



# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



UNLESS  
THE LORD  
GUARDS THE CITY



# Your Routine Life

If it doesn't apply to your household now, "back to school" has applied to you at some point in your life. The non-structure of summer all of a sudden comes to an end and the regimen of a school day begins. In many of our congregations, post-Labor Day means getting back to the non-summer schedule of Sunday School, Sunday Bible class, confirmation class, etc. Some even say that at this time of year, things get back to "normal."

We tend to function best when we have at least some sort of routine in our lives. Imagine if your work schedule changed *every day*. What chaos would there be in your house if the kids had to be in school at a different time *every day*? What if you experimented with going to bed or getting up in the morning at radically different times *every day*?

Think about your spiritual routines. Now, don't take that the wrong way. If we're focusing on the fact that we are saved by God's grace alone because of what Jesus has done for us, and that forgiveness and eternal life come to us through faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit, it may sound slightly foreign to us to think of what we do as God's people. But that's thinking more along the lines of justification: everything God has done for us to make us His own. Think along the lines of sanctification: what we do in response to what God has done for us.

We worship together, usually having the opportunity to do so every Sunday (or some other day of the week). Doing this according to a schedule—that's part of our spiritual routine. Worshipping perhaps according to familiar rites—that's part of our spiritual routine. We study God's Word together, maybe on Sundays, maybe on other days. Doing this according to a schedule—again, routine.

What about as individual children of God? Do you have a regular devotion time for yourself where you read or listen to God's Word and pray? Do you have regular devotion times with your spouse or family where you all dive into a part of God's Word, pray, and maybe sing a hymn? Do you pray before you enjoy a meal, even if you're alone? All good spiritual routines!

And yes, it's easy to break our spiritual routines, those times when we get out of the habit of regular worship, prayer, and study of God's Word. Our lives get busy...and then busier. We tell ourselves, "I'll skip making it to church this Sunday, but I'll be there the next," and one week turns into two, and then into three or four. We glance at that daily devotion that comes in our email and tell ourselves, "I'll get to it later," and the next thing you know we have the next daily devotion waiting for us.\*

Please don't think I'm trying to make you feel guilty for getting out of good spiritual routines. None of us are perfect at keeping them. But Jesus was for you. He worshipped regularly (Luke 4:16). He prayed regularly (Luke 5:16). And you get credit for Him keeping His perfect spiritual routines! On top of that, because He went to the cross carrying all your sins, He has forgiven you for every single time you break your good spiritual routines.

Rejoice in the forgiveness and life Jesus gives you. Rejoice in the opportunity to follow your spiritual routines!

\* If you don't already, consider subscribing to the ELS daily devotion at [els.org/subscribe](https://els.org/subscribe).

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## Question ...

***In Matthew 5:33-37, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the assembly not to swear at all, but, “Instead, let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes,’ or ‘No, no.’ Whatever goes beyond these is from the Evil One” (v. 37, EHV). It sounds like Jesus is saying that it’s wrong for us to take any oath. If so, why do we still permit swearing under certain circumstances?***

## Answer:

Most people do not realize how serious it is to take an oath. Swearing an oath asks God to stand as a witness to a promise, placing someone under God’s punishment for failing to keep his word. Simply giving a statement puts my own reputation on the line. Yet when I swear an oath, I also put God’s reputation on the line.

In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees and experts in the law tried to get around this reality by coming up with a system of oaths where, instead of swearing by God’s name, they swore by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, or even by their own heads. They believed that they would be held blameless for such oaths if they failed to keep them. As a result, oath-taking had become a part of everyday conversation. People swore carelessly, when they did not need to do so, even, at times, to protect their own falsehoods.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that God will hold people accountable for their needless, careless oaths: “But I tell you, do not swear at all: not by heaven, because it is God’s throne; and not by earth, because it is His footstool; and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your own head, since you cannot make one hair white or black” (Matthew 5:34-36). Even when God’s name is not part of the oath, God still stands as a witness to the promise. For this reason, Jesus says, “Instead, let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes,’ or ‘No, no.’ Whatever goes beyond these is from the Evil One.”

