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To the Church, For the World

By Todd Wilken

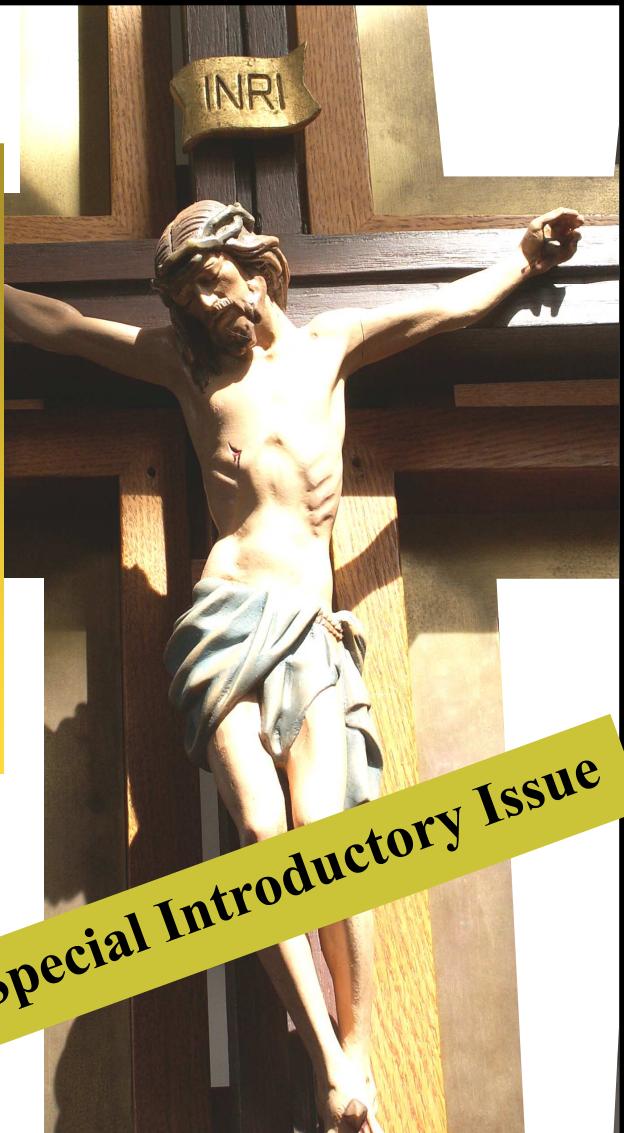
Who Was John the Steadfast?

By Martin Noland

Featured Congregation

St. Paul, Hamel,
Illinois

Pastor William Weedon



Special Introductory Issue



STEADFAST QUARTERLY

The Journal of the Brothers of John the Steadfast

Vol. 1, No. 1, June 25, 2008



STEADFAST QUARTERLY

The Quarterly Journal of the Brothers of John the Steadfast

Special Introductory Issue

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A Word From Pastor Wilken

Prelude: While the relationship between our new show and BJS is *strictly unofficial*, I think BJS is on to something. For the first time, the new media voices of confessional Lutherans are being taken seriously by friend and foe alike. These voices need concerted support and encouragement. That's what BJS is all about.

To the Church, For the World

We call it “infrastructure” —highways, sewers, the power grid, telephone lines. We don’t think of these things as sacred, but secular. But ask yourself this question: To whom did God give these things, and why?

We mistakenly think that God gave these things first and foremost to the world, for its uses. We mistakenly think that the Church uses these things *on loan* from the world. But God did not give these things first and foremost to the world. *God gave them to the Church.*

God gave these things to the Church, for the World.

You see, the highways, sewers, power grid and telephone lines have their good secular uses. But God gave them first and foremost to the Church for her use 1) in proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified for sinners, and 2) in serving the neighbor in need. God gave these things to the Church, for the World.

Really, the world uses these things *on loan* from the Church.

The same is true of the so-called “Old Media” of print, radio and television. God gave these things to the Church, for the World.

What about the New Media —the Internet, blogs, online communities, wikis, P2P sharing, streaming audio and video, and podcasting? God gave these

(Continued on p. 26)

Featured Steadfast Parish

St. Paul, Hamel, Illinois

By Elaine Gavin

If you have ever driven on I-55 in Illinois headed to St. Louis, you've seen it. And if you were driving at night, well, you can't miss it. Sitting right on historic Route 66, a stone's throw from the noisy expressway, St. Paul Lutheran Church U.A.C. (Unaltered Augsburg Confession), Hamel, Illinois, is a local landmark. The neon cross atop the building, given in memory of a member who died in WWII, shines as a beacon in the night.

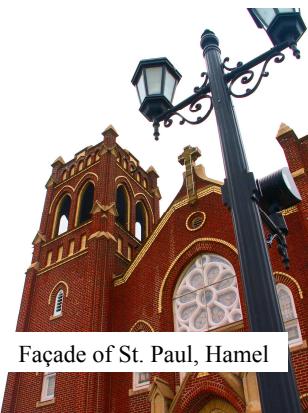
More than 150 years ago, settlers from Germany, many of them from Gehlenbeck in Westphalia, formed St. Paul Lutheran Church, nicknamed "New Gehlenbeck" in honor of their homeland. The fledgling congregation met first in a member's home, then in a newly constructed parsonage with a large room that also served as their school. The first church proper was built during the Civil War, and the present sanctuary was built during the Great Depression.

Albert Brandt, late member of St. Paul, wrote down his remembrances of the school and parish life in the early 20th century in "It Happened at St. Paul: A Story of God's People," as told by Albert Brandt.

