



WISCONSIN  
LUTHERAN  
INSTITUTIONAL  
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# COMPASSION

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DID YOU KNOW?

## WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

by Chaplain Ken Wenzel

“Is it my fault?” was the cry of a mother whose child suffered from pneumonia. It was also a spiritual cry from a faith in crisis. Maggie told her story. Her parents were “strict” members of a legalistic church which demanded that members follow dietary laws. Maggie went to school with coverings over her head and wearing special dresses. Her life was built on obedience that earned God’s blessings - at least, that is how she viewed it.

### GOOD THING OUT OF BAD

But sometimes Maggie’s mother “secretly” stopped at McDonalds and broke the dietary laws. Maggie began to question what she had been taught. But then Maggie's first child was born with a brain disease and was permanently handicapped. Her parents accused Maggie of having sinned for such a tragic thing to have happened.

The current hospitalization brought the accusation that she was not praying hard enough. Maggie, though she had left her church, wrestled again with her childhood laws. At the bedside of her sick child she moaned, “Is this my fault?” She could not find any help or hope. “Where else can I look for help?” was her tearful cry.

I told her that I knew a man who suffered terribly. His friends - like her parents – in a very difficult time, accused him of committing a terrible sin that brought about such hard times. The man’s name was Job and his story is found in the Bible. He did not find the answer to their question, “Whose fault was it?” Rather, the Lord helped him to learn patience and the almighty God can bring good things out of bad.

### JESUS CAN HELP

I also told her that Jesus in a similar way helped his disciples when they wondered, “Whose fault was it?” Regarding a paralyzed man, they asked, “Did he or his

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## A VERY SPECIAL MEMORIAL



At WLIM, decades old events are sometimes brought to mind. Recently a special memorial was received in the office. The gift

was given with thanks to God for ministry carried out by the sainted chaplain Arnold Schroeder over 40 years ago. The Savior's love had been shared with a then 16 year old teenager facing severe difficulties. The message Pastor Schroeder brought had not been forgotten. WLIM acknowledges with great thanks a substantial gift given in loving memory of Salvatore and Violet Vaccarella and their granddaughter, Violet Marie Vaccarella, given so that the same message shared over 40 years ago will continue to be shared over and over again with hurting people in difficult situations!

Your memorial or special gifts to the WLIM operating fund or any WLIM special fund (youth ministry, Grace Oasis, nursing home ministry, etc.) are most appreciated.

Future editions of "Compassion" will be acknowledging memorials and special gifts.

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## THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S LOVE

The look on her face was puzzled, perhaps even troubled. Slowly she shook her head from side to side. She seemed to be saying, "No. Not me. Not ever."

Michelle and I had been studying God's Word for just a few weeks. We began with creation and then went to the fall into sin. Then we came to Abraham.

We discussed how God called Abraham to leave his homeland and travel to the land of Canaan. We went through each of the Lord's one-sided promises to Abraham. We talked about how the Lord blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son and we agreed that children are a wonderful blessing from the Lord.

And then, we came to the Lord's loving test of Abraham's faith when his son, Isaac, was twelve years old. Michelle wondered if she correctly understood what the Lord had asked Abraham to do. Was he supposed to kill his son? How could a loving God ask any parent to do that and how could Abraham even think about killing his son?

The puzzled look became more troubled. Michelle was silent for what seemed to be a long time. Finally, she spoke.

"I couldn't do it. I couldn't kill my child!"

Quietly we looked at each other. I was the first to speak. I agreed that it was almost unthinkable and admitted that I didn't know if I would have been willing to do what Abraham almost did. But then I reminded Michelle that what the Lord asked of Abraham, He actually did himself.

He sacrificed His own Son. His love for us sinners was so great that He was willing to give His Son's life so that we might live!

The troubled look on Michelle's face began to soften. I wondered if it was the first time that she had considered the death of Jesus from the viewpoint of His loving Father. Maybe it was the first time that she had thought about the death of Jesus as an act of love.

What a blessing for me to point her to the cross and share the good news of God's love for sinners, including her and me!