The Lord does not forbid all swearing, though. During His trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus testified under oath that He is the Christ (Matthew 26:63). The Apostle Paul repeatedly calls on God as his witness (Romans 1:9-10; Galatians 1:20). In Genesis 22, the LORD swears by Himself to bless Abraham and multiply his descendants.

While God condemns the taking of false and unnecessary oaths, it pleases Him when we swear a necessary oath in service to the truth for the good of our neighbor. Witnesses in a trial swear to tell the truth. Newly elected or appointed government officials take their oath of office. New recruits in the armed forces swear to defend their country and uphold the Constitution. Through these oaths, “God is praised, truth and justice are established, falsehood is refuted, people are reconciled, obedience is rendered, and quarrels are settled” (Large Catechism, Second Commandment, paragraph 66). By such swearing, the Lord preserves the holiness of His name among us as His people.



***Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?***

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# FRESH STARTS



At this year's synod convention, President Obenberger informed the assembly that, with the addition of Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin (featured in the last issue of the *Lutheran Sentinel*), the total number of ELS members had once again surpassed the 15,000 mark.

Hearing the president mention this figure reinforced an image I've had in mind for a while now of our synod as a decent-sized town or small city. The image is hardly a stretch of my imagination, middle-aged as it is. It simply corresponds to the decent-sized town or small city where I live.

I don't have to go to the big city much because my town is decent enough to have everything a person needs most of the time. It has one hospital, two Kwik Trips, three grocery stores, and more than four fast food options. That's not to say my town only consumes things. My town makes things, too. It has a paper mill, a shipyard, and a foundry. And small as my city is, it requires the service of sentinels: men and women who look after people and places and things. Through their faithful service, the Lord guards my city.

If you choose to share the image I have of our synod and see it as "our town" or "our city," you'll find all kinds of sentinels among us: members of our churches who are called to live their faith by watching over their communities. You might see them protecting the neighborhood, conserving natural resources, ensuring safety at work and the quality of what's being made.

They might be keeping kids safe at the pool or caring for the elderly or, in the case of our first author, doing both!

This series is just one of the fresh starts we're making in this issue. You've already read the first article by our new president, Rev. Michael K. Smith. But there's another new series coming up.

Recently I read and preached on St. Matthew's account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21). As you may already know, this is one of our Lord's miracles—the other is His resurrection—recorded by all four evangelists (Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-13). That got me wondering about the opposite, so to speak. I asked myself, "If we stuck to what's printed in the bulletin and limited our knowledge of the gospels to the one- or three-year lectionary, which of the Lord's miracles would we miss?"

I did a little digging and found five of them—perfect for a *Lutheran Sentinel* series. A neighbor of mine to the south will start this one off at a pool called Bethesda.

There's still another fresh start. This one's especially for the kids in our town as they go back to school. But I'll let a member from our Board for Lutheran Schools tell you about it.

Yes, all this—and more—awaits you in this issue of the *Lutheran Sentinel*. But first, as promised in the previous issue...



Photo credit: Paul Fries

# 10 Questions about Our Newest Home Mission

Eagle Lake Lutheran Church began in the fall of 2024 as a joint effort between the ELS Board for Home Outreach and Peace Lutheran Church in North Mankato, Minnesota. Over the last twelve months, by the Holy Spirit's blessing, the mission took three big steps forward. First was the arrival of Rev. Patrick Ernst, who was commissioned and installed as their full-time missionary on August 24, 2025. Second was their "Charter Sunday" on December 7 (pictured above), when the congregation was officially incorporated. Third was their welcome into the synod at this year's convention. Today, 101 brothers and sisters call Eagle Lake Lutheran Church their home.

I asked Pastor Ernst ten questions about the mission's brief history, current situation, and future plans.

## **Where has your congregation been meeting for worship?**

We worship at the city hall in Eagle Lake. The council chambers serve as our worship space and Bible Class room, and a main hallway becomes the multi-use space: coffee nook, Sunday School rooms, Easter breakfast eating area, you name it.

