biblical interpretation had been limited to Latin-educated clergymen and members of religious orders, if not the bishops, councils, or only the pope. This was because the medievals tended to reduce the church to the clergy

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and the religious orders. At the very least, the laity were deemed second-class members of the church. Medievals also lacked an understanding of the priesthood of all believers' role in judging sound doctrine (Act 17:11) and in witnessing to the faith (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:4–5, 9). Finally, they tended to think the Bible was unclear. Then, when the proto-protestant Lollards and Hussites began to use vernacular Bible translations to criticize the medieval church, vernacular Bible translations started to be frowned upon as well. In contradistinction, Luther not only maintained that the laity needed to be able to interpret the Bible (if they were to function as the priesthood of all believers), he also equipped the laity so that they were able to interpret the Bible for themselves without making subjective interpretations of it. In other words, he taught the people how to read the Bible grammatically, historically, contextually, and Christologically (Nehemiah 8:8; 2 Peter 1:20; Romans 12:6; John 5:39) so that they could recognize the Bible's one Spirit-intended meaning and its proper applications to their faith-lives. He did this not only through preaching and teaching, but also by translating the Bible and providing manifold study aids, such as introductory prefaces and study notes in his Bible. What is more, Luther discovered that the doctrine unpacked by this Biblical approach to Bible interpretation was more in harmony with the doctrine of the early church fathers (e.g., St. Augustine of Hippo) than the doctrine of his opponents. This was splendidly ironic because Luther's opponents were accusing him of subjective, new, and heretical teachings.

Fifth, Luther may not have single-handedly forged the early modern German language. Still, his Bible profoundly shaped the German language and the culture for centuries to come. It helped establish a number of the stylistic features of German. His Bible further advanced Saxon court German as standard German. It coined numerous phrases still used by Germans today.

Luther's translation of the New Testament was initiated during his ten-month stay at the Wartburg Castle near Eisenach. He was especially driven by the need for all Christians to have a better understanding of the Pauline Epistles which were so fundamental to Reformation theology. After Luther had refused to recant his theology at the Diet of Worms (1521), Elector Friedrich the Wise of Saxony (1468–1525) secretly stashed Luther at the Wartburg for his protection. The emperor's Edict of Worms made Luther an outlaw. There the reformer grew out his hair, was disguised as a knight, and went by the name Jörg. But he grew stir crazy at his Patmos (cf. Revelation 1:9) and took on a number of writing projects

(e.g., devotional writings, postils [i.e., model sermons], polemical treatises, and *A Judgment on Monastic Vows*). In fact, Luther began his translation of the New Testament at the beginning of 1522 and finished it in less than eleven weeks! Still this could not remain a solo project. Once he returned to Wittenberg, he had Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), a premier Greek scholar, help him revise it. Georg Spalatin (1484–1545) assisted as well. His translation was based on the second edition of Desiderius Erasmus's (1466–1536) Greek New Testament, the *Novum Testamentum Omne* (1519). Luther's *The German New Testament* began to be published in September of 1522. The title page omits the names of the translators and publisher, but the listing of Wittenberg as the place of publication spoke volumes. Besides introductory prefaces, marginal study notes, and Lukas Cranach the Elder's (1472–1553) illustrations, Luther sought to facilitate understanding by introducing a single column format into his Bible and breaking the text into paragraphs like modern Bible publishers do. The antilegomena books were placed at the end. A revised second edition was published in December of that same year ("December Testament").

Luther eventually expanded his translation commission to help him translate the rest of the Bible. This commission included Philipp Melanchthon, Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558), Caspar Cruciger the Elder (1504–48), and Matthäus Aurogallus (ca. 1490–1543). Meanwhile, Luther and Melanchthon began revising the Latin Vulgate for worship especially in the urban parishes. By 1534, Luther published his High German translation of the whole Bible (including the non-canonical apocrypha) and added the aforementioned study aids to the Old Testament. Granted, Bugenhagen got his Low German version of it published the year before. Thereafter, Luther continued to work with various translation teams to revise and improve his Bible and its study aids until his last revision in 1545. Records of the various translation teams show just how arduously they worked on the project.

