LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

The Incarnation

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025

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Many of our ELS congregations use the Athanasian Creed on at least Trinity Sunday each year. Besides this creed making some of the most concise and clear statements regarding the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, it also contains clear and brief confessional statements regarding the incarnation—namely, that God became flesh. On Christmas Day, we will once again acknowledge this gift from the Father, the feast of the incarnation of His Son as our Savior.

We rightly confess that ancient creed when it emphasizes the importance of this teaching, saying:

"It is necessary for everlasting salvation that one also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ... the Son of God is God and Man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world... Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and Man, yet He is not two but one Christ: One, not by changing of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God."

It is critical for our salvation to believe and confess that God has taken into Himself our shared human nature. One of our premier ELS theologians put it this way:

"Since our human nature was doomed to the eternal punishment of death, the Son of God assumed the human nature so that man might not be destroyed by death. Our human nature was subject to the wrath of God; it was therefore necessary that our Mediator make satisfaction for us in the human nature. Because the human nature in Adam was separated from life and fellowship with God through sin, it was necessary that the Son of God in His own Person unite human nature with the divine nature by the most intimate union and thus restore it to fellowship with God. The Son of God assumed our human nature so that we who are His brothers

may receive the things which the Head bestows upon His members... It was necessary because the human nature would not have been an adequate ransom for sin. The Son of God suffering and dying in His own flesh could alone be the propitiation for the sins of the world."

(B.W. Teigen, I BELIEVE: A Study of the Three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds, Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1976, p. 20.)

We more frequently use the Nicene Creed, which was originally drawn up in response to the false teaching that Jesus was not true God. So, when you regularly recite this creed, it may be helpful to contemplate it with these terms in italics explicitly understood:

"Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven; the only-begotten Son of God was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man.

God come in the flesh was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; God come in the flesh suffered and was buried. The third day God come in the flesh rose again, according to the Scriptures. God come in the flesh ascended into heaven, and God come in the flesh is seated at the right hand of the Father. God come in the flesh shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. God come in the flesh—His kingdom shall have no end."

In Christ, God is your Brother in the flesh. By reflecting on His person, we begin to appreciate the mystery of His incarnation and its significance for all that He has done to save us—and for all that He will continue to do for us into eternity. No greater honor is given to God's crown of creation—the human race—than that He became flesh and dwelled among us in this world and forever in the new heaven and new earth.

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THE INCARNATION IN MUSIC:

Of the Father's Love Begotten

- 1 Of the Father's love begotten,
 Ere the worlds began to be,
 He is Alpha and Omega,
 He the source, the ending He,
 Of the things that are, that have been,
 And that future years shall see,
 Evermore and evermore.
- 2 At his word was all created;
 He commanded, it was done:
 Earth and Heav'n and depths of ocean,
 In their threefold order one;
 All that grows beneath the shining
 Of the orbs of moon and sun,
 Evermore and evermore.
- 3 He is found in human fashion,
 Death and sorrow here to know,
 That the race of Adam's children,
 Doomed by Law to endless woe,
 May not henceforth die and perish
 In the depths of hell below,
 Evermore and evermore.
- 4 O that birth forever blessed,
 When the Virgin, full of grace,
 By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
 Bore the Savior of our race,
 And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
 First revealed His sacred face
 Evermore and evermore.

- 5 O ye heights of heav'n, adore him!
 Angel hosts, His praises sing!
 Pow'rs, dominions, bow before Him
 And extol our God and King.
 Let no tongue on Earth be silent,
 Ev'ry voice in concert ring
 Evermore and evermore.
- 6 This is He whom heav'n-taught singers Sang of old with one accord; Whom the Scriptures of the prophets Promised in their faithful word. Now He shines, the Long-expected; Let creation praise its Lord Evermore and evermore.
- 7 Christ, to Thee, with God the Father, And O Holy Ghost, to Thee Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving And unending praises be, Honor, glory, and dominion, And eternal victory Evermore and evermore.

Question ...