I started going to German American parochial school at St. Paul's New Gehlenbeck in 1921. The teacher then was John Schildt (1919-1934). The pastor then was Rev. H.H. Hanson, 1909-1934.

It seems the New Gehlenbeck settlers chose Hamel for its resemblance to the land they left. Current Pastor William Weedon talks about the area and the changes the church has seen.

The area around Hamel was originally all farmland-flat, rather like the territory the settlers came from in Germany, and suitable for dairy. In the last 25 years the metro east of St. Louis has grown quite a bit, and our parish has gone from being mostly



Façade of St. Paul, Hamel



farmers to being really a suburban parish located in the country on the far northern rim of the St. Louis metro area. New members no longer come necessarily from the countryside and villages around the parish; our newest members came from a town about half an hour away. They're not exceptional. The parish boundaries are as far as people are comfortable driving in an automobile.



St. Paul's chancel

According to Albert Brandt, very few people had automobiles when he was a boy, and comfort didn't really seem to be a consideration in getting oneself to church or school.

I remember when all church goers arrived in buggies and surries to attend church ser-

vices and there was not one automobile nary a one on the grounds. All transportation of people was by horse power or walking. . . . We had no snow days then. School was never called off because of snow no matter how deep it got. . . . Everybody walked to school. Northern students would catch a ride on a milk truck and ride part of the way to the school when milk trucks made their debut or first appearance. A ride with traveling vehicles on Hillsboro road was always accepted on our way trekking homeward.

This steadfast parish made confessional Lutheran catechesis a priority and they expected their children to behave and to respect their teachers and esteem their pastor. This is not to say that they were not typical children! Albert remembers:

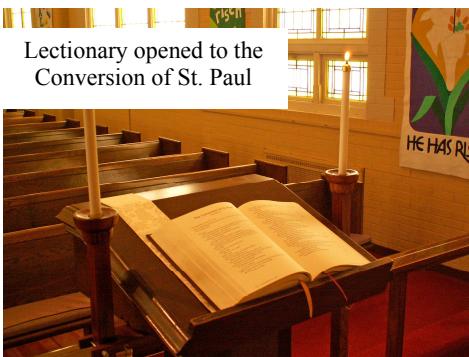
During school sessions for discipline control the teacher used a long leather whipping strap to chastise unruly students which he occasionally used. I saw teacher use it on boys but never girls. They apparently were better behaved than the boys. During noon recess while teacher was home for his noon meal some boys would open the drawer on teacher's desk where he kept his whipping strap and cut off a couple



The Lord's gifts

of inches of strap. This happened more than once. Apparently teacher never caught onto the prank and by the time I was confirmed and left St. Paul's school there wasn't much strap left. . . . Teachers then were very strict and believed in the old saying "spare the rod and spoil the child."

This was acceptable those days. We did receive a good Christian education and I am thankful for that.



School opened daily with a greeting "Good morning dear teacher" in German "Guten morgen, Herr Lehrer." We done a lot of singing, much of it out of a book called "Lieder Perlen." Luther's Small Catechism and the Bible were basically taught in the German language.

If I remember right Catechism was taught in English one day a week only on Wednesday. All Bible study was in the German language only and none in English. Reading and writing was taught in both languages.

When you would ask some of the old timers if they spoke English they would answer Yes, I speak American. They didn't call it English but always called it American. My own father called English "American" vs. German.

Later on as more English was being spoken in St. Paul's parish a switch was made from having all services in German to having some services in the English language. I don't think that Rev. Hansen had any English language instructions at the seminary. When preaching on the pulpit he gave it his best under the circumstances. . . . Anyway leave it to "papa Hansen" he got the message across. He was held in high esteem and highly respected by parishioners of St. Paul. At the onset of the Great Depression of 1929 and 1930 he asked the congregation to lower his salary.

Many years have passed since Albert Brandt attended school at St. Paul; the hitching posts have been replaced with a paved lot. Much has not changed, how-



ever. This parish is committed to the Divine Service, the study of God's Word, the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, and the historic liturgy of the Church. Now, as then, St. Paul is a confessional congregation. "Very much so," says Pastor Weedon:

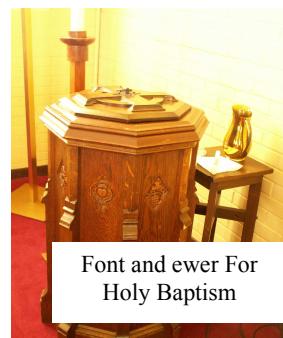
St. Paul's is proud of its Lutheran heritage and desires to be nothing but Lutheran. That doesn't mean we're perfect; we're not. But we consciously try to allow the Sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Symbols to shape not just the preaching and teaching we do here, but also our administration of the Sacraments and our life together in Christ.

Jeff Schwarz and his family are members of St. Paul. He remembers his first visit to the church, talks about the preaching and teaching at St. Paul, and commends his fellow parishioners.

I'll never forget our first visit to St. Paul's. After attending the Divine Service, several members encouraged us to attend Bible class. Pastor Weedon is an exemplary teacher and preacher. . . [he] preaches Law & Gospel: the Law to show me my sin; the Gospel for my constant need and dependence on Jesus. The liturgy is conducted with reverence, sacredness and holiness. The parishioners at St. Paul's have been thoroughly instructed into the Biblical and historical basis for the liturgy.

My fellow parishioners at St. Paul's have been extremely supportive during my wife's illness and my unemployment.