In the preface to the *Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writing* (1539), Luther articulated his threefold strategy for reading the Bible devotionally and cultivating the spiritual life. Drawing on Psalm 119, he counseled believers first to pray that the Holy Spirit reveal the meaning of a given text of Scripture. Then Luther advised them to meditate on that text by continually mulling it over in their hearts and minds. Finally, he indicated that as they put the text into practice in their lives, they would experience crosses which would spiritually refine them just as gold is refined.

By publishing an extra verse with Luther's hymn in 1817, Grundtvig wanted to show the connection between the church of the Reformation and the church of his day. But Grundtvig did not follow Luther in every respect. He developed a unique teaching about the Christian Church and how it grows. He said that the Bible presents the necessary information about Jesus and the salvation He has won. But until this message is proclaimed by the Church, it is not powerful to create and sustain faith. He called the Apostles' Creed the "living Word" since it is the primary confession of the Church. Until the Word is proclaimed, it remains a "dead letter" on the pages of Scripture.

This unorthodox view gained acceptance in Denmark and Norway, and the first Norwegian pastors in America included it in the organizing constitution of the Norwegian Synod in 1851. But when more Norwegian Lutheran pastors arrived, they called attention to what is now called the "Grundtvigian error." They voted to revise the constitution and reorganize the Norwegian Synod in 1853. Grundtvig's novel teaching caused enough trouble among Norwegian Lutherans in America that none of his hymns were included in the hymnbooks of the Norwegian Synod until 1903. Since then, every Lutheran hymnbook in English has included "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage."

Luther's "*A Mighty Fortress*" is the immediate context for Grundtvig's verse and gives it added depth. Luther wrote that "a word" shall overthrow the devil (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #251, v. 3). The Word of God overcomes the devil because Jesus comes through the powerful Word to fight for us. The devil cannot defeat Jesus because Jesus crushed his head by His atoning death on the cross. He brings us His victory now through the Word and Sacraments and strengthens our faith in Him. As Luther wrote, "Still is He with us in the fight / With His good gifts and Spirit" (v. 4). Even if the devil should destroy all that we have in this life, "With us remains the kingdom" (v. 4).

Grundtvig's verse expands on this reign of God's kingdom through His Word:

*God's Word is our great heritage,
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way;
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure,
Throughout all generations.*
(#583)

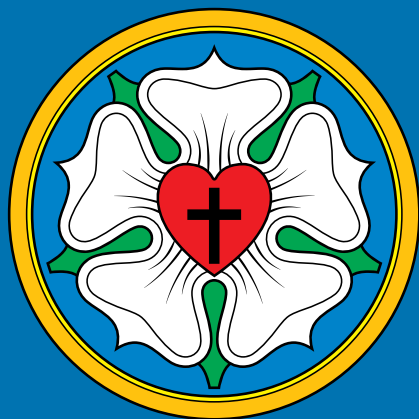
We cannot take credit for receiving the Word of God. It is an inheritance passed along to us by the mouths and hands of others. It is the best gift we have been given. Jesus says that all are blessed who "*hear the word of God and keep it*" (Luke 11:28, ESV). This "keeping" of the Word means to keep it close and pay careful attention to it. Grundtvig's original wording says we desire to hold God's Word in high esteem. Our confession of the truth can only be as clear as our understanding of it. Our "chief endeavor" is to gladly hear and learn God's Word so that we are ready to "spread its light from age to age."

Grundtvig also writes about how the Word benefits us. It "guides our way." It leads us out of the darkness of our sin and of the world and shows God's love and mercy toward us. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins through the Word of God's Law and comforts our hearts through the Word of His Gospel. The message of what Jesus has done to save us "is our stay." His righteousness, forgiveness, and grace are our consolation and comfort both in life and in death. The final lines of Grundtvig's verse are a prayer for everything expressed both in his verse and in Luther's hymn.

"God's Word Is Our Great Heritage" was translated into English by Ole G. Belsheim (1861-1925). He was a pastor in the United Norwegian Lutheran Church and served on the committee that produced the 1913 *Lutheran Hymnary*. The original melody for this hymn is Luther's tune for "*A Mighty Fortress*." The setting of the hymn is by Ludvig M. Lindeman (1812-1887), a famous Norwegian musician who produced isometric settings of many Lutheran hymns. The 1941 *Lutheran Hymnal* used an alternate melody for Grundtvig's hymn, so many are unaware of the hymn's original pairing with "*A Mighty Fortress*."

