

HOW DO I KNOW THERE IS A HEAVEN?

Are you really sure that there is really such a place as Japan? Have you ever been there? Most of us would have to say, no, I have never been to Japan.

Nevertheless, I know that such a place exists because I know people who have gone there, and have returned with evidence of its existence. I am convinced because the people who have seen it are people whose testimony I trust. I am convinced that Japan really exists.

Friends, that's the same way that it is with heaven. None of us has ever been there, but we know that such a place exists because we know someone who's been there and has returned with evidence that it's really there. That Person is Jesus Christ. He is the God-man who came to the earth to save us from our sins. He lived a perfect life in our place, which proved his deity. He died as our substitute to take away our sins. He rose from the dead to confirm the fact that we are justified--forgiven. His followers wrote their eye-witness accounts which confirm that Jesus really lived, died, and rose.

Before his death, Jesus told his worried disciples: **John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**

Now he has ascended into heaven. His ascension reminds us that there is such a place, and that he will come to take us there. That is also what the angels promised the wondering apostles: **"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."**

Jesus will return. The Bible says that he will come in glory. That is what the clouds symbolized -- the glory of God - which hid Jesus from their sight. Jesus was no longer physically visible because he returned to heaven to assume the position of glory which he had with the Father before creation. The book of Ephesians 4:10 says that he went to "fill all things." You see, Jesus is Almighty God. He rules the entire universe. He Himself controls every event on the face of this earth. With the Father and the Holy Spirit, He rules as One God, now and forever.

He has a time, appointed by the Father, in which he shall return to this earth. We don't know when, we only know that he will. At that time Jesus promises that he is preparing a place for us; and if he is preparing a place for us, he will come again and receive us to be with him in heaven. Won't that be a wonderful time?

There's an expression that we sometimes use when things aren't going well; we say, "Don't worry, it's not the end of the world." But if you think about it, that's not a very appropriate expression for a Christian. The end of the world is something that all of us look forward to with joyful anticipation.

We may find ourselves in the same boat as St. Paul who said to the Philippians that he was confused about where he wanted to be. He wanted to be in heaven with Jesus, but on the other hand, he realized that he could do more good for the Kingdom of God if he remained on earth. God had a plan for his life. God also has a plan for your life. Don't get me wrong, it's good to be home-sick for heaven. On the other hand, Dwight L. Moody once said that a man who walks around with his head in the clouds is so spiritual that he is of no earthly good. That is to say, a truly spiritual person is not one who sits on the hillside, gazing into the clouds, waiting for Christ's return. Rather, it is the person who is using the gifts and talents which God has given to spread His Word.

And one thing I don't want anyone to miss about this celebration of Christ's Ascension is what is written at the

end of the Gospel of Luke. We read: **Luke 24:51-53 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵²Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.**

The Ascension brought joy to the disciples, and their reaction was to worship and praise him with hearts, hands, and voices. The message of his ascension brings us joy as well. As Jesus raised his hands to bless the apostles, they no doubt saw the nail marks in his hands, and were reminded that in those wounds was their forgiveness and the symbol of their redemption. We too were bought with the same sacrifice, and our sins too, were nailed to the cross of Christ. But now that he is risen, the ascended Lord has gone to prepare a place for us in heaven. There we will be with him and with one another for all eternity.

The angels had asked the apostles who stared into the sky: **Acts 1:11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."** They angels discouraged them from just standing around and waiting. They had work to do. Rather than focusing their eyes on the visible things of this world, they needed to focus their hearts on Christ and his saving work. When they did so, the apostles' hearts were filled with joy, which led them to serve Christ.

May we also focus our hearts on Christ, so that even as we occupy our time on this earth, our hearts will look heavenward. When He returns let us be ready, not by trying to figure out the time or place of his return, but rather, working as if he will not return, but knowing that he will. May we continue to worship and praise him, and to spread his saving message with all our strength. Then when he returns, we will be ready, through faith in his promises.

In Christ,
Pastor Bovee

From Your Staff Minister

This summer there will be three joint activities with St. Paul's, New Ulm. The first will be the Service in the Park at German Park on June 16, at 6:30 pm. Following that, is a tentatively scheduled Art Camp at St. Paul's during the last week of June. The last thing is our joint Vacation Bible School which is tentatively scheduled for the last week of July. Please watch the church calendar for times and dates where events are tentative.

