

A Short Story that Speaks Volumes for Our Life: A Father's Love



Jesus said, "The son got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20).

He was homeless, smelly, and almost starving to death. But the worst thing was that he knew it was all his fault. He thought his father was cruel and overbearing; there were too many rules. He wanted freedom. He wanted to have fun, but his father was all about responsibility and hard work.

So, he asked for his share of the inheritance. He didn't care about the farm; he just wanted the

money. As soon as he got it, he left. He could finally do what he wanted to do. But it didn't take long and all that money was gone—partying is expensive.

Those he thought were his friends left as soon as he ran out of money. He was all alone and miserable. He had two choices, and neither seemed pleasant. He could continue as he was and hope he could scrape enough together each day so that he wouldn't starve to death, or he could go back home.

He headed for home. He was prepared to grovel, to ask to be just a hired hand on his father's farm. But he didn't get the opportunity to do much groveling. As soon as his father saw him coming, he ran out to meet him. He hugged and kissed him, and gave orders for a huge celebration in his honor. The rebellious son had expected a cool reception. He had expected an "I told you so." Instead he got what he knew he didn't deserve: a joyous welcome home.

You and I are that young man who rebelled against his father. We have all rebelled against our heavenly Father. We have considered

him to be cruel and overbearing and having too many rules—someone who doesn't want us to have any fun. We have all separated ourselves from him and broken his commandments. Our consciences tell us that he is angry, that we deserve whatever pain or suffering comes our way. Could our heavenly Father still love us? Could he still welcome us to his eternal home in heaven?

Jesus' story about the disobedient son in Luke 15:11-24 is a short story that speaks volumes for our lives. It assures us of God's love and our heavenly home. Our heavenly Father loves us so much that he punished his obedient Son, Jesus, in our place so that he can welcome us as his dear children and heirs of eternal life. Instead of giving us what we deserve for our rebelliousness, he gives us what we don't deserve: complete forgiveness in Jesus.

Gather with us on Sundays at 8:00 or 10:30 A.M. or on Mondays at 6:30 P.M. to learn more about our heavenly Father's love.

*Reprinted from our synod's
Outreach Newsletter*

Join us for our Worship Services in Lent



Crossroads

Traveling with Our Savior

Have you ever noticed how much time you spend traveling? More and more, people have to take into account the hours that they spend in a car, at an airport, or simply walking from one place to the next.

For many, the hours spent traveling can be a time of reflection on what just happened—a church service, the date you just had, and so on. But those hours can also be times of anticipation as you look ahead to where you're going. Can't wait to

see Grandpa and Grandma. How much longer? Are we there yet? And while you're thinking about what just happened or looking forward to what lies ahead, you still have to be aware of what's going on at the time of your travel—watching for cars, listening music, looking at the scenery flying by.

Throughout the last week of Jesus' life, we see him going from one place to the next. Did you ever wonder what Jesus and/or his disciples were thinking about as they traveled? Let's put ourselves on the road with Jesus, the road that would eventually lead him to the cross.

Join us this Lenten season on Wednesdays for *Crossroad—Traveling with Our Savior*.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, **February 6**, we hold services on

Wednesdays at 3:30 and 6:30 P.M. each week during the season of Lent.

These Wednesday services help us to reflect on our Lord's great love for us—love that moved him to come down from heaven to go to the cross for us in order to put us at peace with God.

We invite you also to our Lenten Suppers held in the school gym between services from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. These suppers are sponsored by the following groups: Home & School; Senior Choir; Handbells; Fellowship Committee; and Boy & Girl Pioneers. We thank them for their willingness to serve!

Please note: Children need to be under the supervision of a responsible adult to attend the worship services and suppers.

Update on our Building Project

Midwest Engineering Services performed subsurface exploration and foundation evaluation on the site of our new addition on January 22 by drilling three borings to a depth of 20 feet.

From the borings we will be able to determine the following:

- ◆ Soil and ground water conditions.
- ◆ Recommendations for foundation design, the allowable soil bearing capacity, lateral pressures and foundation drainage.
- ◆ Guidelines for construction considerations relating to site drainage, groundwater control and excavations.

- ◆ Site classifications for seismic design.

We invite any members who are involved in the construction trades to contact our Building Committee if you are interested in bidding on any portion of our project. Please call Bob Cutting at 414.327.7158.

The hardware for our new church doors has received by our door contractor. The door will be installed when the weather is warmer so that painting, caulking and window repairs can be done under more favorable conditions.