Who is St. Paul's pastor? William Weedon has served as pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Hamel, Illinois, since 1992. He holds an M.Div (1986) and an S.T.M. (1998) from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He has been guest preacher on *The Lutheran Hour*, and has had numerous items published in *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, *Lutheran Witness*, *The Bride of Christ*, and other journals. He was a frequent guest on the radio show *Issues, Etc.* He has also served as a plenary speaker for the Higher Things Youth Conference, the St. Michael's Liturgical Institute, and several pastoral conferences. His areas of interest include liturgy, patristics (study of the Church Fathers), preaching, catechumenal ministry, Atkins diet, and church music. He and his wife, Cindi, have been blessed with three children by nature and one by grace (a son-in-law). You can visit him at his blog: weedon.blogspot.com



Font and ewer For
Holy Baptism

What We Learned from *Issues, Etc.* (& What We'll Learn In the Future)

By Rev. Dr. Timothy Rossow

Editor's Note: This article is based on a seven week Bible study taught by Pastor Rossow this past spring at the parish he serves, Bethany Lutheran, Naperville, Illinois. The Bible study is available online at www.steadfastlutherans.org.



Young protester gazing into the reflection pond at the LCMS International Center

Introduction

What's the big deal? Why have over 7,500 people signed a petition? Why care so much that a denominational decision was made to unplug a radio show for financial reasons? The radio, internet and podcast program called *Issues, Etc.* was cancelled this past Holy Week by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and thousands of people are upset. The program is near and dear to this magazine because it was the inspiration for the founding of the Brothers of John the Steadfast and this quarterly magazine.

Issues, Etc. was a radio show underwritten by the LCMS on St. Louis radio station KFUO-AM. The show was on the air for over ten years, with Pastor Todd Wilken serving as the host for the last several years. His producer was Mr. Jeff Schwarz. The podcast followers were by far the largest audience of the show, exemplified by the over 187,000 downloads in November of 2008. Guests on the show included world renown theologians, seminary professors, pastors, political figures and an endless list of others.

The show was both apologetic (it defended the faith) and confessional (it confessed the hard truths of Scripture). *Issues, Etc.* was not only profoundly edifying to Lutherans, but it also brought numerous people to the LCMS from heterodox congregations.



In our Bible study at Bethany we looked at five recurring themes of *Issues, Etc.*. Highlighted here are two of those: the importance of doctrine and the fact that piety flows out of true doctrine. For both we include a favorite quote from the petition site that was launched to bring back *Issues, Etc.* (To view the petition site go to www.petitiononline.com/Issues/.) Before we get to the two themes consider this example from the comments left on the petition site and see how it illustrates the crucial work that this show did.

Petition Signer #5,578 (Rebecca)

As a former member of both a seeker sensitive/purpose driven church (4-square) and liberal church (Methodist), I am appalled and disgusted at the changes that are taking place in the LCMS. For the first time in my life here was a church that made sense. It based everything off of the Bible and was therefore genuine in its confession. By cancelling Issues Etc., a program that merely examined the issues of the day and referred back to the Bible as a guide to the way a true believer and follower of Christ should react to such trying times, you have shown your true colors.

“I told my wife if I keep listening to this show I might end up Lutheran . . .”

The Importance of Doctrinal Truth

The first and most significant of the themes of the show is the importance of doctrinal truth. The Christian faith is built on doctrine. Many in the church today are seeking a church that is built on relationships, caring for others, outreach, and other proposed foundations. These are important things, but the church is not built on them. When these become the foundation of the church we are at risk of losing the very Gospel that forms the church. Pastor Wilken and *Issues, Etc.* were a clear voice promoting the true significance of doctrine for the church.

The Bible is clear that pure doctrine is the foundation upon which everything else in the church is built. **Ephesians 4:11-14** states that the very purpose of the pastor is to teach sound doctrine so that the church stays on course.

¹¹ And he (Christ) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Here is an example from the *Issues, Etc. Journal* of what Pastor Wilken taught on this matter.

*The Church has something better than any fad. . . . Many in the fad-driven church believe that preaching the Word is impractical: “If just preaching the Word worked, people would be lining up at our door.” Others in the fad-driven church believe that preaching the Word is outdated: “It may have worked 50 years ago, but not today.” Others believe that preaching the Word is just too simple. St. Paul tells the Church to preach the Word not because it is the most practical way, or the most current way, or the simplest way—but because it is the only way. . . . “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 1:25). [That way] is the Gospel, the message of the forgiveness of sins purchased at the cross, with the blood of Jesus. (Todd Wilken, *Issues Etc. Journal*, “The Fad-Driven Church,” Vol. 3, No. 3)*

**“The
Church
has
some-
thing bet-
ter than
any
fad. . . .”**

Here is an example from the petition drive of how this teaching moved others.

#809. Rev. Scott Eaton - Calvary Community Church, Schaumburg, IL

*I am a Baptist General Conference pastor who has benefited greatly from the *Issues, Etc* program. . . . Does the LCMS not care about truth, the gospel, and its own confessions? I have told my wife that if I keep listening to this show I might end up becoming a Lutheran! . . . Even as a non-Lutheran I was greatly impacted by this program and its confessional approach.*



Pious Living is Dependent Upon and Flows from Doctrinal Truth

The second theme we highlight grows out of the first. *Issues, Etc.* makes it very clear that pure doctrine is a priority in the Church. However, that does not mean that piety is to be ignored. Instead, the two things are intrinsically connected. True piety (good works, sanctification, worship) flows from pure doctrine.