“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” (Lk 24:50-53)

Kelly Emde

Our Synod at Work

2018 WELS Annual Report - Called to Service

We will continue our review of the Synod's 2018 Annual Report to members by taking a look at the section entitled "Called to Serve."

WELS Congregational Services, which encompasses the work of the Commissions on Congregation Counseling, Adult Discipleship, Youth and Family Ministry, Worship, Evangelism, Special Ministries, and Lutheran Schools, has put together a five-year plan to direct its work. The plan addresses current demographic challenges facing many WELS congregations. These plans include:

- Creating a present-day mission emphasis—the Commission on Evangelism is developing a comprehensive evangelism curriculum that congregations can use to offer annual evangelism training and encouragement.
- Better capitalizing on WELS' historical strengths—WELS' school system, its compassion ministries, and gospel-centered worship are known strengths of our church body, so Congregational Services is working to strengthen these areas and promote them in our communities and to our congregations.
- Focusing on closing the "back door"—the Commissions on Adult Discipleship and Youth and Family Ministry in particular want to help churches address delinquency quickly, revitalize youth ministry, produce resources for millennial outreach and retention, and create stronger inter-congregation connectivity.
- Striving to strengthen the family—Congregational Services is working to produce resources that help train families how to grow together spiritually.

Each area of WELS Congregational Services is working on different aspects of the five-year plan, but many times the groups are working together to develop resources to face these challenges. One major component of Congregational Services' five-year plan is to develop a clearinghouse for all these resources so that congregational leaders can easily find the materials that they need.

One of the specific areas being worked on is a project that is preparing principals to lead. An effort coordinated by Lutheran Schools and Martin Luther College, encourages congregations and schools to structure the principal position in a way that respects the complexity and importance of the task and the training it requires. In addition, Lutheran Schools and Martin Luther College are providing training before a teacher is called to be a principal to help prepare a worker for the important role. The first cohort of seven teachers with leadership potential began leadership Candidate Training in 2017.

WELS Youth and Family Ministry produces a monthly video newsmagazine for youth that is entitled *Kids Connection*. The video features spiritually uplifting stories about people, places, and programs around WELS.

Gerald Woodley

Women of St. John's

Our next gathering will be **Tuesday, May 1** at 7 pm.

The presenter for the evening will be Christina Wolffgram who will share her experience of growing up in Russia.

We hope you are able to join us!

Council

The St. John's Church Council met on April 17 and the St. John's quarterly voters' meeting was held a week later on April 24. A summary of reports and action from those meetings not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Memberships changes

Transfer In

Jasmine Zacate from Zion, Winthrop, MN

Ministrations

Wedding

3/17/18 Brianna Czer and Derek Schmidt

Plans are underway for the arrival of Rev. Robert Guenther, new administrative associate pastor at St. John's. Pastor Guenther graduated from Martin Luther College in 2000 and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 2004. He and his wife Becky are the parents of four sons: Josiah (14), Judah (12), Jacob (7), and Joel (5). Pastor Guenther spent the first six years of his ministry at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he was ordained into the public ministry. Since that time he has served Grace Lutheran Church in Kenai, Alaska. The Guenthers plan to arrive near the end of June and will live in the recently-purchased parsonage at 601 S. Washington. He will be installed on Sunday, July 8. The 4 pm installation service will be followed by a congregational meal. A free will offering is planned for the month of June to defray expenses related to the move and to purchase some needed major appliances for the parsonage. Look for an offering envelope accompanying next month's *Fortress*. Appropriate welcome activities for our new pastor and his family are also under development. Details will be announced as those plans are finalized.

Administrative Teacher James Dretske continues treatment for a disabling health condition. Although he had recently returned to the classroom for partial days, he experienced a setback and was diagnosed with a broken pelvis that will require surgery and prevent his return to the classroom this spring. The Board of Elders, functioning as our congregation's called worker care committee, has appointed Gene Slettedahl to serve as a liaison between the Dretske family and the council to make sure the family's needs are being addressed during the time of this disability. Please continue to pray that God would be with Jim and Cindy according to his good will and purpose, relieve Mr. Dretske's pain, restore his health and allow him to return to the classroom next fall.

The Elders will review the times of the midweek services for Lent and Advent and the format of services during Holy Week and report back to the council.

The Board of Youth and Education proposed an increase in the tuition offset provided for families whose children attend St. Paul's Lutheran School from \$500 to \$550 per child annually. The council forwarded the proposal for consideration at the voters' meeting where it was approved.