Two hundred years after Grundtvig wrote his hymn, we give thanks that the treasure of God's saving Word is ours today. We pray that this great heritage is kept pure throughout all generations so that many more will learn of their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, "Who wins the victory / In ev'ry field of battle" (#251, v. 2).

Note: The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* contains six of Grundtvig's hymns: 120, 143, 211, 462, 583, 595.



NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

by **REV. DAVID J. WEBBER**, ELS Doctrine Committee
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The **North American Lutheran Church**, or NALC, was organized in 2010 by sixteen congregations that had been members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). For quite some time, they had been unhappy with the ELCA's continual drift away from Biblical theology and morality, but the final catalyst for their departure was the ELCA's formal approval in 2009 of pastors living openly in same-sex relationships and of pastors officiating at same-sex weddings or union ceremonies. The NALC grew rapidly. After six years, the number of affiliated congregations had grown to more than 400. The NALC describes itself in this way:

The NALC embodies the theological center of Lutheranism in North America and stands firmly within the global Lutheran mainstream. We are a church family committed to the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. In keeping with the Lutheran Confessions, we believe all doctrines should and must be judged by the teaching of Scripture. The NALC has embraced four core values which shape our common life: Christ Centered, Mission Driven, Traditionally Grounded, and Congregationally Focused. We are a church centered on the unique Gospel of Jesus Christ, animated by missions and evangelism, grounded in the 2,000-year tradition of Christian faith, and organized chiefly to serve our congregations.

What being in the “theological center” means to the NALC includes allowing women to be pastors and to serve in all other offices and roles within the church. A 2020 document states that by the time the NALC was organized, the ordination of women had become a normal and accepted practice in the church. Therefore, the NALC Constitution contains a rather succinct but declarative reference: “Ordination and reception of ordained ministers shall be a function of the NALC. The NALC shall ordain both men and women to the office of Word and Sacrament.”

Being in the “theological center” also includes the promotion of an essentially open communion practice at NALC altars. The following statement has been recommended for congregations: “All are welcome to receive the Lord’s Body and Blood who are baptized and believe that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is truly present in, with and under the forms of bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.”

The ELS would agree with the positions that the NALC has taken on several ethical issues. The NALC defines

marriage, as God instituted it, as the lifelong union of a man and a woman. The NALC is pro-life, recognizing the full humanity and right to life of unborn children. The NALC opposes physician-assisted suicide and rejects the validity of embracing a gender identity that contradicts one’s biological sex.