There is a movement in the church today to ignore doctrine and simply preach good works. Examples include all of the sermon-series on things like *The Ten Principles of Christian Money Management*, *How to be a Good Parent*, and others.

If the church loses pure doctrine it will lose true piety because piety is spawned by the Gospel. We love because God first loved us (I John 4). If we do not understand the love of God or if we mix into it false teaching, our love (piety) will not be motivated by the Gospel but by some form of works righteousness. Pure doctrine is not opposed to piety; it gives birth to it!

Here is an passage from the *Issues, Etc. Journal* that highlights this point.

Works do not produce faith, faith produces works. True faith in Jesus Christ is nothing other than trusting Jesus Christ and His works, not your own. True faith is trusting in the perfect obedience, the suffering, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus alone. And faith is not produced by works, but only by the message of the Gospel. Paul and James agree, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (*Romans 10:17*), and “Accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (*James 1:21*)
... (*the*) Gospel produces faith, and faith produces works.

(Todd Wilken, *Issues, Etc. Journal* – “Not by Faith Alone?”, Vol. 5, No. 2)

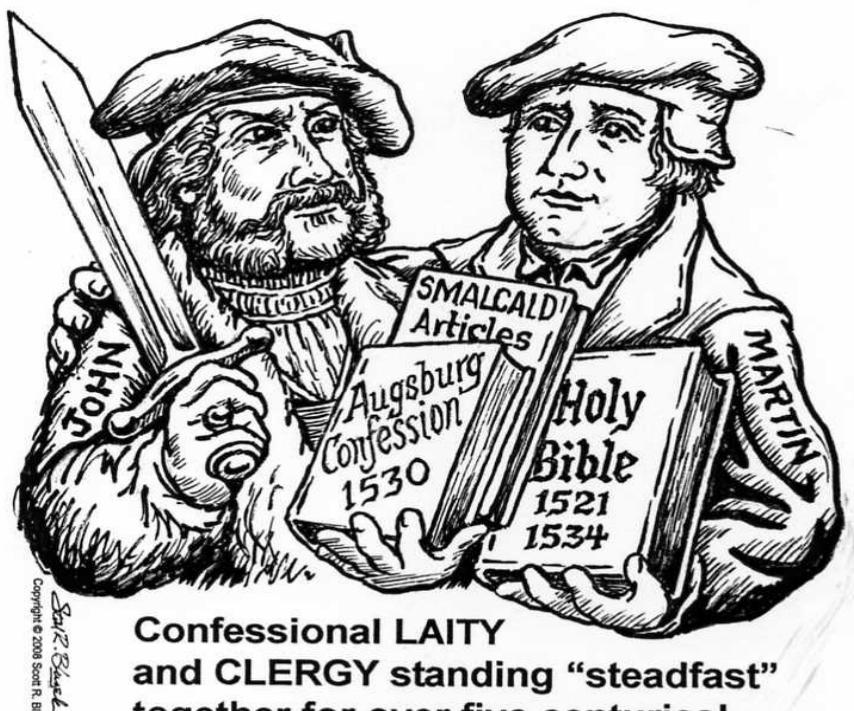
One of our favorite petition offerings on this subject comes from a familiar Lutheran name.

321. **David Preus, Trinity Lutheran Church, Bridgeton, MO**
I learned quite a bit of good Lutheran theology from Issues, Etc. I learned how to apply the Gospel to my personal life. I learned about

all sorts of issues that, while they may have been news to me, were and are still extremely important to my Christian brothers and sisters. Issues Etc. kept me tuned in to the life of the Christian church. I strongly urge the board responsible for making this decision to terminate Issues, Etc. either to rescind their resolution, or to inform the public why they are justified in their decision. In Jesus' name, Holy Week, 2008.

Conclusion

We have not even scratched the surface of what *Issues, Etc.* has taught us. We are not sure if anyone, other than Pastor Wilken and Producer Jeff Schwarz, can even comprehend the surface area that *Issues, Etc.* has covered in the last few years. The list of podcasts of the shows is mind-bogglingly rich and comprehensive. May this brief summary tantalize us as we look forward to the next expression of Pastor Wilken and producer Scwharz as they bring us the issues that challenge the church today and tomorrow, etc.





Quote of the Quarter from a Steadfast Layman

"If I were a pious person, I could be content in a Greek/Russian Orthodox Church. If I were a good person, I could be Baptist. If I were nice I could be Methodist. If I were really smart, I could be a Calvinist. If I were more comfortable expressing my emotions, I could have made a Pentecostal. But I'm actually a very selfish, mean and utterly bad person. . . . Needless to say, a murdering, whoremongering idolator like myself needs all the Means of Grace he can get his hands on to stay out of hell. And the Lutheran Church is the only place on earth I know of where I can get them all, get them often and get them for free."—Jon Bischof, writing on the Wittenberg Trail Lutheran networking site, June 2, 2008

Steadfast Quote from the Lutheran Confessions

Researched by Rev. Gary Wright

From the Preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, paragraphs 15-19. Philip Melanchthon considers the dangers that face the steadfast confessors of the true faith.

Discord does not delight us, neither are we indifferent to our danger; for we readily understand the extent of it in such a bitterness of hatred wherewith we see that the adversaries have been inflamed. But we cannot abandon truth that is manifest and necessary to the Church. Wherefore we believe that troubles and dangers for the glory of Christ and the good of the Church should be endured, and we are confident that this our fidelity to duty is approved of God, and we hope that the judgment of posterity concerning us will be more just

. . . We shall commend our cause, therefore, to Christ, who some time will judge these controversies, and we beseech Him to look upon the afflicted and scattered churches, and to bring them back to godly and perpetual concord.