## **How is that working out for you? Is there enough room?**

The city leaders are exceptionally gracious, and the space is great: updated, bright, inviting. The (good) problem is that we need more of it. The worship room, which can hold about a hundred chairs, has been at or near capacity on occasion. Some Sunday School stu-

dents have class in the 8'x5' vestibule between double doors. Offering counters are elbow to elbow with members cleaning Communion ware. If a congregation is a family, we're in the "young couple living in a studio apartment" phase. I'm confident we'll look back fondly on this time, but we're also looking forward to having more room!

## **How are you fixed for music?**

We have everything we need for liturgical worship in a temporary space: a good keyboard and great accompanists. The congregation sings well, and we also have several talented instrumentalists. Last Advent, having a harmonica join in for "The Happy Christmas Comes Once More" (ELH 143) was a musical highlight for me.

**Back when you were serving at your last church, were you surprised to hear about a new mission start so close to Mankato? What were your thoughts? Have those thoughts changed since you arrived?**

Talk of an Eagle Lake mission was being floated when I was in seminary around ten years ago, and I was always in favor for one simple reason: ELS churches are flocks, not feedlots. I don't believe there will ever be a 3,000-member ELS church. Posterity can prove me wrong, but the value we place on pastoral connection puts a natural ceiling on the scale we'll achieve in a single congregation. With the blessing of ELS growth in the Mankato area, it's only natural to plant more churches. I was at a parish I loved in Michigan, but I was also convinced that this mission was a priority for the church body. I still think so today.

**What would you say is the biggest difference between the work at your last church and the work here?**

In the mission, I spend more time on administration and outreach. The church I previously served, St. John's in Frankenmuth, Michigan, is a 145-year-old parish chugging along in fine form. Administration was organized, and many outreach channels were already in place. The needs of the members are the same; the needs of the organizations are different.

**What kind of outreach activities has the church tried? Have any of them been successful enough to repeat?**

Many of the outreach efforts we've tried are fixtures in other congregations: local parades; fall festivals; mailers; door knocking; being present at town events. Outreach events give people some connection to the congregation, which is good. When I think about repeating events, I'm always considering how much connection we made with people outside the church relative to how much effort we put in. As time goes on, I've also become very interested in equipping members for evangelism (communicating Law and Gospel). If members have a strong Lutheran identity, know Biblical teaching, and are excited about all of it, outreach and evangelism can happen in far more situations than the church could ever engineer.



▲ Pastor Ernst at Eagle Lake Lutheran Church, Eagle Lake, Minn.

**So..."Eagle Lake Lutheran Church." Was there debate about the name? Why do you think it's the best fit?**

There were certainly convictions about potential names, but I come back to two main arguments for "Eagle Lake Lutheran." 1) The spiritual ancestors of the ELS were happy to put their stake in the ground this way and start churches like "Norseland," "Scarville," "Parkland," and "Holton," named after the place where the church was. The name communicated, "If you're looking for the church of Christ in this place, look no further than us." 2) That old naming custom meets a current desire people have for a congregation to be rooted in the community and concerned with community needs. We want to portray that we are both the church in Eagle Lake and the church for Eagle Lake.

**Speaking of names...Does anyone ever call you "Pastor Earnest" by mistake? If so, do you correct them, or do you roll with it, since there are worse names for a pastor?**

If I were writing a screenplay for Netflix, that could very well be the name of my loosely autobiographical character. "Thanks for the idea!" I'd say to whoever made the mistake.

**What are the next steps for Eagle Lake Lutheran Church?**

I'd say, "Plan ahead of the growth." In the short term, that means keeping our Lutheran identity always on target, buying land for a building, and keeping members engaged and connected to each other as we grow.

**What are some ways ELS members can support your congregation right now?**

I earnestly desire the prayers and encouragement of the synod. In addition, if individuals or congregations wish to support the mission financially, gifts to Eagle Lake Lutheran Church or the Board for Home Outreach are welcome and can be sent to the ELS (6 Browns Court, Mankato, MN 56001).