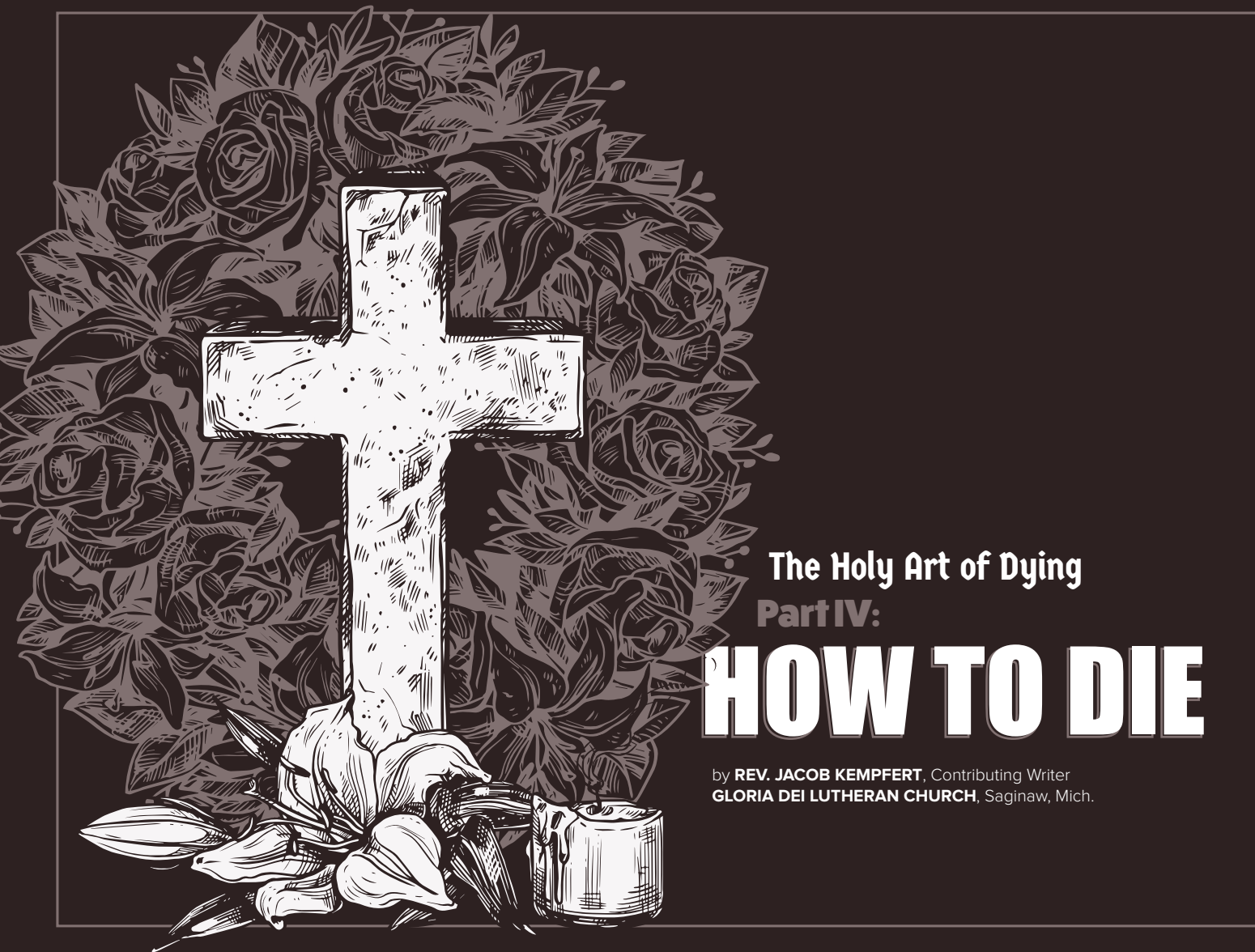
The NALC has good relations with several Lutheran church bodies in the third world that disagree with the extreme theological and moral liberalism of the mainstream churches of Europe and North America. It has a cordial

relationship with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), which separated from the Episcopal Church for reasons similar to the reasons for the NALC’s break with the ELCA. A seminary closely aligned with the ACNA, Trinity School for Ministry, is the primary institution utilized by the NALC for the education of its pastors. (Other seminaries, with a variety of denominational backgrounds, are also endorsed.)

The NALC participates in theological dialogues with the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church – Canada (an LCMS sister church). “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide,” described as “a guiding statement on the character and proper use of the Sacred Scriptures,” was jointly

issued by those three bodies in 2016. There is much in this statement with which the ELS would agree. It affirms, for example, that a “qualitative difference between the Scriptures and other literature is that the Scriptures – like the God who gives them – are reliable and completely trustworthy, or as the Christian church has often asserted, they are inerrant.” Yet in view of the NALC’s embracing of women pastors and open communion, one suspects that this statement may in some respects be an agreement in words without necessarily being an agreement in things. Indeed, it goes on to say that “Not all Christians who confess the inerrancy of the Bible view this inerrancy in the same way...”

“...The ELS would agree with the positions that the NALC has taken on several ethical issues. The NALC defines marriage, as God instituted it, as the lifelong union of a man and a woman. The NALC is pro-life, recognizing the full humanity and right to life of unborn children...”



The Holy Art of Dying Part IV: **HOW TO DIE**

by **REV. JACOB KEMPFFERT**, Contributing Writer
GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH, Saginaw, Mich.

Whenever I order new funeral bulletins for Gloria Dei church, I wonder if I'm ordering my own. Likewise, I keep taped to my desk a post-it note scrawled with an antique adage: "Learn as if you'll live forever. (For you will!) Live as if you'll die tomorrow. (For you may!)" And alongside this rests a notecard with Scripture readings and hymns I'd like used in my funeral service. Death has been a topic of personal interest for me for nearly three decades, ever since I first started spending an inordinate amount of time exploring the cemetery within biking distance of my childhood home.