(from the *Triglot Concordia*)

Reformation Testimonies of Steadfast Faith

Who Was John the Steadfast?

By Martin Noland

Who was the first Protestant? If you guessed Martin Luther, you would be close, but not right. The word "Protestant" was first applied to the German rulers who opposed the imperial laws adopted at the second Diet of Speyer in 1529. Chief among the protesters was John "the Steadfast," Elector of Saxony, who thereby gained a reputation as the first and foremost Protestant.

Although John the Steadfast is not well-known outside of Lutheran circles, he should be. Without his steadfast conviction that Luther's teaching was true, and his steadfast actions in defense of the Reformation, there would no Protestant church today. Without John's protection, Luther would have experienced the same fate as Jan Huss, who was burned at the stake at the Council of Constance. Without John's wisdom in political affairs, the Lutherans in Germany would have been murdered like the 20,000 French Calvinists on Saint Bartholomew's Day in 1572.

German Lutherans still remember the role that John the Steadfast played in defending their religion. The Wittenberg Castle Church has two prominent tombs today. These are not the graves of Luther and Melanchthon, who are buried in front of the pulpit, but the graves of John and Elector Frederick "the Wise" (his older brother). The electors are buried in front of the altar under huge bronze memorial slabs. They are flanked by alabaster statues, depicting them kneeling in prayer, and by magnificent bronze sculptures of the two electors in ceremonial garb and sword.

John the Steadfast was born in 1468 at Meissen, known today for its famous porcelain. He received a scholarly education, was trained in the arts of the knight, and gained prestige in battles against the Ottoman Turks. John became an enthusiastic reader of Martin Luther's writings. When the papal bull was published against Luther in 1520, John was responsible for making sure it was not enacted in Electoral Saxony. Through correspondence, he convinced his brother Frederick at Worms to be more bold in his defense of Luther, resulting in Luther's protection at the Wartburg. In October 1522, John



heard Luther preach sermons at the court of Weimar on the powers and limits of secular authority (German: *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). These sermons became John's personal political philosophy.

Upon the death of Frederick in May 1525, John the Steadfast became the Elector of Saxony. In those days, the Saxon Elector was second only to the emperor in power and influence in the Holy Roman Empire. Upon his accession, John announced to the clergy of Saxony that, in the future, the pure Word of God should be preached without human addition and that all useless ceremonies were to be abolished. In February 1526, John ratified a treaty with the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, which was soon joined by other Lutheran states. This was the beginning of political organization in defense of the Lutheran church.

John the Steadfast also defended the Lutheran church from economic disaster. The Saxon aristocracy had been appropriating church lands, which had previously been used as capital assets to pay the salaries of clergy, teachers, janitors, maintenance, and capital improvements. John put a stop to this appropriation, ensuring that the church was properly endowed for the present and future. John also assisted Luther and Melanchthon in the reform of the University of Wittenberg, which became the pattern for Lutheran universities until the present day!

The imperial laws adopted at the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529, if enacted, would have resulted in the eradication of the Lutheran religion in the Holy Roman Empire. Along with his allies, John the Steadfast protested these laws. Emperor Charles the Fifth then challenged the Protestants to defend their new religion and its practices, which they did at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. Their defense is known as the Augsburg Confession, with its first signature being that of Elector John the Steadfast.

From this history, we learn that the first "confessors" and defenders of the Lutheran church were laymen. Their spiritual heirs should remember that the Lutheran church cannot survive without laymen who also confess and defend this faith. John the Steadfast met his Savior on August 10, 1532.



Church Newswatch

What's Going On in the Church At Large?

By Jennifer Jordan

The **United Methodist Church** has agreed to full communion with the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**. The ELCA will vote on full communion with the United Methodist Church at their general assembly in 2009. “It’s not a merger,” says Bishop Melvin Talbert, co-chair of the ELCA-United Methodist dialogue team, although the agreement allows pulpit and altar fellowship. The United Methodist Church has also opened a dialogue with the Episcopal Church, presumably aimed at reaching a similar agreement.

In early March of this year, David Trotter, lead pastor of **Revolution [Church]**, Long Beach, California, told his congregation that he needed a sabbatical. Two days later, he left his wife, children, and the church which he founded. He had a brief fling with a woman from the church, then was dumped by her. Trotter has now begun his own life coach and consulting business. Read more about his new “calling” at <http://www.startarevolution.tv>

Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay bishop elected in the **Episcopal Church**, is planning to join with his partner of twenty years, Mark Andrew, in a private civil union ceremony this summer. Bishop Robinson has not been invited to the worldwide Anglican Communion’s once-a-decade Lambeth Conference, but insists that he will attend anyway. On the other hand, Anglican primates of Uganda, Rwanda, Sydney and Nigeria, among others, are boycotting Lambeth and will instead meet in Jerusalem at their own Global Anglican Future Conference, GAFCON. A statement by Council of the Anglican Provinces of Africa reads, in part, “[W]e are not sure that we can in good conscience continue to spend our time, our money and our prayers on behalf of a body that proclaims two Gospels, the Gospel of Christ and the Gospel of Sexuality.” There appears to be slim chance that the Epis-



copal Church in the United States will be called to account by the rest of the Anglican Communion for ordaining and electing an openly homosexual bishop, or for TEC's tacit approval of homosexuality in general.