Michelle and I are continuing to study the Word of God. I think she still finds it difficult to accept that Abraham was willing to kill Isaac. But, she is also very happy that God the Father was willing to sacrifice His Son to save her!

*Chaplain Charles Iles, Sr. joined WLIM in 2000 and serves at several state prisons and the Mental Health Institute.*

*Chaplain Charles Iles, Sr.*



# A GENTLE ANSWER

Bridgett regularly comes to Grace Oasis. (Grace Oasis is WLIM's Friday night program for people recovering from addictions). She's a very quiet and reserved person. I know she's my ally sent from God.

## A STORM HITS THE OASIS

A few weeks ago, as the Friday night Grace Oasis program was starting to wind down, a man came in totally drunk. I told him he'd have to leave. He said, "I'm waiting for my bus ticket." I told him, "You don't get a bus ticket." He immediately started swearing and getting belligerent. I made a mistake then: I made eye contact. (Handy rule for living: don't make eye contact with growling dogs or with hostile drunks.) That completely set him off, and he was on his feet shouting louder and louder and getting more belligerent than before.

That's when Bridgett stepped in. She put a hand on the man's shoulder and calmly talked to him as she eased him toward the door. He kept yelling threats and curses at me, but Bridgett kept soothing him and gently worked him out of the building.

## CALMING THE STORM

I watched in complete astonishment. Bridgett explained, "I know him from the shelter. He's a nice guy when he's sober, but he was going to hit you." I had figured as much but Bridgett found a better way. "A gentle answer turns away wrath." (Proverbs 15:1)

On another evening, Janet told us her sister had died the day before. She was sad, of course, but she was also really agitated, demanding to know why God would do this. Knowing Janet and her alcoholism, this had all the makings of a relapse. I felt really helpless. I knew I could tell her things about God's love for her and how Jesus' death on the cross made it possible for her sister to go to heaven where Janet would be united with her again, but I was afraid my words would never be able to penetrate her grief and the oncoming relapse.



Then Bridgett stepped in. I saw her take Janet quietly aside. Some time later Janet was smiling through her tears. She told me, "Bridgett explained everything to me. She told me Jesus died for my sister and how she's in heaven with Him right now and I'm going to see her again."

## A MINISTER TO GOD'S FAMILY

Those are all the same things I could have told her, but I don't think it would have hit home if I had, not the way it did when Bridgett said it to her.

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

It's a joy to see the Holy Spirit working through every one of His people, including Bridgett, making every one of us a "priest" to minister to the rest of God's family.

Chaplain Phil Merten

Chaplain Philip Merten spends the majority of his time working with people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and runs "Grace Oasis," WLIM's Friday evening ministry to people recovering from addictions. He is also involved with jail and prison ministries.



## MEET THE STAFF DEACONESS SARAH OWENS

Deaconess Sarah Owens had very early exposure to institutional ministry. Before Sarah was in school, her father, Pastor Paul Zittlow, accepted a call to Grace Lutheran Church in Waupun, WI. After visiting the inmates at the state prison in Waupun, WLIM Chaplain Ken Lenz would often stop at the parsonage and recalls Sarah serving him lunch as he would speak about his ministry.

After graduating from high school, Sarah enrolled at Wisconsin Lutheran College. WLC had a program in which students led Bible studies for children in group homes and shelters, something that was of great interest to Sarah.

Her weekly volunteering again brought Sarah into contact with WLIM and Pastor Lenz who remembered her. In 1993, a few months after graduation, Sarah was called as the first WLIM deaconess - the first full-time deaconess in the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

Sarah works with children and teens in the Milwaukee County Children's Court Center, in the Behavioral Health Treatment Center and various other institutions throughout the state. Sarah also makes many community visits with hurting women, most of whom have been previously institutionalized.

After twelve years, Sarah continues to love her work. She is excited to help others, including many WLC students, assist in WLIM's ministry.

Sarah, her husband Karl and their children, Aaron, Peter and Elisabeth, live in Milwaukee and are members of St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church.