Suffice it to say, I'm not great at parties. However, these rituals of my somewhat morbid temperament are intended to serve a sanctified purpose, teaching me to number my days upon this earth aright in the blessed hope I

may one day gain a heart of wisdom by doing so (Psalm 90:12). And I relate them in order to make plain my qualifications (or lack thereof) for writing an article on "How to Die" when I myself have no personal experience in the matter (yet).

I can propose the same practical encouragements that funeral directors and lawyers do: draw up a will, plan advanced directives, make prearrangements with your favorite funeral home. But a pastor is neither a litigator nor an undertaker. These plans may be helpful for the living, but even the best worldly preparations cannot properly prepare a soul for dying. I've seen enough dying to know that the process of death is hard enough as it is—but immeasurably more so when it arrives by surprise.

So the first step I can share in how to die is to prepare for dying and death while you are healthy and alive. It's best to strengthen ourselves against suffering when we are not suffering—otherwise, suffering will blindside us and we won't know how to respond to its ambush. The best way to prepare for a tornado is to run tornado drills under blue and sunny skies. And that's the good news for every single one of us as we face the morbid uncertainties of dying and death: you have already taken this first step, perhaps without even realizing it.

To hear the Word of God is to take this first step of preparing for death. When we confess a Scriptural faith in Jesus, we must come face to face with death; it can't be otherwise. First, our own death, a result of sin. But next, Christ's death, which atoned for our sin and paid in full the price of death. And finally, death conquered and overcome by Christ's resurrection from death, which is our own resurrection to eternal life through baptismal faith (Romans 6:3-5).

And again, it's written: According to His great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5). If you have read and heard and marked this Word of God, then you have been prepared for death by God Himself, who with gentle, yearning grace desires you to obtain the outcome of your faith: the everlasting salvation of your soul (1 Peter 1:9).

If you want to learn how to die well, go to where that Word of life is given freely to you, spoken in your ears and placed before your eyes, washed over you, placed upon your lips. Hold fast daily to God's Word, learn it, treasure it in your heart as your greatest hope in life and greatest strength in death. Remember daily your Baptism and the covenant of regeneration, sainthood, and everlasting life God has made with you in its Word-brimmed waters. Partake of the Lord's Supper often, "proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26), in repentance over sin and assurance of forgiveness in Christ's own body and blood.

The divine service we receive in church is not only strength for this life, but also a rehearsal for the moment of our blessed death. For this reason, I like to think of church as "death practice." The Word of God you hear in church every Sunday prepares you for death by giving you the work of the Lord of Life. We repeat these words from Scripture and receive them for our everlasting

blessing every Sunday, over and over, so that when we get to the place in our lives when we need them the most—when we go through suffering, pain, doubt, poverty, illness, when we come to our own death—then we have them at the ready. We've practiced exactly for this moment.

This is most evident at the conclusion of our celebration of the Lord's Supper. We sing the Nunc Dimittis, "now depart in peace," the song Simeon sings after seeing the infant Jesus in the Temple: now I can not only leave this place in peace, but now I can leave this life in peace, I can die in peace, at peace with God through Christ Jesus, my Savior (Luke 2:29-31).

We leave divine service "ready to die," for we are reconciled to God, at peace with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Lord's Supper we have received a foretaste of what awaits us after death: the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. For a brief, timeless moment on earth, we have entered the eternity we even now possess as our inheritance by faith in Christ Jesus. We have passed the veil of time and space that makes this creation as a dark glass, a smudged mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12).

We have tasted the precious Food of Heaven and so our Savior, the Lamb of God standing at the center of the Throne, communes Himself with us, just as He truly is Immanuel, God with us. And in this meal, we also have communed with all the communion of saints: in a brief, blessed glimpse of eternity, we have joined with all those who have gone before us into everlasting life and partake of this marriage feast of heaven. We commune with the entire Church Triumphant, beyond all time and space, beyond all sorrow and grief, intimately joined to the glory of the resurrected and ascended Lord of heaven and earth, rejoicing in the presence of our Savior. We are given the blessed peace and consoling rest of heaven that is ours already and yet still awaits us in the fullness of its bliss.

by REV. CHRISTIAN EISENBEIS, Contributing Editor
FIRST TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Marinette, Wisc.