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints** has announced the formation of the 100th congregation of that church in Taiwan. The Church has also announced plans for a new Temple to be built in Arizona, which will bring the total of temples built or planned for Arizona to five, and the number to 140 worldwide.

Suffering in the Church Persecution of Christians Across the Globe

A Catholic adoption agency in Great Britain has had to shut its doors due to passage of the Equality Act, a law which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair had wanted the agency in question to be exempt from the law, since it requires that homosexual couples be allowed to adopt and the agency's ties to the Church prevent it from complying. One Minister of Parliament has described the new law as a "secular attack on the Catholic Church."

Iranian Christian Mohsen Namvar has been detained by Iranian police for a second time for baptizing former Muslims. After he was released following his first detention, Namvar was unable to walk due to torture sustained during his imprisonment. The second detention follows a series of similar arrests of Iranian converts to Christianity in recent months. The International Antioch Ministries, which supports Iranian Christian churches, reports that the number of Christians in Iran is growing rapidly. According to Islamic law, conversion to another religion is a capital offense punishable by execution.

As reported by the International Christian Concern at www.persecution.org.

Not Your Grandfathers' Church

Visits to Not-So-Steadfast Churches

By Phillip Magness

A couple of years ago, I was traveling back home from vacation with my family and decided to attend Divine Service at an LCMS church in one of the growing exurbs outside a Texas metropolis. Upon entry I noticed a few red flags, but didn't say anything to my family out of respect for what we Lutherans call "adiaphora" (rites and ceremonies neither commanded nor forbidden by God). After all, maybe there were no hymnals in the pew racks because a recent spike in membership had resulted in not enough to go around. And maybe we couldn't see a baptismal font because we just had poorly located seats. Still, it was hard to overlook the size of the sound system and the visibility of the sound engineer. Yet this was supposed to be a "traditional" service, and I took comfort that a clearly Lutheran liturgical order was outlined in the bulletin provided by the ushers.

As the service progressed, there were some irritants, like sitting for the Collect, but nothing one could point to as contrary to Lutheran piety. Indeed, it was easy to put the best construction on some of the things, and I was thinking that I could use them as examples of choices congregations make, showing that while some choices might be more meaningful than others, different choices are not necessarily wrong. Who knows? Maybe this fairly young congregation had many people with health problems, and so the pastor was trying to let the people stay seated as much as possible!

Then something happened I'll never forget. After the Epistle the pastor announced that they were going to "take some time this morning to share the excitement that was VBS" at their parish the past week. Immediately, tracks of Disney-style music blared through the sound system and a couple of dozen kids came streaming down the aisles. Once up front, they began to move and shake--at least the younger girls did. The older ones, especially the boys, looked uncomfortable. But I love the sound of children singing the Lord's



song, and so even as my own children sat up straight in shock with their backs against the pews, I leaned forward in anticipation of something edifying.

But the children didn't sing anything. Instead they lip-synched to the kids on the tracks. And neither the words nor the tune were worthwhile. Just a cheerleader jingle about being pumped "up, up, up" for the Lord. And as if one song weren't enough, *there had to be an encore!* During this second number several of the parents stood up to get a better view with their camcorders, presumably since the second one had some sort of "hand jive" associated with it that older girls seemed to enjoy giggling through. Predictably, the spectacle ended with a vigorous round of applause led by the pastor.

Things could go nowhere but up after that, and the rest of the service was fairly calm. The sermon was heavy on sanctification, with emphasis on "everyone a minister." This flowed logically into the installation of the congregation's first Stephen ministers. The folks in the narthex afterwards were friendly enough, and all the buzz was about how "alive" things were at the parish now that their new pastor was getting "so many things going." Clearly there was more than adiaphora involved in all this mix of new things, and I knew our family would have lots to talk about on the way out of town.

As we drove away my daughter said the service reminded her of a Monty Python comedy skit in which there was an election involving a Serious Party, a Silly Party, and a Very Silly Party. My children had come to know that while we in our family are serious Lutherans, there are some Lutherans who are not serious about doctrine and practice, but are just plain silly. My children had never seen these other Lutherans in action. So my daughter asked, "Daddy, were those the silly Lutherans at that church?" To which I replied, "Yes, sweetie, those weren't serious Lutherans, they were some of the silly ones."

At which point my older son interjected, "Very Silly!"

President Kieschnick likes to talk about how today's LCMS is "not your grandfather's church." But do our synodical leaders know how silly it is becoming?

Maybe it is time for laymen to speak up and tell them. Grandfather was a Serious Lutheran. So are we.

Featured Steadfast Blog

Rev. William Cwirla

By Jennifer Jordan

Rev. William Cwirla, Holy Trinity, Hacienda Heights, California

Blogging at *Rev. Cwirla's Blogosphere*, <http://blog.higherthings.org/wcwirla/> and *Blogosphere Underground*, <http://revcwirla.blogspot.com/>

Many of our readers may be familiar with Pastor Cwirla's name from his work with Higher Things, the confessional Lutheran youth organization. He's been blogging at the HT website for some time, but recently started a new blog, *Blogosphere Underground*, as well. He told us, "I started my 'underground' blog when *Issues, Etc.* was taken off the air. I was a fan of the show, friends with Todd and Jeff, and a frequent guest. I knew the whole thing was going to go political. As the vice-president of Higher Things, I didn't want to drag the organization into a political scrum." *Blogosphere Underground* focuses more specifically on internal LCMS matters, whereas *Rev. Cwirla's Blogosphere* touches on current events, movie reviews, YouTube clips of note, even discussion of life on other planets. *Rev Cwirla's Blogosphere* also contains the posts that best epitomize why we feel he deserves to be called a Steadfast Lutheran: his sermons. Thank you for posting your sermons, Pastor Cwirla. And thank you too, for taking some time to answer a few questions for us.