## ADOPTION DAY

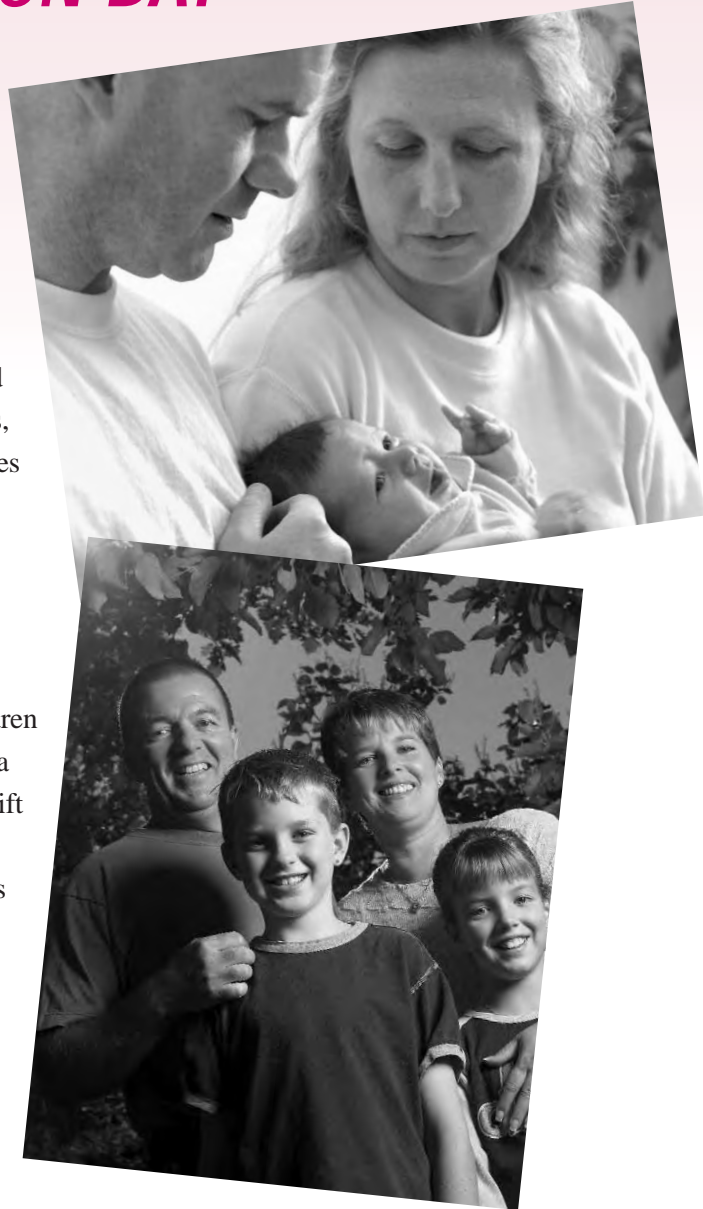
Every so often it is Adoption Day in the Children's Court Center. Children dressed in their best clothing are holding the hands, or being held by their new parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents. They too, look beautiful with their lovely clothing and bright smiles. The newly adopted children are usually holding a stuffed animal – a gift from the court commemorating this important and very special day.

### ADOPTION – THE SPECIAL BEAUTY

Adoption has its special beauty all its own. The children were chosen especially by their parents. The new parents loved them enough to go through endless paperwork and great financial cost to bring them into their homes.

When I see these Adoption Days in court, I am reminded of the awesome "Spiritual Adoption Days" that I have been part of. Through the power of the Word, individuals learn that they are sinners and that they need God's grace. They sometimes ask if they can be baptized. If they are going to be in the correctional system for a time, they are unable to go to a church for baptism. So, I call a chaplain and arrange for baptism for that person.

The setting is not a beautiful church. It is usually just a small room in the visiting area. Only a few people are allowed, but what joy and what smiles are there! The commitment from God to make this child His own has



already been made at the cross. At Baptism, this match is made official. God says, "I love you. I made you. I bought you with a price. I choose you. You are my own." It is not because of the words of a judge or legal paperwork, but through the water and the Word that this child is spiritually adopted into God's eternal family.