CROSSING PATHS

On the Road to Jericho

PART FOUR

Formerly Chief of Sinners (Luke 19:1-10)

Many Minnesotans remember June 3, 1990: the day Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev came to visit. What unforgettable images! The leader of the Soviet Union randomly halting his motorcade and launching himself into adoring crowds; his wife visiting, in her words, a “typical middle-class family” in Minneapolis.

The family of six welcomed Mrs. Gorbachev into their home while six thousand people gathered outside. Some of them climbed trees to get a better look. All of them wondered—as I wondered, watching it on TV when I was ten years old—what made this family worthy to host such a distinguished guest. One reporter for the national news noted that their yard needed to be mowed and had too many dandelions. Their weeds made the headlines!

On the day Jesus “entered Jericho and was passing through” (Luke 19:1), the people in town may have asked themselves if He needed a place to stay. Jerusalem, His destination, was a day’s walk ahead, all of it uphill work. If they wondered which of them might receive the honor, they didn’t wonder if it would be Zacchaeus. They knew he was unworthy to host the Lord, and the reason why went far beyond an unkempt lawn: “He was a tax collector and was rich” (v. 2b).

The people’s actions revealed their thoughts the day Jesus came to visit. They lined the road and, like all good citizens of Jericho, formed a wall. They occupied the “moral high ground” and looked down on the man who was “small in stature” (v. 3b). They tried to keep his path and the Savior’s path from crossing. (We’ll see another example of this next time.) They proved Jesus’ point, which He had made in the previous chapter of Luke’s Gospel: “*How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God*” (18:24)!

The people of Jericho could’ve named ninety-nine people more righteous than Zacchaeus: ninety-nine more worthy to welcome the Lord into their home. Unwittingly, they proved another point Jesus had made: “Behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30). The Son of Man looked beyond their hatred and looked over their heads into the sycamore tree. He left the ninety-nine to

seek and save the one who was lost. “Zacchaeus,” He said, “hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (19:5b).

The crowd’s response to the love of Christ was predictable. They all grumbled, “*He has gone in to be the guest of a sinner*” (v. 7; see Luke 5:30, 7:34, 15:1-2). The “sinner’s” response, however, was something new and spontaneous.

Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (v. 8). Without shame, the chief tax collector confessed his former way of life as chief of sinners. Without shame, he confessed his repentance and faith in Jesus. The chief way he would show his repentance wouldn’t involve retiring from his position or moving to a different town, actions which, according to the world’s way of thinking, would’ve been wise. No, the chief fruit of his faith would be love for his neighbors, expressed in generosity far beyond what any law prescribed.

When the Lord called up to Zacchaeus and called him by name, the Holy Spirit went to work in the sinner’s heart. Zacchaeus obeyed the Lord’s command and opened his home to Him with joy. Though we don’t know how long Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus, He promised that He would abide with him in the fullness of His grace: “Today,” declared the Lord, “salvation has come to this house” (v. 9a).

That the Son of Man should seek and save us when we were lost and unworthy and unwilling to be found; that the Son of God should suffer and die for our sins; that the Risen Savior should desire to dwell in our hearts and homes; “*such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it*” (Psalm 139:6). Thanks be to Jesus, who has come down to us! He has not overlooked us or passed us by. He calls us by name, and we are His! Truly His love “has broken every barrier down” (ELH 319:6)!



Pictured from left to right: (back) Graham Parsons, Peter Estrem, Caleb VonDeylen, Joel Hansen (front) Caleb Strutz, Matthew Lehne, Skyler Hepler
Vicars not pictured: Cody Anderson, Caleb Helmen, Max Kerr

New Academic Year Begins for Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary began the new academic year on August 22, 2022 with an opening service at Good Shepherd Chapel. For the opening service, President Hartwig preached on John 17:13–23. He reassured the seminarians that although they cannot see the future with its difficulties and triumphs, Jesus can. Jesus sees and knows what is to come and will work all things for their good. They can trust him because he prayed for them and their work on his behalf on the night he was betrayed. If Jesus was mindful of them as he prepared to suffer and die for the sins of the world, he certainly has them in mind today. They can confidently move forward into the future even knowing that they will have failures as servants of Christ. Christ has lived and died for them. Jesus was the perfect pastor and his righteousness is credited to them by faith. Through His death, Jesus has forgiven all their sins: past, present, and future. Jesus will bless their future work of proclaiming this forgiveness to the world.