Tell us a little about yourself.

I was born and raised in Chicago, baptized at St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church on the southwest side. The congregation was meeting at the elementary school gymnasium at the time, so I was baptized in a gym. I never was much of an athlete, however. I worked in industrial chemistry for six years prior to going to Concordia Seminary-St. Louis.

My favorite "adult beverage" is good red wine--Cabernets, Syrahs, Zinfandels. The "big reds," as they call them. No wimpy wines, and definitely no white Zinfandel which is against the order of creation. I also like good beers.



Are you a "lifer" or a convert to Lutheranism?

I am what many would call a "lifer Lutheran." I've never strayed too far from the Lutheran fold. I messed around with Youth for Christ in high school, which was an offshoot of Campus Crusade. They played guitars, had very cool youth leaders and plenty of cute girls. I lived at home during college, so I continued to worship in my family's congregation though I poked my head in the campus Lutheran congregation which was LCA at the time. The pastor was very interested in historic liturgy and vestments. It was there I discovered that Lutherans could use incense and not start sneezing. When I left home for graduate school at Berkeley, I joined a very conservative and traditional LCMS congregation in town, a move that kind of surprised me, since I wasn't that conservative and traditional at the time. I guess it represented stability at a time when everything else in my life was pretty much upside down. Berkeley has a way of bringing out one's inner conservative.

What do you enjoy most about writing a blog?

What I enjoy most about blogging is the ability to put ideas out into the public square and then engage comments. For me, blogs are trial balloons to see if an idea will fly. I also regularly blog my sermons to share a bit of what is being said at Holy Trinity with the general public.

The "blogosphere" is definitely the 21st century marketplace of ideas. It isn't for the squeamish or the faint of heart. I think many people misunderstand the role of blogging. They see it as some kind of publishing venture when really it's an open-ended conversation.

I always try to include some level of humor in my blogging because I think it's a good test of whether one is living under the Law or the Gospel. People who can't see the absurdity of our condition or laugh at themselves need a strong dose of 200-proof Gospel to set them free.

How would you best describe the "issues" in the LCMS to someone who asks, "What's all the fuss about? Why can't we all just get along?"

"Getting along" is not an end in itself, but a fruit of the Spirit when the Word has had its way with us. The Bible never speaks of bare "unity" but of "unity of the Spirit" or "unity of the faith" which means that it's not a unity we cook up for ourselves. The "issues" that plague the LCMS are complicated and inter-

woven with our history as an immigrant church body and our theological identity as confessing western catholic Christians.

Unfortunately, these issues tend to be oversimplified in terms of "us" versus "them," traditional versus contemporary, doctrine versus mission, conservative versus liberal, confessional versus church growth-ist. Everyone seems to have a label for everyone else, which doesn't help the situation.

I think the struggle today is similar to the struggle the Saxon immigrants who started the LCMS faced, namely, how to maintain a distinctive Lutheran identity in the stew of religion that is American Christianity. Lutherans have never been the majority voice in America, which was dominated by Reformed theology in the past and Evangelical theology today. Lutherans just don't fit in terribly well. We're too "evangelical" to be Roman Catholic, and too "catholic" to be Evangelical. We offer Christ and Him crucified for our forgiveness, life, and salvation, but no one naturally feels a need for that.

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The struggle in the LCMS today is over how best to hold fast to our Lutheran distinctives, which are really the heart of Christianity itself, namely the centrality of Christ, the centrality of justification by grace through faith, the sacraments as divinely instituted means by which God reveals His grace to us, and our liturgical and catechetical heritage.

A great concern of mine is that we seem to be rapidly losing our Lutheran identity as confessing evangelical catholic Christians. In the past, our identity was maintained by three essential books: Scripture, Catechism, and Hymnal. We are in danger of losing the hymnal entirely in the move toward "contemporary" worship forms that are drawn from the Evangelical revival tradition where everything is fresh and projected on some screen. It's disposable liturgy for a consumer culture. Our grasp of the Catechism and the Confessions is slipping, as people are more interested in "personal relevance" than they are in the articles of the faith. And even our hold on the Scriptures is weakening as we relativize the Word to a subjective reading in terms of "what it means to me." Of all Christians, Lutherans ought to understand that the faith once delivered to the saints is something handed on like a baton in a relay race. The Christian life is not some 100-yard dash where everyone runs his own version of the race. I'm amazed by our fascination with the so-



called "emergent" church movement which is nothing more than a continual reinvention of Christianity, including every one of its historic heresies.

What do you think we as a church can do to encourage men in their unique vocation of leading their families spiritually?

I think the church has not done nearly enough to challenge her men to stand up and be confessors of the faith at home, in society, in the workplace, and in the church. First of all, the men need to pray with their families. A child should learn to pray Our Father from his or her father. The father needs to take the lead in family devotions, catechesis, and worship. The mother can help, certainly, but this is primarily father's work to do, and if he doesn't do it, the children suffer.