Catalyst Construction will have the budget book done in about three weeks. Korb Tredo Architects will then finish the design for our new welcoming center. Construction bids will be placed by the end of March. This will keep us on pace for our groundbreaking in April.



News from the WELS Together e-newsletter

COP concludes winter meeting

From the office of President Mark Schroeder

Last week I had the privilege of meeting with the Conference of Presidents (COP) for the second time. I went away from that meeting once again impressed with the faith, the dedication, and the zeal shown by these men who have been called to serve as the shepherds and spiritual leaders of our 12 districts.

The Conference of Presidents is divided into five committees: leadership, funding, education, operations/outreach/communications, and doctrine. The issues that come before the COP are given to the various committees to discuss and formulate recommendations. As you can see from the names of the committees, the topics under discussion are wide-ranging and diverse.

Among the matters discussed or decided were:

- The COP reaffirmed that Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) are the primary and foundational method of support for our synod's various ministries. In view of that, the COP and WELS Ministry of Christian Giving will continue to stress the continuing primacy and importance of CMO. At the same time, the COP recognizes that from time to time specific needs arise in the church that must be addressed and must receive special attention from our people. When that becomes necessary, the COP and the Ministry of Christian Giving

will work to ensure that all appeals for support—including CMO, individual mission offerings, and specific needs—will be gospel-based and will clearly and faithfully utilize biblical stewardship principles. The COP will take special care concerning the number of special funding requests that are brought before the members and congregations of the synod. (You can read about the most recent encouraging report from WELS Chief Financial Officer Todd Poppe elsewhere in this issue of "Together." The news



is very good—another reason to thank God for his grace and to thank his people for their generous and joyful response.)

- The COP reviewed the plans in place for the gathering of the Year of Jubilee offering, which was authorized by the synod convention last summer to eliminate the synod's \$22.5 million internal debt. These plans will be shared with the district conventions next summer, with the actual synodwide start for the offering beginning in the fall. Several districts have decided to make an early start in

this effort.

- Various topics relating to doctrine and practice were discussed, such as worship, outreach, congregational organization/structure, and the role of the synod in assisting congregations. Most, if not all, of these issues will be discussed in pastoral conferences in the coming year and in future meetings of the COP.

Many other items could be added to this list. No matter what the issue under discussion, it's clear that the Lord has given these dedicated men as gifts to his church. Please keep them in your prayers as they continue their important work.

Serving in Christ,

Mark Schroeder

Positive synod financial trends continue

WELS' financial indicators continue to trend positive, in particular Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO)—the offerings congregations commit to the synod's collective ministry—and gifts from individuals. "Based on the facts, it's obvious God is blessing the synod financially," says Mr. Todd Poppe, WELS chief financial officer.

CMO for December 2007 was up more than \$250,000 or 7.1 percent over the same month in 2006—the sixth straight comparative monthly increase. For the 12-month period ending Dec. 31, 2007, CMO is up six percent over the previous year.

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Synod News Continued plus some other brief notes

The synod received gifts for its operating budget of more than \$500,000 in December—to date, for fiscal year 2007-08 such gifts are \$900,000 greater than the prior year and are trending higher than the budget and the forecast.

Poppe says the results mean the synod is in "excellent financial condition," at least through the first half of fiscal year 2007-08, and on track to exceed the \$1 million budget surplus forecast in October. Any surplus will be used to re-establish a buffer fund to offset any unanticipated future support shortfalls.

Poppe cautions that if the synod is to remain fiscally healthy and if it is to meet the ministry funding levels approved for next year by the 2007 convention, gifts from congregations and individuals must continue to show strong growth.

Get Your Act Together!

St. John's Home & School is planning a **Spaghetti Dinner and Talent Show on Saturday, February 23, from 6-9 P.M.**

Do you play an instrument, know a cute or funny skit to perform, dance, martial arts, magic tricks or sing? There are so many avenues of talent, what's

yours? Please share it with us at the talent show. This event is open to all, so tell your friends and family and let's make this a fun evening. **If you're not performing, but coming to dinner and the show, please reserve your spot as soon as possible by calling the school office at 414.541.5881.**

Tuesday, February 12, 6:30 P.M. K4 & K5 Round Up.

This night is for children who will be 4 or 5 by September 1, 2008 and their parents to hear about St. John's K4 & K5 programs for the 2008-2009 school year. Meet the teachers and visit the classrooms.