The teaching staff for the seminary this semester is as follows: **Timothy Hartwig**, **Brian Klebig**, **Nicholas Proksch**, **Gaylin Schmeling**, and **Timothy Schmeling**. Professor Timothy Hartwig is teaching courses in pastoral theology and symbolics; Professor Brian Klebig is teaching communication; Professor Nicholas Proksch is teaching in the areas of New Testament, homiletics, and hermeneutics; Professor Gaylin Schmeling is teaching homiletics; and Professor Timothy Schmeling is teaching Old Testament, church history, and homiletics.

The seminary enrollment this year numbers ten. There are three vicars, two seniors, three middlers, and two juniors. The vicars are **Cody Anderson** at *Saude, Jerico, and Redeemer Lutheran Churches* (Lawler and New Hampton, Iowa); **Caleb Helmen** at *Our Savior Lutheran Church* (Naples, Florida); and **Max Kerr** at *King of Grace Lutheran Church* (Golden Valley, Minnesota).

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“Lutheran Care of Souls”

Care of Souls in the Lutheran Reformation

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 Grand View University,
 Des Moines, IA

Care of Souls in Lutheran Orthodoxy

Dr. Benjamin Mayes,
 Concordia Theological Seminary,
 Fort Wayne, IN

Care of Souls in Modern Lutheranism

Dr. John Pless,
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Bethany Lutheran College | S. C. Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center | Mankato, Minnesota | October 27, 10:30 a.m.

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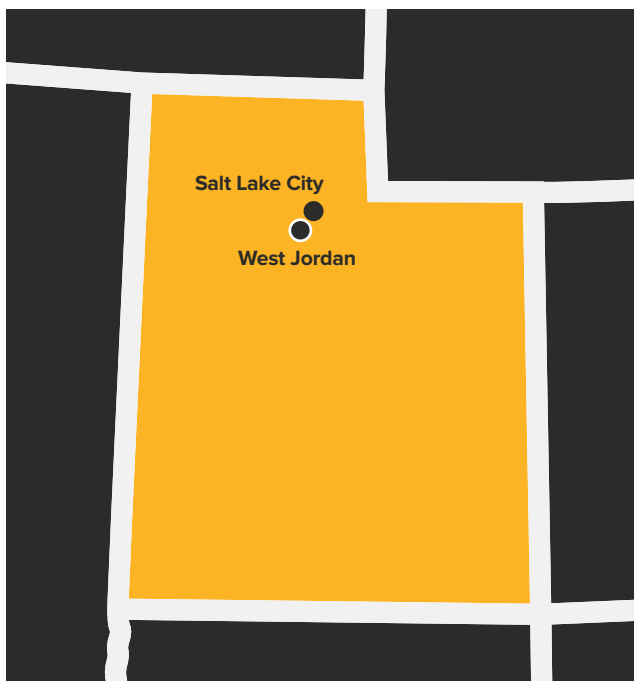
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MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:

Hope Lutheran Church

West Jordan, Utah

by **REV. PAUL WEBBER**, Contributing Writer
HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH, West Jordan, Utah



In 1987, far from the heartland of Lutheranism, an LCMS mission congregation was founded in West Jordan, Utah, under the care of Rev. Gregory Sahlstrom. Twelve years later, in 1999, Hope Lutheran Church voted to join the ELS. Though relatively young compared to many other churches in the ELS, Hope plays a critical role both in our state and indeed in the synod at large. An eight-hour drive from the closest ELS churches, Hope stands as an isolated beacon of light in a very dark spiritual environment. The heartland of Mormonism, Utah is a mission field of souls searching for answers, answers found only in the truth of Christ crucified for sinners. Something else that sets Hope apart is the fact that a large percentage of its members came to faith as adults. In a synod blessed with many members who had the privilege of being raised in the faith, Hope brings a different and important perspective to the ELS.

Since Hope's beginnings as a mission congregation under Rev. Sahlstrom, the congregation has also been shepherded by Rev. Aaron Hamilton and, currently, Rev. Paul Webber. Utah is a beautiful state, blessed by God with many national parks and the best snow on earth. If you are able to visit Utah and you are in the Salt Lake area on a Sunday morning, your brothers and sisters in Christ at Hope Lutheran Church invite you to join them for worship.