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## **"ADOPTION HAS ITS SPECIAL BEAUTY ALL ITS OWN"**

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Siblings, there are many out there who are being adopted into your family today. Rejoice! And keep your eyes open for ways to serve and love them.

### ***GOD IS READY TO ADOPT YOU***

Brothers and sisters, there are many more who are looking for and need spiritual adoption. They need to be brought into the fold of believers to join us in the safety of our father's home. Pray for these precious people. Ask, "Do you know who my Father is? Do you want to be part of His family? My Father's house is never too full for one more child. His arms opened wide to die to pay for your sins and His arms are open wide to accept you in as His adopted child."

Praise God for "spiritual adoption!" May we remember it, celebrate it and walk hand in hand with our heavenly Father always!

*Deaconess Sarah Owens*

*Deaconess Owens works with children and teens in the Milwaukee County Children's Court Center, in the Behavioral Health Treatment Center and various other institutions throughout the state.*



### ***FAITH – CONTINUED FROM PG 1***

parents sin?" Jesus answered, "Neither." Jesus then challenged them to look for God's glory.

### ***SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS ANSWERED***

These two stories helped Maggie to see that she was not alone in her struggles with spiritual questions. Now it was time to believe the good news of Jesus. He perfectly fulfilled the laws of God so that Maggie could be covered with his sinless life. Christ died upon the cross so that she could also be covered with his forgiveness and friendship.

Maggie came to learn that the laws are for thanking Jesus, for showing Jesus our appreciation for his love and forgiveness. God's love forgives, saves, and helps in times of trouble. In Jesus' undeserved love for sinners, Maggie – and all of us – find help here on earth and eternally.

Maggie's tears dried. Her eyes brightened in faith. I told her to read the Gospels of Luke and John for more spiritual strength. I gave her the name of our nearest church for support. Rather than asking, "Whose fault was it?" We follow Peter's example who proclaimed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (Jn 6:68-69)

*Chaplain Ken Wenzel*

*Chaplain Wenzel's primary ministry is conducted at the University Hospital and the Children's Hospital, as well as two other Madison, WI area hospitals. A 1973 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Chaplain Wenzel joined WLIM in 1997.*



## A VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS GIFT

WLIM is well known in the Milwaukee area for the annual gift collection drive. Tens of thousands of new articles of clothing, toys, stuffed animals, decks of cards, cosmetics, (the list could go on and on) are collected by WELS congregations and individuals for the institutionalized, their families and many others in need.

This year, a very special donation was made that touched the entire staff. A twelve year old boy from a Milwaukee suburb used his birthday money to purchase and donate to the gift collection, twelve good-quality sports balls – football, soccer, volley and basketballs!

What an expression of love and support for the gospel ministry carried out by WLIM! We were impressed in the office and can only guess at the number of smiles and hours of use that will result from this very special Christmas gift.

WLIM thanks this young donor as well as the many churches and other individuals who supported the 2005 gift collection. This gift giving effort does open doors and provides opportunity to share an even greater Christmas gift, the new-born Savior and the forgiveness he brings. We try to share, with every gift distributed, the Savior's gift of love and forgiveness for us all !



## A GENTLE WHISPER

In 1 Kings 19, the Lord said to Elijah, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountain apart and shattered the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. The Lord was in the whisper.

### POWERFUL WORDS OF THE LORD

Scripture speaks again and again of the amazing power of God's Word. At Creation the universe was created by God's Word. Scripture pictures the word of the Lord, though so powerful, as a gentle whisper that shows love, mercy, kindness, care, and compassion.

Read the entire 107th Psalm. God's Word is pictured as a healing force, a rescue from distress, and an answer to our cries and prayers. When we need spiritual and emotional relief in our lives, we seek God's healing Word. That Word sustains us when we are weary, discouraged, and in need of assurance.