SENTINELS AMONG US:

# Stewarding Grace

by **MS. ADELA MADSON,**  
Norseland Lutheran Church, St. Peter, Minn.

God calls us to serve our neighbor, saying, “Use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace” (1 Peter 4:10). God has blessed me with the desire to serve others since childhood, and while I have found ways to care for family and friends all my life, the last couple of years have given me countless more opportunities through my two jobs.

Two years ago, when I was fifteen, I became a lifeguard, hoping to have an exciting job and save some lives. This past spring, I followed through with my plan to become a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant), and over the summer worked many hours at both jobs. While the primary duties of each are different, the goal is the same: to serve others. As a lifeguard, this looks like enforcing rules to protect patrons and being ready to make a save at any moment. As a CNA, my service is in providing physical care for our residents and communicating with each resident's family to ensure good quality of life. Although the work can be monotonous, often going through the same routine every day, together the two callings have taught me a lot about vocation and how a person's work displays their faith in the Savior.

To become a lifeguard, a person has to prove their swimming abilities, pass a water rescue course, learn CPR and first aid, and take a written test on skills and scenarios. If they pass everything, they are registered in the Red Cross as a lifeguard and can apply at any pool, waterpark, or aquatic center. I have been lifeguarding for two and a half years, working at an outdoor pool in the summer and at an indoor pool the rest of the year.

The outdoor pool where I lifeguard is a small pool in a small town, and we see a lot of the same nine to twelve-year-old kids every day. Most of their parents work and they have no better way to spend their day, so they come to the pool because they are somewhat supervised. Some days they are well behaved, and on others, they take all the patience we have. However trying the kids are, they're just seeking attention and need some discipline to teach them the consequences of breaking rules. For a lot of them, their parents are not often present, and we are the main source of authority in their lives.

To be completely honest, I wanted to become a lifeguard because a lot of my friends were becoming lifeguards and because it sounded exciting. However, I have come to realize that God's hand was in the matter as well because lifeguarding has proved to be a huge blessing to my life. Although the pool is not as obviously suited for ministry work as the nursing home, there are always opportunities to spread God's Word. The lifeguard position is a position of law, and at the pool it is my job to uphold the pool's law. However, being placed in this position of authority gives me a tremendous opportunity to proclaim God's law, too! All earthly authority has been instituted by God. Therefore, when the pool rules are enforced, God's law is declared.

However, the law is only half of the job. As a "guardian of life," I not only enforce rules, but am prepared to do anything to preserve a person's life. This means

that if one of the kids, who always needs reminders of the rules, would begin drowning, a lifeguard would not hesitate to jump in and rescue the same rule-breaker from a watery death. This is a reflection of the Gospel, an imperfect representation of Christ's perfect love and mercy.

To become a CNA, a person must go through both classroom and hands-on training. The classroom component teaches the more medical side of the job, such as body systems and functions, as well as the proper techniques for the hands-on skills. The facility training happens at the nursing home that hires you. This allows you to shadow an experienced CNA and get to know the residents you will be taking care of. I have been working at my facility, which is a combined rehab center, memory care, and nursing home, since March of this year.

Working as a CNA has taught me a lot, not only about other people, but about the true faith as well! Although the work is often stressful, sweaty, and smelly, it provides a great opportunity to bear witness to the Gospel. A lot of the residents have lost most of their independence and rely on us to keep them clean, well groomed, and presentable. Every day is a new reminder to love my neighbor! Because it's easy to try to cut corners and save on the time each task takes, the work requires compassion. Each resident, no matter their physical or cognitive ability, is a person and deserves the care I would want given to myself.

CNA work is living proof that all people are made in the image of God. If an elderly person's body is failing, it doesn't make them disposable. If a resident has dementia and can't remember who they are anymore, they're no less of a person than I am. We were each knit together in the womb by God's gracious hands, and we are all redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Although it can be difficult to remember, if a resident has lost the ability to see or hear or speak, they are still God's handiwork. They are still covered by God's grace! Daily, my CNA work serves as a reminder of God's everlasting grace and His eternal Kingdom.