Some close family friends recently lost a family member to suicide. Since they know I'm a Christian, they've asked me if his soul is now in hell. I'm not sure how to answer them. How can I speak about suicide with honesty and compassion?

Answer:

All of us may find ourselves having more conversations about suicide. Over the last twenty years, national suicide rates have increased by thirty percent, which means we probably know at least one family impacted by someone taking his or her own life. As we intend to speak the truth in love, it may help to distinguish between what we know and what we say to others.

What We Know

First of all, suicide is never God's will. God regards human life as sacred since He created human beings in His image (Gen 1:26–27; 9:6). His gift of life—from the time we are conceived to the day of our death—is our time of grace, our opportunity to be brought to repentance and faith in Jesus as our Savior (Acts 17:27). Suicide cuts short a person's time of grace, leaving the victim no time to repent and be saved.

Scripture warns us that "no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:15). When someone deliberately commits suicide—the murder of one's self—that person rejects God's grace in Christ, resulting in eternal condemnation. When Judas Iscariot hanged himself after betraying Jesus, he "went to his own place" (Acts 1:25), the place of punishment in hell reserved for him.

Judas, however, only received what every human being deserves. Each of us has felt the pull of either hatred or despair in our own sinful hearts—deadly sins that rightly deserve God's wrath. Merely avoiding the sin of suicide cannot save. Only Christ and His holy life in our place can save us. "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:14, 29). On the cross He bore the punishment our sins deserved, including sins of murder and suicide. On the third day He rose from the grave so that all who believe in Him will have everlasting life. Now that Christ has come, only unbelief condemns (Mark 16:16).

On rare occasions, the evidence gives reason to hope. In His grace, the Lord sometimes grants the suicide victim enough time to seek forgiveness prior to death. Additionally, a suicide committed by someone suffering from severe mental illness may not be willful or deliberate. In the end, we trust that "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Tim 2:19).

What We Say

Knowing these truths, however, does not make the conversation any easier. Before speaking, it is important to listen and ask questions. A family torn apart by grief after a suicide may simply be grasping for any comfort they can find. At the same time, they may also be seeking an outlet for anger, hurt, or loss. The situation will help determine how we respond.

When the truth allows us to be charitable, we can, in good conscience, point people to the Savior who bore all our sins on the cross—including murder and suicide. If the victim was baptized, we can offer hope based on God's promises in baptism: the gifts of faith, forgiveness, and eternal life.

Even when the truth does not permit such charity, we need not add to the wounds of an already grieving family. Speaking the truth in love, we do not draw conclusions about a person that go beyond what Scripture says. Instead of focusing on the spiritual fate of the deceased, we can redirect survivors to the hope of eternal life they themselves have through faith in Christ.

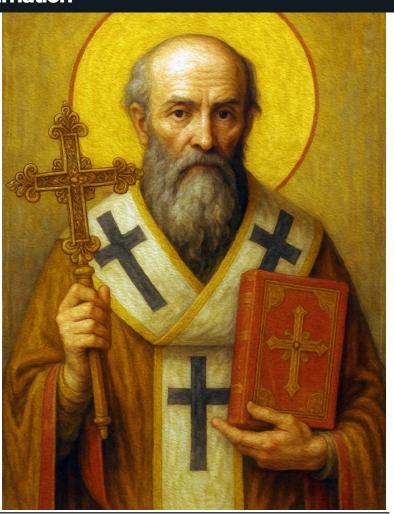
In these difficult conversations, you are not alone. If this family belongs to a church, they can speak with their pastor. If they do not have a church, you may ask whether they would be open to speaking with your pastor. Above all, the Holy Spirit will enable you to lovingly confess the truth. He will give you the words to lead them to the source of true comfort—the gracious and merciful Triune God.

? Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

--→ Send them via email: pvankampen@holycrossmadison.org

--→ Send them via "snail mail":
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The Comfort of the Incarnation!

by **PASTOR ABRAHAM FAUGSTAD,** Contributing Writer King of Grace Lutheran Church, Waukon, Iowa

When was the last time you were banished to another state or country for confessing the Nicene Creed? When was the last time an emperor sent 5,000 soldiers to capture you for holding to the teachings of Scripture while you were in the middle of a church service? When was the last time your enemies tried to get rid of you by falsely accusing you of murder, witchcraft, or bribery? These might sound like absurd hypothetical scenarios to us, but these were real threats and events endured by a man who confessed the teachings of the Nicene Creed. Who was this man? Athanasius—whose life would later be summarized by the famous adage, *Athanasius contra mundum* ("Athanasius against the world").

THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL 6

As you may have read in our May-June issue of the Sentinel, this year we celebrated the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, held in A.D. 325. Constantine the Great called the council primarily to settle a dispute between Arius and the Bishop of Alexandria, Alexander. Arius was a false teacher who claimed that Jesus was God's greatest creature. Since Jesus is the Son of God, Arius reasoned, He could not be eternal like the Father. Arius's thinking was logical—but not biblical. His followers popularized the saying, "There was a time when He was not," meaning that Jesus was not eternally God. Arius taught that Christ was less than the Father. The Council of Nicaea rightly condemned this heresy and confessed the true teaching of Christ, which we still confess in the Nicene Creed: that Jesus is "Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father."

Unfortunately, a church vote does not always settle the issue. Even though Arius was deposed and exiled, he later gained favor with various Roman emperors, enabling him to promote his false teachings. In defense of the true doctrine of Christ, Athanasius rose to the occasion—contending for the truth throughout his forty-six years as Bishop of Alexandria. His name may sound familiar from our annual use of the Athanasian Creed. While he did not author it, the creed expresses the same teaching he tirelessly defended.

Athanasius's contending for the faith (Jude 3) truly was a battle. As mentioned earlier, he was exiled five times, slandered with horrific accusations, and nearly captured or killed on multiple occasions—including one harrowing escape from 5,000 soldiers. What would motivate someone to endure such hardship? Any of those trials might tempt us to give up. But not Athanasius. Why? Because he knew that losing the true teaching of Christ meant losing the Savior we need. If Jesus were not fully God, His sacrifice could not atone for the sins of the world. Only through Jesus Christ—true God and true man—do we have a Savior from sin and death. For Athanasius, this truth was worth fighting for.

Shortly after returning from exile, he encouraged his congregation in Alexandria with these powerful words:

"Thus too Paul, while he conducted himself after the example of the Lord, exhorted us, saying, 'Be followers of me, as I also am of Christ.' ... Finally, He became man, that we who die as men might live again, and that death should no more reign over us; for the Apostolic word proclaims, 'Death shall not have dominion over us.'"

The incarnation (the Son of God becoming man) is the most important event in all of history. All of God's promises from Genesis to Malachi pointed toward it. All of history is centered on this one moment—when the Son of God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet the climactic event of His birth was not accompanied by the grandeur you might expect—only lowly shepherds, a manger, and a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths because there was no room in the inn. Just as this event was overlooked by many in Judea, the significance of it can easily be lost on us amid the distractions of the Christmas season or through our own doubts.

In humble faith, we hold to the great mystery that the Child in the manger is the almighty God. The One who held the world in His hand was held in the arms of the Virgin Mary. The eternal and unchanging Lord took the form of a servant to redeem humanity and reconcile us to God. As we sing in *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*: "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity! Pleased as Man with man to dwell: Jesus, our Immanue!!"

What does the Child in the manger mean for you? This Child born of a virgin is proof that God is with us. He is our Immanuel, meaning "God with us" (Matt 1:23). More importantly, He came for you. He is the One who has taken every one of your sins to the cross, so that He may crown you with His glory and righteousness. With Athanasius, we find comfort in knowing that through Christ's resurrection, He has "banished death from [us] like straw from the fire." We have peace with God. By faith in Jesus, we now live in heavenly peace. And when our time in this world comes to an end, by God's grace we will also sleep in heavenly peace.

Let us rejoice with the angels and stand with Athanasius: God became man so that we could become children of God!