### GOD'S WORD LIFTS US UP IN TIMES OF NEED

Paul writes, “We have the treasure of this Word in jars of clay to show that His all surpassing power is from God and not from us. We may be hard pressed in our lives, but not crushed, perplexed at times, but not in despair. We may even feel persecuted, but never abandoned, even knocked low by circumstances, but not destroyed.” Paul continues a few verses later, “All of this is for our benefit so that the Grace of God that again is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to flow to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 15)

Isaiah, in a beautiful portion of scripture, compares the rain and the snow from heaven that waters the earth, making it bud and flourish, yielding seed for the sower and bread to the eater, to God's Holy Word that goes out from the mouth of God. We are promised that it will not return empty to him, but will accomplish his desires and achieve God's purpose in our lives. (See Isaiah 55:10,11)

Are you feeling all alone, fearful, frustrated and discouraged? Let the gentle whisper of God's Word sustain you and lift up your spirit. You have His Word on it!

*Franklin Gauger recruits, trains and communicates with lay ministry volunteers and leads Bible classes in area retirement & assisted living centers.*

*Franklin Gauger,  
Lay Ministry Coordinator*



# A TRUE FRIEND IN JESUS

James said that he didn't have much of a vocabulary. So when his mother said that she was disappointed, he said he wasn't sure what that meant.

## SO CALLED FRIENDS

He told me about his experience with some older kids who claimed they were his friends. They had been involved with criminal activities and he knew that it was wrong, but he thought that his friends provided protection. James, like many other teens in detention, found out just the opposite.

When the group got caught for the crime, James found out that the "friends" intended only to protect themselves. They blamed James. After all, he was younger and would likely not have to do much time, with a charge that would only be put on his juvenile record. They thought they had outwitted the system.

James' "friends" didn't realize that the system can charge young teens as adults. That is just what the court system is planning to do with James. He is facing a long sentence and having an adult record at fifteen years old.

James is overwhelmed with the need to face a disappointed mother and doing time in prison. He is grasping for sense and hope.

## LOST AND ALONE

It seemed to me that James felt like he was lost and alone. His mind was flooded with bad thoughts about his future, but I told him that he had an even bigger problem, and that was his sin. I relayed the story of the life preserver.

I said, "Imagine that you were in an ocean, all alone and drowning. But then someone with a life jacket comes along and offers it to you. He will drown so that you can live. How would you feel?"

James said, "Oh, that's kind of like a sacrifice."



"Exactly," I said. Interesting answer, I thought, coming from a boy with a supposedly limited vocabulary.

I explained further, "This is like the way we are with our sin. We are lost and going to go to hell. But Jesus came and sacrificed His life for ours on the cross. He died and came alive again."

## JESUS CARES

"James, do you see the difference between Jesus and your friends? Your friends cared only for themselves and were willing to sacrifice you for their own good. With Jesus, you have a true friend, one who sacrificed His own life for your eternal gain."

James still had lots of concerns. But I pray that the story of the life preserver stays with James. I pray that he will cling to the One who gives an eternal life preserver, Jesus, who is also our Protector and True Friend.

Deaconess Sarah Owens





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## OUR MISSION

*“To Share God's Law And  
The Saving Gospel of  
Jesus Christ With People  
Who Are Institutionalized.”*

## CENTENNIAL THANK OFFERING CONCLUDES

Nearly four years ago as planning for WLIM's Centennial took place, some thought a realistic goal for the thank offering would be \$100,000. The WLIM Board had a better idea. The board established what seemed to be a totally unrealistic, “pie in the sky” goal of \$500,000.

“Impossible!” was the reaction of most of the WLIM staff. God had his own plan and just as he has blessed WLIM for nearly 104 years, he certainly blessed the Centennial Thank Offering.

Total gifts for the three-year Thank Offering on the closing date of the drive, December 31, 2005, are nearly \$475,000! Amazing! What blessings those special gifts have produced. A large portion of the offering has funded an expanded lay volunteer ministry at WLIM. The gospel is being shared in many new locations by many new volunteers – what a loving Heavenly Father! Thank you to several thousand individuals who have supported the WLIM Centennial Thank Offering!

### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

- The WLIM 2006 operating budget is \$669,800, an increase of 2.5% over 2005.
- There are now 212 congregations in the WLIM association. Many have lay delegates who receive updated reports from the WLIM office three times a year.