Both of my jobs serve others, requiring patience and humility to put others before myself. Although my position as lifeguard is a position of authority, while my place as a CNA is one of submission, they have worked together in my life to highlight the importance of God's grace. My call to faithful stewardship, both at the pool and at the nursing home, fulfills the Lord's great commandment in Mark 12:31: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Every day I am grateful that God has blessed me with a heart for service and an able body to carry out this calling, in order that I might glorify Him!



**Not Printed in the Bulletin:**

## THE HEALING AT THE POOL

by **REV. PAUL LANGE,**  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Oconomowoc, Wisc.

In John 5:1-18, Jesus miraculously heals a man on the Sabbath, prompting a confrontation with Jewish religious leaders.

While Jesus was in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, He went to a pool called Bethesda. The pool was surrounded by colonnades,

which provided shelter for the large number of sick people gathered there. The water of the pool was said to have healing qualities. Whenever the water was stirred, it was believed that the first person to enter the pool would be healed.

Lying beside the pool was a man who, for thirty-eight years, had been plagued with an incurable disease that left him unable to walk. Although he wasn't searching for healing from Jesus, Jesus still sought him out and had compassion on him. How blessed are we, plagued with a lifetime of sin, that Jesus in His compassion sought us out and rescued us from our sins, and continues to come to us in His Word and Sacraments; for, like the sick man, we would never come to Jesus on our own. With Martin Luther we confess: "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him."

Jesus, knowing the man had been sick for a long time, asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Surprisingly, the sick man doesn't ask who Jesus is or even answer Jesus' question! The man's presence at the pool was evidence of his hope to be healed. But it was a false hope. That hope had turned to hopelessness with the realization that even if the waters did have healing power, he had no one to help him into the pool when the waters were stirred. He had placed his hope for physical healing in something that could never cure him.

Everyone is in need of spiritual healing, for we all sin. Sadly, many have placed their hope for heaven in what is false. Failing to recognize that all people are by nature spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God, some look to themselves and what they can do to obtain heaven. They think they can somehow earn God's favor by the good things they do. But this is a false hope. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"Do you want to get well?" Do you want spiritual healing? The only cure for sin is found in Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus did not first ask the man if he had faith before healing him. He did not wait for the man to ask to be healed. He did not offer to carry the man to the edge of the pool and position him for the next time the water was stirred. Jesus simply said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk." Nothing more was needed. "Instantly the man was healed." No need to learn how to walk. No gradual recovery. No weeks of physical therapy. "He picked up his mat and walked." The man did nothing to be healed. It was Jesus who did it all.

We cannot heal ourselves spiritually. Only Jesus, God's Son, saves us. As true man, Jesus lived under God's law in our place and kept its demands perfectly, satisfying God's demand for holiness. As true God, Jesus took on Himself the sins of the world, and by His death on the cross as our Substitute, made full payment for all sin. Jesus rescued us from sin and

its eternal punishment and gives us forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift. We are saved by God's grace through faith in this work of Christ alone, and not by our own works of the law. Jesus did it all for us.

Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. When the Jewish religious leaders saw the man carrying his mat, they took issue with him for working on the Sabbath. He responded by saying that the man who healed him had told him to carry it. When they asked for the healer's name, he did not know who it was. When we first read this, we are surprised the man who was healed did not know and did not even bother to find out Jesus' name. Yet, upon reflection, it isn't so surprising when we realize how human it is for us, too, to "forget" our Savior's name.

Instead of rejoicing over the healing, the religious leaders were concerned only with the man's adherence to the rules and regulations they had added to God's law. Are there times when we make rules where God has not? Are there times when we are more concerned about enforcing our rules and our expectations than showing love and compassion? Jesus paid for those sins, too!