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by REV. DR. TIMOTHY SCHMELING

Professor of Exegetical and Historical Theology at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Mankato, Minn. Member of the ELS Doctrine Committee.

A little over twenty-five years ago, *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) was released. While the film is largely based on the four Gospels, it also makes insightful references to the rest of the Sacred Scriptures. One of these is to Revelation 21:5: "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new." In the biblical text, Christ speaks these words at the full realization of the new creation on the Last Day. But *The Passion of the Christ* has Him deliver them after collapsing under the weight of the cross on the Via Dolorosa. In this heart-wrenching scene, a tortured Jesus looks up to His distraught mother and says, "See, Mother, I make all things new."

Now, Jesus did not explicitly say these words along the Via Dolorosa, but the film rightly alludes to them. The Prophet Isaiah foretold that Christ's reign would inaugurate a restoration of creation (Isaiah 11). St. Paul states that God "set forth [His purpose] in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9–10). The film properly shows that Christ's suffering on behalf of the whole world has already begun the recreation, even though

it has not yet come in its fullness. Clearly, creation is a major theme in the Bible from beginning to end.

What does the biblical concept of creation entail? In Scripture, creation is something only the Creator does. Human beings may describe their own fabrications as "creations" and speak of "creativity," but the Bible reserves creation for the Triune God alone. When God "creates," He speaks something new into existence that was not there before. God's words are never empty; they accomplish what they declare. As Luther says, "God calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom 4:17) ... He speaks true and existent realities" (Luther's Works 1:21–22).

Moreover, what is created is always purely passive in God's creative acts. Human beings cannot will their recreation in Christ any more than they could will their first creation. There is no creaturely cooperation in creation—it is entirely a free gift of God. In fact, it was the creaturely attempt to usurp the role of the Creator—by Satan, Adam, and Eve—that introduced sin into the world and brought corruption to the cosmos (Gen 3).

The Sacred Scriptures recount several kinds of divine creation. First, there is creation out of nothing. On the first day, God the Father created the building blocks of creation—heaven, earth, and light—through His Son, the Word, and by His life-giving Holy Spirit. The uncreated God created all that is not God out of nothing—not from some primordial material, but through a sheer and free act of His benevolent will (Gen 1:1–2).

Second, the Bible speaks of creation from matter that was itself originally created from nothing. On the subsequent days, God completed His creation, bringing forth all living things from what He had already made (Gen 1:20–21). This culminated in the creation of human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).

There is also God's continued creation and preservation of creation. Though His work in Genesis 1–2 was perfect and complete, God continues to create after the Fall by bringing forth new life, preserving the world, and governing it. The psalmist says, "Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD" (Ps 102:18). God does not create a clockwork universe and then abandon it; He remains intimately involved in His creation and intervenes for its good (Psa 104:30). This providential care extends to believers and unbelievers alike (Matt 5:45).

The Lord also creates just judgments (Isa 45:7), divine benefits (Isa 41:20; 45:7; 57:19), and new things (Num 16:30; Jer 31:22).

Another divine act of creation is the recreation inaugurated by Jesus Christ. King David anticipates this in the words we frequently use in the offertory: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps 51:10). To accomplish this, God's Word not only assumed human flesh but also took upon Himself the sins of all humanity. Having made atonement by shedding His holy blood, Christ breathed the Holy Spirit deep into His nostrils and rose triumphant over the crushed head of the serpent. He did all of this so that "we [who] have borne the image of the man of dust [i.e., the first Adam], [could] also bear the image of the man of heaven [i.e., the second Adam]" (1 Cor 15:49; cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Granted, believers are not fully freed from their sinful nature by the first resurrection of Holy Baptism (Rev 20:6). Nevertheless, St. Paul declares, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). Christ's work did not merely recreate mankind; it inaugurated the new heaven and new earth. God foretells this through Isaiah: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind" (Isa 65:17; cf. Isa 11; LW 17:388). Yet this remains hidden under its opposite for now (Rom 8:18–30).