The 25th anniversary in ministry of Teacher Laura Balza will be recognized during the 9:30 am service on Sunday, May 27. Professor John Brenner from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary will be our special speaker for our services that weekend. A special program with refreshments will follow the service led by Pastor Wayne Laitinen. Make

plans now to join us as we praise God for the ministry of this faithful servant.

The St. John's Church Council will participate in a joint council meeting with the St. Paul's Church Council during the month of May as a way of coordinating the Christian fellowship and gospel outreach we share in the New Ulm area and through our partnership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The meeting will replace the regular monthly council meeting and is scheduled for Monday, May 14, at 7 pm.

Steven R. Thiesfeldt,
Congregational Chairman

St. Paul's Lutheran School

BoCD Work (SP Board of Child Discipleship)

Tuition

Final work on Tuition for the 2018-19 has been tabled until 5/17 waiting for a decision on what will be covered in the St. Paul's Church budget. The prioritization order at this time includes a) Technology \$5,000; b) additional Fundamentals help (3 hours per day) \$7,000; and c) Part-time teacher (7-8 history) \$7,000.

Technology Family Fee

In March - The BOCD approved the recommendation to include Pre-K families in the technology fee in 2018-19 at \$75 per family.

Band Recommendation

In March -The BOCD Approved the recommendation to a) Employ a non-faculty band director paid by band participation fees (Band Fund); b) include a 5th grade band – one rehearsal per week; c) include a 6th grade band – one rehearsal per week; and d) include the Raider Band of 7th-8th grade students – two rehearsals per week
In April, the BOCD approved the hiring of Annie Vogel to take over the Band Program

Request for Adjunct Professor at MLC

The BOCD approved this request for Mr. Plocher to be an adjunct professor at MLC. He will teach a Monday evening class for the first semester in 2018-19.

PreK Recommendation to call part time teacher

The BOCD recommends to start a Tuesday and Thursday afternoon session and to staff the new session with a part time lead teacher and para if necessary due to an anticipated enrollment of fifty-five students. There are currently 46 students in PreK.

Self-Study

The MNSAA Team visited April 10-12 to complete the final step towards fulfilling the accreditation process. In June, the MNSAA Board will review information and will hopefully renew accreditation for St. Paul's School for the next seven years. The Steering Committee thanks all the people who worked on committees for their time and energy. It also thanks God for all the people who are considered stakeholders in the support of St. Paul's School. God has certainly blessed the school and the relationship between St. Paul's and St. John's Congregation so that St. Paul's School continues to serve our members with Christian education with high standards for academics.

Spring Sports

Take a look at the school website calendar during the last month of school for the many scheduled sporting events. With the weather being unpredictable, watch for updates as schedules may change quickly. The school will use the SchoolReach system to notify parents of last minute changes. Contact family members who have children in sports that you would like to watch if the weather seems questionable.

MAP Testing

Classrooms will be completing their third and final testing of the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) Tests of the school year during the month of May. Teachers will use classroom Chromebook computers during the week of May 14-18 to test individual students. Results will be included in the year end report cards. Teachers have been impressed with the timely information that they are able to get from these tests and will be able to use up-to-date information to plan instruction for the 2018-19 school year.

Tuition Assistance Envelope

If you haven't used the envelope in your offering envelope box for K-12 Education Assistance (Feb-March), consider using it. Your gifts help support families who send or want to send their children to St. Paul's Lutheran School or MVL, but are unable financially to do so. If there are families that find that they are in need of assistance, please submit an Application for Tuition Assistance before June 30th in the school office. Distributions are given prior to Registration Day for St. Paul's School following a review of these applications.

Dretske Update

Although Mr. Dretske had been back to teaching four hours a day following the Easter Break, he ended up in the ER on April 15th and was found to have a broken bone in the hip area and a broken metal plate which had been used to reinforce the pelvis from a previous car accident. He was referred to Mayo Clinic Trauma, which every indication is leading toward surgery. The BOCD has asked Mrs. Rogotzke to take on a more full-time position in his classroom for the balance of the school year. Please continue to keep Jim & Cindy in your prayers.