Later, in the Temple, Jesus found the man He had healed. Jesus said to him, "Look, you are well now. Do not sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you." Jesus' words of warning were also an encouragement to the man to live a life of daily repentance, trusting in God's grace and mercy in Christ, the Man who healed him. As difficult as it was to suffer for those thirty-eight years with sickness, it would be even worse for the man to live a life of unrepentant sin, which results in an eternity of suffering in hell. Jesus wanted him to spend eternity in heaven. God is concerned about the spiritual well-being of everyone and wants everyone to spend eternity in heaven. "He is patient for your sakes, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

The man went back and told the Jewish religious leaders it was Jesus who had healed him. Because of what they considered Jesus' blatant disregard for the Sabbath and His exposing their rules and regulations as worthless additions to God's will, "the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath." Jesus responded, "My Father is working right up to the present time, and I am working too." They understood what Jesus was saying. Jesus was calling God His Father, making Himself equal with God. Therefore, they "tried all the more to kill Him."

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).



# “IN THE BEGINNING...”

LYA 2026

by **REV. ABRAHAM FAUGSTAD**,  
King of Grace Lutheran Church, Waukon, Iowa  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Calmar, Iowa

In late July, 180 ELS youth from around the country, along with seventy youth leaders and pastors, gathered at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, and traveled across the border into Kentucky to explore the Creation Museum and Ark Encounter. These two sites made Bible history come to life through evidence pointing to creation, responses to evolutionary claims, and a life-sized recreation of Noah's Ark!

The two keynote presenters were Dr. Doyle Holbird (“You are a Special Creation”) and Prof. Chad Heins (“I Don't Know Anything: Searching for Truth in God's Word and His World”) from Bethany Lutheran College. Along with daily chapel and excursions, the youth enjoyed outdoor recreation and even archery dodgeball! Our annual Lutheran Youth Association is a tremendous opportunity for our ELS youth to grow in their faith, enjoy time for fellowship, and have fun. To give you a glimpse into LYA, we interviewed three young people who attended this year:

**MARIT FAUGSTAD** (*third LYA*)  
Saude Lutheran Church, Lawler, Iowa

**JACKSON TOMKO** (*fifth LYA*)  
Bethany Lutheran Church, Port Orchard, Wash.

**MAGDALENA MEARS** (*fifth LYA*)  
Heritage Lutheran Church, Apple Valley, Minn.

## What was your favorite part of LYA?

**Marit:** Hanging out with old friends and making new ones.

**Jackson:** Meeting new and unique people.

**Magdalena:** Going to the Ark Encounter. The Ark was not only fun and exciting but also very educational and truly a beautiful display of God's sovereign plan for us, His children. I also enjoyed our night on the Xavier University soccer field playing archery tag and dodgeball.

## Why is LYA important?

**Marit:** Because it fosters a sense of unity in the synod by bringing together people who might not meet each other otherwise. It provides an excellent environment for learning more about God's Word, asking questions, nurturing your faith through Word and Sacrament, and making connections in the Lutheran circle, all at the same time. It's simply very encouraging to spend time with other confessional Lutherans.

**Jackson:** Because it's a bunch of like-minded Christians gathering to grow in faith and connect with people.

**Magdalena:** For so many reasons! I find so much joy and comfort in spending the weekend with such like-minded youth. It is hard for me to find friends who agree with me on doctrine, so LYA is a place for me to find people who I know have the same values as me. LYA is also important because we spend our time worshipping our Savior and learning more deeply about our faith.

## How would you describe the worship at LYA?

**Marit:** Worship holds LYA together. Each day begins and ends with a chapel service where Law and Gospel are clearly preached. And there's nothing quite so wonderful as singing great Lutheran hymns with a bunch of great Lutherans!

**Jackson:** It's primarily focused on growing our faith and understanding of God's Word.



Photo credit: **Jeffrey Hendrix**

**Magdalena:** The worship is beautiful. Joining together with hundreds of Christians to sing praises to God is one of the most amazing things to do. There are many talented singers in the group, so most hymns are sung in harmonizing chorus. Every year I am also so impressed with the youth who bring instruments to accompany the services. We start and end every day praising our Lord in worship.