Finally, there is the full realization of the new creation on the Last Day (2 Pet 3:13). As the end of the church year approaches, this naturally becomes the focus of the faithful. Although the Scriptures strain to describe its glory, they give us glimpses of resurrected life in the new heaven and earth—most vividly in Revelation 21–22. The recreation begun in Christ (Isa 65:17–25) appears here in all its fullness.

In this new creation, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will be adored as a bride for her divine bridegroom. God will dwell with His people and be their God (Rev 21:1–3; cf. Isa 65:17–18). "Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4; cf. Isa 65:19–20). God will freely give to the thirsty the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 21:6; 22:1). The tree of life will bear twelve kinds of fruit, and its leaves will heal the nations (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14; cf. Isa 65:21-22). Resurrected humans will be like Christ (1 John 3:2): imperishable, spiritual, immortal, radiant, and glorious (Matt 13:43; 1 Cor 15:42-53; 2 Cor 5:4; Phil 3:21). Marriage and procreation will cease (Matt 22:30; cf. Isa 65:23). There will be no temple or sun, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be the temple and lamp (Rev 21:22-23; 22:5). The nations will walk by the glory of the Lord that shines from the Lamb (Rev 21:24; cf. Isa 65:21-22).

Until that bright and glorious final Easter morning, sing with Martin Franzmann:

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness. Glorious now, we press toward glory, And our lives our hopes confess. Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end! (ELH 72:3)



by JOHN L. HOH, JR.

At Christmastime, I enjoy watching movies with a Christmas theme. Who hasn't seen good triumph over evil—or at least over the heartless—in It's a Wonderful Life? How many eagerly watch Ralphie's quest for the Red Ryder BB gun in A Christmas Story? Even the Grinch warms our hearts in How the Grinch Stole Christmas, and we love that Linus can clearly tell us the true meaning of Christmas in A Charlie Brown Christmas.

Recently, however, I have noticed a trend in newer Christmas movies. These movies often contain serious conflict. Typically, there is a recent or impending loss through death or divorce. Christmas is presented as some magical elixir meant to draw everyone together—warts and all—for a family holiday gathering.

A key component in many of these films is sibling rivalry. Festering resentments rise back to the surface after having been hidden by time and distance. Suddenly, once everyone is under the same roof, these conflicts come to the fore again. Often the movie "resolves" these issues by the end, but how many of us truly believe the underlying problems are solved?

I have also noticed that the loss—or potential loss—of a family member is often involved. While the Christmas season get-together may attempt to return to normal, that death or impending death has already changed what "normal" looks like.

While we may miss those older films and their feel-good, "Capra-corn" messages, is it possible that the aim of today's movies is to give us insight into the real reason for the season? Though we enjoy goodwill among people at Christmastime, we know that politics, rivalries, and personal faults will return and affect us throughout the year.

Our lives are messy. God knows that. God made a promise to Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior to rescue them. Throughout the Old Testament we are given signs of that Savior, the Messiah. He would be born of a virgin. He would

perform miracles. He would be sinless and without blame. He would be the Suffering Servant whose death would pay for our sins.

The apostle Paul wrote, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons" (Galatians 4:4–5 EHV).

Christmas is more than a season for gift-giving and charitable contributions. It is not a drinking binge. It is not merely a time to hope for peace on earth. Christmas is the fulfillment of God's promise to send His one and only Son to be our Savior. It is the death and resurrection of Jesus that give us peace with God. Jesus is, as John tells us in his Gospel, "The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:9-14).

At Christmas, we still live in a messy world and lead messy lives. God did not forsake us or keep His distance from us. At Christmas we see God—Immanuel—who dwells among us to live perfectly in our place and to die the death we deserved. Christmas is about life—the sure promise of eternal life. Even when life gets messy, we still have that promise.



LUTHERAN MILITARY SUPPORT GROUP (LMSG)

10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

13

by **BRADLEY PRICE**, President & Chief Executive Officer, Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG)

On May 3rd 2025, Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG) celebrated a decade of providing Christ-centered support to Military Service Members, Veterans, and their families at Bethany Lutheran College.