Calendar

May 7	NO School: Teacher In-Service
May 8	Grades 1-2 Spring Show: 6:30 pm
May 10	Track Meet: Redwood Falls
May 10	Ascension: Gr. K-8 sing: 4 pm
May 17	Raider Band Concert: 7 pm
May 24	Kindergarten Spring Show: 6:30 pm
May 27	Laura Balza 25th Anniversary Service/Reception
May 28	NO School: Memorial Day
May 30	Closing Service: 6:30 pm at St. Paul's Church
May 31	Last Day: Dismissal at 12 pm

Library News

An addition to the Practical Theology section of the library is titled “Escaping the Deathtraps.” It was written by Terry L. Schultz who was a missionary to Latin America and a missions consultant. He uses the story of Pastor Pedro who teaches the members of his congregation about church fellowship. He answers their questions such as “Why are there so many different kind of churches?” and “Is it okay to worship with Christians from other churches?” It has many Scripture references about church fellowship and each chapter is followed by a set of study questions. It could be used in an informal Bible study. You will find it easy to read.

To celebrate the 100 years that the Minnesota District has been a part of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, a booklet has been published which tells the history of the district. It also includes a listing of the congregations in the district, schools, and other programs carried out within our district. Perhaps some of you have purchased your own copy, but for those who haven’t you will find it very informative.

Eleanor Runke
Church Librarian

Thank You Sunday School and Youth Leaders

We are very grateful for the many individuals who assisted with our Sunday School and Youth programs this year past. Please take a moment to thank the following for their faithful service.

- * Senior Youth: Carrie Schaefer, Melanie Mohror, Mike and Lisa Goeglein
- * Grades 7-8: Ben Snyder and Dawn Weisensel
- * Grades 5-6: Rylee Weisensel
- * Grades 3-4: Peggy Pekrul and Ashley Urbanek
- * Grades 1-2: Ruth Aufderheide
- * PreK and K: Denise Karstens and Gwynne Gutzke
- * Infants and Toddlers: Natalie Borgwardt, Michelle Grubbs, and Becca Koelpin
- * Assistants, Musicians, Substitutes: Mary Thom, Emily Stoering, Christine Baganz, Pastor Laitinen, Lisa Lindemann, Ben Strackbein, and Mattie Martindale

We are always in need of teachers and substitutes. If you have an interest in serving in this capacity in the coming year, please speak with Pastor Bovee.

Archives

Miscellany

More items from service bulletins, newsletters, and council and congregational minutes from 60, 50, 25, 10, and 1 years ago.

1958, Pastor was Rollin Reim. An April service folder prior to a voters’ meeting notes a financial problem: “We have not, as a congregation, stepped up our stewardship to a level where we can meet the obligations we assumed as a congregation last January.” Other business for the meeting included a proposal to establish a standing committee for stewardship.

1968, Pastor was Frederick Nitz. A family night was held in May which included a pot-luck meal and a suggestion that families bring their own dishes and tableware so that the ladies would not have to wash so many dishes since it was Mother's Day. Pastor John Miller of Butterfield preached for the afternoon mission festival service on October 6. The announcement for the Ladies' Aid Christmas party asked that members bring a small sampling of their Christmas cookies for the boxes for our shut-ins and elderly.

1993, Pastor was David Kolander; David Zabel was Director of Christian Education. Among things discussed during the year was the possible calling of a second pastor and the purchase of a computer for the church.

2008, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. The new *Worship Supplement* was adopted for use in 2009. Pew copies were purchased and the *Service Settings* booklets were to be removed from the pew racks.

2017, Pastor was Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. New settings for a new edition of the hymnal were tested and surveys taken.

To be continued.

Bob Krueger
kruegerh@mlc-wels.edu

OWLS

Our historic April snowfall cancelled our Minnesota OWLS District Rally but, our speakers are very eager to come on May 14, the day after Mother's Day. We are thrilled! Pastor Tim and Megan Redfield will tell us about their adopted and blind, but much cherished, daughter's care and special needs. She is a 6-year-old kindergartener. You may even be able to read about her in advance in the May Forward in Christ. You will also be pleased to find out that she is the granddaughter of Jerry and Caroline Birkholz! You will remember Jerry especially as the very first principal of MVL High School. Tim and Megan's presentation will help us learn about the challenges and joys of serving our Lord as the parents of a special needs child.

Tim and Megan's presentation will begin at 1 pm but we invite you to join us already at 11:30 am for a bit of fellowship before our noon pot luck. Pastor Sutton will have a devotion at 11:45.

As supporters of Lutherans for Life we cannot but honor these young parents for choosing to be the mother and father of a special needs child. Thank you for considering this opportunity for learning.

Dar Raddatz