### **How would you describe the fellowship and fun at LYA?**

**Marit:** At LYA people have the opportunity to take part in various group activities: choir, band, and many different outdoor games. There's always something to fit your interests and help build camaraderie with the other people there.

**Jackson:** LYA is always a fun time, full of fun events and activities to work on community and having a good time.

**Magdalena:** Some of the best parts of LYA are the spontaneous moments of fun and connection with the other youth. After the last service of every evening, most of the youth head outside to play sports such as sand volleyball, basketball, and ultimate frisbee. This is a highlight for me and a time for all the youth to make lasting memories and have fun.

### **This year we went to the Creation Museum and Ark Encounter. What were some of your major takeaways?**

**Marit:** The exhibits at the Creation Museum were very impactful; it felt as if I were actually walking through the first few chapters of Genesis. It really hit home to see the beauty of the Garden of Eden and then the death and destruction that followed the fall into sin. I also appreciated how the museum clearly addressed and refuted opposing worldviews. Like the museum exhibits, the Ark was amazing to see with my own eyes. It felt so much more real when I was walking through it—the lighting and sound effects brought it to life. The structure was massive, and it was interesting to learn how Noah, his family, and the animals

would have had enough food and light to live on the Ark for so long. Overall, it served as a great picture and reminder of how God loves and provides for His people.

**Jackson:** It really made me think about all the things that God helps us through no matter how difficult it may seem. He's always there for us, making everything work out.

**Magdalena:** At the Creation Museum I was able to learn so much more about our Creator and His creation that I didn't know about. So many details that go unnoticed were displayed so well. It was also a great place to learn how to defend our faith against the world and why we have this Christian worldview. I loved the Ark so much because it amazed me that the Flood could have happened. It opened my eyes to how incredible our God is that He could tell Noah how to perfectly make a boat that would save him from the Flood. Going to both the Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter were amazing experiences and I grew in my faith because of them.

### **What would you say to other youth to encourage them to attend LYA in the future?**

**Marit:** LYA is a fun opportunity to travel to places that you may have never visited before. But no matter where you are in the country, you can be certain that at LYA you will deepen your understanding of the Bible and make Lutheran friends. LYA is the best place to meet other people who are like you, who share your interests and beliefs.

**Jackson:** I would encourage them to go out of their comfort zone a little and socialize with people, make the most of everything, and do everything with a God-loving attitude.

**Magdalena:** LYA is always one of my biggest highlights of the summer. Every year the convention is so much fun, and you make so many new lifelong friends. Most importantly, the weekend is filled with Christian fellowship and deep learning about our Savior. This is why LYA is so important to me.



### EXCELLENCE IN WORSHIP: PART 3

## WE WORSHIP WITH OUR EYES

The devil told Eve—and Adam with her—that their eyes would be opened if they ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then they would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5). It was a half-truth, which Satan excels at. Their eyes were certainly opened when they ate, and they learned the difference between good and evil. Now they were no longer good “like God.” They were evil, separated from His gracious presence.

But God looked upon them with mercy. He promised to send a Savior for them and their descendants: a Savior who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). This promise was repeated through the prophet Isaiah, who wrote that at the coming of the Christ, “The eyes of the blind shall be opened” (Isaiah 35:5). This promise was fulfilled when the Son of God took on flesh and brought healing to many, including those who were blind. But more than that, He came to deliver the world of sinners from spiritual blindness.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, our eyes have been opened both to our own sinfulness and to our salvation through Jesus. The design of a church building and its furnishings underscore the Gospel truth. We see the baptismal font where the Triune God claimed us as His own. We look at the pulpit where our pastor proclaims and applies the Word of God for our salvation. We view the altar where our Savior’s body and blood are distributed for the remission of our sins.