God provided a beautiful day to give thanks to Him for those who have served LMSG as leaders and for those who have been served by its ministry. The worship service was held in Trinity Chapel and was led by WELS Civilian Chaplain to the Military, Rev. Paul Horn, with the liturgy based on the adapted Matins format found in the Christian Service Members' Handbook. ELS President Rev. Glenn Obenberger delivered a timely sermon based on Luke 7, focusing on the warrior vocation being sanctified through faith in Jesus.

The celebration continued outside at the ELS Military Monument, with the golden images of Scripture and the cross on the flag standard shining in the bright sun. Marine Corps Veteran Justin Burk led attendees in the National Anthem. LMSG leadership—past and present—shared memories of the organization's beginnings and offered insights into its future. Bethany professor Jason Jaspersen shared some of the visible and invisible qualities of the Military Monument, relating them to the warrior vocation and the strength found in God's Word. Videos of the worship service and the celebration at the Military Monument can be found at www. lutheranmilitary.org.

LMSG was founded in 2015 by ELS and WELS Veterans concerned with the spiritual and mental welfare of Christian Warriors and their families in our congregations, as well as providing education on issues such as suicide, post-traumatic stress, and moral or spiritual injury. Since its founding, the gospel has reached thousands of service members around the world through grants and other programs.

A primary focus of LMSG is providing spiritual and mental health support to Christian Warriors and their spouses. In 2018, the first Spiritual Retreat was held for ELS and WELS Veterans living with PTSD. In 2022, retreats were opened to spouses and to military service members who have experienced negative impacts from their deployments, including post-traumatic stress, moral injury, and related symptoms.

The Spiritual Retreat is held once a year and lasts four days. Attendance is provided at no cost, supported by LMSG's Ammo Can Campaign, with assistance for travel available. This year's retreat marked its sixth year and was held at Camp Shiloh, Texas, from October 16–19. Topics included: sharing the gospel with other Service Members, suicide awareness and prevention, resilience for spouses caring for their families, discovering moral injury in the Bible, and the gospel promises God provides while the battle rages within a warrior's soul.

Additional programs that provide spiritual and mental health support include one-day workshops for Veterans and First Responders and access to counseling through Christian Family Solutions.

Another way LMSG provides support is through scholarships for Veterans pursuing ministry as ELS and WELS pastors and teachers at Bethany Lutheran College, Martin Luther College, and each synod's seminaries. Since 2018, 48 scholarships have been awarded across the two scholarship types. Over \$380,000 has been awarded in grants and scholarships supporting gospel ministry since 2015.

The Christian Service Members' Handbook is a pocket-sized resource developed by ELS and WELS pastors and lay members who themselves served in the military. The handbook is intended to provide spiritual support to deployed Service Members through specific prayers, orders of worship, hymns, and Bible passages chosen to encourage them while away from family or engaged in warfare. A free copy is available to deployed ELS Service Members through the Bethany Bookstore.

All of this is possible through God's grace, along with the hard work and generous hearts of many people. Support for this ministry comes through Ammo Can Campaigns held in May and November, as well as faithful monthly donors. More information about the Christ-centered support available—or about hosting an Ammo Can Campaign at your congregation—can be found at www.lutheranmilitary.org or by contacting LMSG at info@lutheranmilitary.org.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025



by **PASTOR TONY PITTENGER,** Contributing Writer, Bethany Lutheran Church, Port Orchard, Washington

At birth, a baby's brain has 100 billion neurons and 2,500 synapses per neuron. That's 25 with 13 zeros behind it!

Scientists, researchers, and educators tell us that the best way to strengthen, nurture, and develop a child's brain is with words. Words spoken, words sung, and words read.

Most children scoring in the bottom 2% of any standardized test have only heard and seen about 8,000 words per year. That's 22 words per day! Conversely, most children scoring in the top 2% on those same standardized tests have heard and seen one million words per year.

Words. Words like Dad narrating his preparation of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Mom singing a nursery rhyme while changing a diaper, or a story read at bedtime. Scientists, researchers, and educators all agree on the importance of words.

God's people know an eternally more important value of words: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10–11).

"The seed is the Word of God" (Luke 8:11).

"Already you are clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

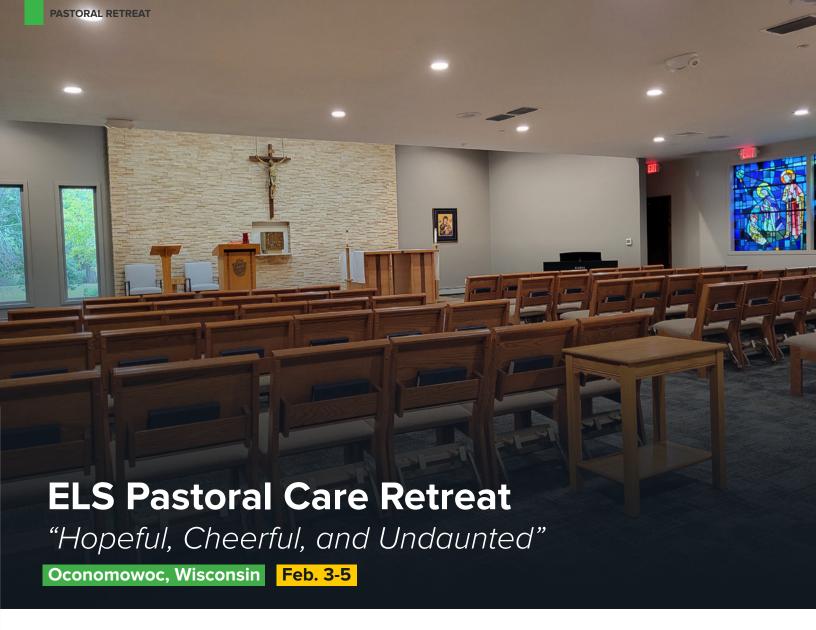
"When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

All created things owe their existence to God's Word. Our Savior and Redeemer is the Word of God in flesh and blood. The Spirit works faith through that same Word.

While speaking, singing, and reading with your children will help their minds and lives develop for this life, speaking, singing, and reading Bible stories, hymns, and Bible verses will feed your child's faith—strengthening it, nurturing it, and causing it to grow for life eternal.

God bless Christian parents, grandparents, and all other Christian caregivers as we plant seeds of faith—seeds which, in the end. save!



The "Hopeful, Cheerful, and Undaunted" Retreat is an opportunity for our shepherds and their wives to be nourished and nurtured in their lives together. There will be daily offices (Matin/Vespers) and a communion service, as well as availability for private confession and absolution. There will be time devoted to providing a relaxed setting for the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" and some free time for the couples to go out on a date.

Presentation topics include: the blessings of the parsonage, the prayer life of the parsonage, common stressors on a pastor's family, grief, the Lord's Supper, and more. Pastors and their wives will be refreshed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and made aware of resources for ongoing spiritual care.

Pastors and Wives: Please block the time off so that you can take advantage of this retreat. **Congregations:** Please consider setting funds aside so that your pastor can attend.

Registration: https://els.org/retreat (Dec. 1-Jan. 11) **Couple:** \$375 **Single:** \$210

*Registration includes room and board at the retreat. Wednesday afternoon and evening will be free time for the couples.





Pacific Northwest Women's Mission Rally

On **September 27, 2025**, the Pacific Northwest Women's Mission Rally was held at Bethany Lutheran Church in Port Orchard, Washington, where **Rev. Tony Pittenger** serves as pastor. The theme for this year's event was "*One Thing Needful*," based on Luke 10:42. The guest speakers were **Rev. Thomas Heyn**, Administrator – Board for World Outreach; **Rev. Brad Kerkow**, Evangelism and Mission Counselor; and **Rev. Tim Bartels**, who serves at Saved by Grace Church in Gresham, Oregon.