Second, I think the church needs to have its men in visible positions of spiritual leadership. We are suffering from a bit of clericalization, I'm afraid, where the pastor is the only spiritual man in the congregation. I would like to see a lot more of our men teaching Sunday school and Bible classes, especially with our youth. I am in the ministry today thanks to a handful of faithful men who taught Sunday school year after year in my congregation. We also need to have our men assisting in worship., and we need to encourage our men to open their hymnals and move their lips. I don't know where this comes from, but many of our men set a poor example for their sons by their lack of participation in worship.

Third, I think we need to get away from this notion that the church is being "feminized." The Church is the Bride of Christ, which is a feminine image. She ought to be feminine and moth-

**Men need to
pray with
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lerly. What we need to be concerned about is the feminization of the pastoral office and the absence of true masculine leadership in our congregations. I think the men need to be challenged to take their place as true heads of their families, in the way of God's own fatherly goodness and mercy. What we need is a healthy dose of Gospel

dads who will raise their children in the fear and faith of the Lord.

Finally, the church needs to combat this Gnostic nonsense that floats

around our post-feminist society that male and female are accidental traits like hair color or eye color. They are part of our essence as human beings created in the image of God--"male and female He created them." If we don't delight in our distinctions, we will miss the blessing and the opportunity that comes with being male and female.

When Midwesterners think of California, "lots of Lutherans" is hardly the phrase that comes to mind. Can you share what's different about being a confessional Lutheran in California?

I think the lesser "density" of Lutherans in our neck of the woods can be a potential plus. People who are confessionally Lutheran here are so intentionally. Many people have left other denominations and joined a Lutheran congregation precisely for its distinctive preaching, teaching, and liturgy. Lutheranism on the west coast tends to be somewhat freer of Midwest Lutheran "culture," the stuff that Garrison Keillor always pokes fun at, including the marshmallow jello salads. That freedom from Lutheran culture also can be a problem. There is considerable pressure to imitate the large, successful churches such as Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel or Rick Warren's Saddleback. Our challenge is how to hold on to a Lutheran identity and ethos when you don't have the support of a Lutheran culture or heritage. As I said, it's both bane and blessing.

We also have a lot of people living here who are simply burned out on religion. They've done the altar call, they've given their hearts to Jesus many times over, some have been baptized two or three times, and they've concluded that religion doesn't work for them. Some have been burned by their churches, which promised them one thing and then delivered something entirely different. These are the folks who would characterize themselves as "spiritual but not religious." It's really a kind of cultural Buddhism, where everyone pursues his or her own self-chosen path to enlightenment. A theology of the cross that preaches death to self in order to live in Christ and the neighbor is a tough sell in a culture where the self is king if not a god.

At the end of the day, though, we are all sinners in need of justification, whether we happen to live on a coast or somewhere in between. Geography doesn't change our sinful condition; it is only the context in which we sin and the context in which God engages us through Baptism, Word, and Supper. When it comes to dying and rising, we are all in the same baptismal boat.



From the Editor

My Life as a Layman

Rev. Frederic W. Baue, Ph.D

BJS was initiated by Rev. Tim Rossow . The journal is being edited by me, another pastor. Where are the laymen? We have some outstanding laymen coming forward to lead this organization and write for the journal.



But to keep things in perspective, let me say that no pastor was born with a clerical collar around his neck. We all started out as laymen. Somewhere along the line, the good Lord inspired us—or dragged us—into the ministry. When asked how old I am, I usually try to say “a mature gentleman in the prime of life.” But it’s hard to squeeze all those words into the little space on the form that says, “age.” So I put down 61. I was ordained at the age of 35. Having been a layman longer than I have been a pastor, I see things both ways.

As a layman, I was in awe of pastors.

As a pastor, I am in awe of laymen.

As a layman, I always held pastors in high esteem—all that education, plus the spiritual demeanor, the cheerful attitude, along with gravitas.

As a pastor, I hold laymen in high esteem. I’m thinking of a man in my congregation who is a real theologian. Another man who stands by his invalid wife day and night. A woman who continues to love an ill-tempered child who has rejected the faith. A teenager who suffers persecution from schoolmates because of her Christian faith. All these have been tried in the fire. Strengthened by God’s Word. Purified by the Blessed Sacraments.

May God help me do whatever I can as a pastor to enlighten and encourage the wonderful laymen of our church, whether by my congregational ministry or by editing this little journal.

A Word from Wilken (cont.'d from p. 3)

things to the Church, for the World, too.

Don't get me wrong, God doesn't NEED the New Media and neither does the Church. In Luther's day the New Media was movable type, something considered primitive today. But look at what God accomplished in the Reformation using that primitive medium! The Gospel doesn't derive its power from technology, nor is it limited by it. Nonetheless, the Church receives every new medium as a gift from God to be used to proclaim the Gospel.

Many in the Church are talking about the New Media; but few are using them *for the purpose for which God gave them*. Sadly, many churches that are using the New Media are using them to promote error, silliness and un-biblical innovation. They think that if it's new, it must be good. Some are even abandoning the divinely instituted means of Grace —preaching, Baptism, Absolution, the Lord's Supper— for the buzzers and whistles of the New Media.

It's time for the Church to use the New Media for the purpose for which God gave them: to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus for sinners, and to serve our neighbors in need.

I'm hopeful that the laity of the BJS will actively support the new media voices of confessional Lutheran theology. I'm also hopeful that those who are brought together by the New Media will find in BJS a place for real, not virtual fraternity and Christian brotherhood.

Actually, the New Media isn't so new anymore. But that's okay. God's gift of the New Media isn't about being "new." After all, Lutheran theology isn't new either; it's ancient. It goes all the way back to Christ, His Apostles and Scripture.

Old Theology, New Media.



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