As we look around the church building, there is still more to see: crosses, stained glass windows, banners, paintings. These all depict the saving truth that Jesus

died and rose again to save sinners. We also see the object of our Savior’s love: the people around us, our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a privilege to worship together each week and to encourage one another. Our gathering together becomes more and more important as we see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

While these visible things all enhance and edify our worship, there is also a proper time to close our eyes. We close them when we pray to our holy God. As we pray, we take comfort that “the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry” (Psalm 34:15). He sees our troubles and promises to deliver us.

We worship with our eyes by looking in faith to Jesus, and Jesus only, for our salvation. We look at our neighbors as Jesus looks upon us, with compassion and love. We also give thanks for the visible signs of His grace that He instituted for us: His Gospel dispensed through Word and Sacrament.

*Here stands the font before our eyes,  
Telling how God did receive us;  
Th’ altar recalls Christ’s sacrifice  
And what His table doth give us;  
Here sounds the Word that doth proclaim  
Christ yesterday, today, the same,  
Yea, and for aye our Redeemer.*

**(Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary #211, v. 6)**

Next Issue: ▼

**Part 4: We Worship with Our Ears**

# Bible Lessons are for Life

by **MR. AARON KREUTER**,  
King of Grace Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minn.

The night before Jacob was reunited with his brother Esau, years after cheating him out of a birthright and blessing, he wrestled with God (Genesis 32:22-32).

I didn't wrestle competitively as a boy, but I did have three older brothers. I knew about wrestling, and about being overmatched. That's the lens through which I saw the story of Jacob. But I couldn't understand this thing that seemed a closer cousin to Greek myth than something from the Old Testament. It was not clear to me why God would wrestle with a man, or how a man could wrestle with God (and, by all accounts, do a pretty good job of it).

I don't remember if I was taught anything about what this lesson meant as a child; my memory is that the purpose it served in Bible History class was to advance the story of the patriarchs and to explain how the people of Israel got their name. And it does both of those things, to be sure. Jacob's life is an important chapter in the story of how God worked through His people to bring about the salvation of all people.

Over time and multiple rereads, this account has only become more of a favorite. I appreciate the depth and layers in a way that I didn't, and couldn't, as a child. Yes, it's a narrative that adds context and color to the larger scope of Scripture. And yes, it's part of the larger "morality tale" of Jacob's life: Jacob, the consummate schemer, faced a problem that, finally, even he couldn't

out-strategize. He was left with no choice but to trust God.

But there's another layer to this story: it tells us who our God is. We have a God who is willing to come to earth, to grapple and sweat and struggle in the dust and in the dark. And why? He came to bless Jacob and rename him, just as He came to bless us and rename us as children of God.

And still, there's more. Jacob's wrestling match is a reminder that reading Bible lessons is a lifelong pursuit.

Every Christian will struggle with Scripture at times. Maybe a particular Bible lesson or verse or idea is a mystery. Maybe a particular Bible lesson or verse or idea is offensive. Read the account from Genesis 32 through the lens of John 1. Whatever the source of your struggle, Christ Himself comes to you through the Word, inviting you, like Jacob, to struggle with Him. Sometimes, you'll walk away with a limp, like Jacob did. But, like Jacob, God will bless you.

On that note, we'll be asking students at each of our ELS schools to submit short essays about their favorite Bible lesson and why it's important to them. Some of these essays will be published in the *Lutheran Sentinel* over the next several issues. We can't wait to read your submissions—and for you to start a lifelong habit of reading and rereading the Bible!

REFORMATION LECTURES: 2026

2026

BJARNE WOLLAN TEIGEN

# Reformation Lectures

October 29–30, 2026 | The Sports and Fitness Center at Bethany Lutheran College  
Mankato, Minnesota

*Did Luther Have an Agenda?  
Luther's Liturgical Writings*

## LUTHER'S OCCASIONAL SERVICES

**Prof. Aaron Christie**, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisc.

## LUTHER'S DIVINE SERVICES

**Dr. Joseph Herl**, Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, Neb.

## LUTHER'S HYMNS

**Prof. Dennis Marzolf**, Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn.