



## Experience Faith

### Celebrating Stories of Grace, Gratitude and God-Moments

#### Devotions of Faith

This little devotional came to life as the people of Faith Lutheran reflected and wrote about God at work in their lives. From the cocoon of human hearts the stories emerged: written in flowing penmanship; attached in emails; scribbled on copy paper during confirmation studies.

Here is soul food, locally grown. You'll celebrate the gifts of long-ago Sunday school teachers, faithful grandparents and God-moments at camp. You'll see life-changing relationships with our God proclaimed. You'll share the highs and lows of our common experiences, from crying out from the depths... to standing at life's crossroads... to mountain-top highs. And you'll see how our individual stories interweave into a beautiful narrative of God's continued presence among us here.

Read, reflect and enjoy! It's rich inspiration as we consider our ministry for Faith's next chapter.

#### With God in Our Lives...

In the past 6 months, we have gone through some really tough financial times that involved filing bankruptcy and losing our home and our vehicle. Without God in our lives, it would have been extremely difficult to get through something like this. We looked to him for a lot of guidance and love and felt without that, we had nothing.

Then in March 2012, a loss of employment caused us depression, but we managed to accept it with the belief that things happen for a reason.

Since we've had God back in our lives, obstacles don't seem like obstacles. When we started attending, and later becoming members of Faith Lutheran, life is so much easier to deal with.

We believe good things come to those who wait. We are willing to wait as long as it takes: with God in our lives, the course we take will be with His guidance. **Mark & Mary Hartman**

#### Simple Faith

My faith story is quite simple--I grew up in this church and attended Sunday school and church itself. I was--and still am--surrounded by people that build up my faith and view. As the years go by, my faith in God continues to grow.  
**Lexie Evenson**

## Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

My Faith story began in Southwest Wisconsin at Our Saviors Lutheran Church in Soldiers Grove. One person who had a profound influence on my young life was Julia Sime, my fifth grade Sunday school teacher. She was seventy-nine years young at the time and went on a ride on a sled with each of her five students.

My first year of confirmation class was taught by Dorothy Jurgensen, who was the mother of one of my classmates. She inspired us to read the entire Bible and I completed that in two years.

John 3:16 has always been very meaningful to me because when God gave me his only son for my sins, I am no longer punished for them, but may have eternal life. I have also grown to realize that forgiving others for the things they do is allowing me to be more at peace.

One lesson I learned that has really been highlighted in our Bethel series this year is that following Jesus' will is what the life of a Christian is truly about. We are falling short if we are only truly looking forward to eternal life.

This family of believers at Faith Lutheran has truly become my home. It has given me the chance to worship, serve, be a leader and to socialize. As Hymn 564 says, *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*. **Ron Jones**

## Fishing Camp and Faith

My favorite experience was fishing camp at Camp Waypost. I went the summer of my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year with my cousin Ryan Valleskey. Every morning, everyone at camp would meet in a large circle after the wake-up bell would ring. We would sing faith songs and we learned many great new songs. Once breakfast was ready, everyone would be seated inside. We would do faith trivia, and if your table answered a question correctly you could go get food! Once everyone had food, we would say Grace and eat.

After breakfast we would have a church service which was made up of a lesson from the Bible, a mini-play and three or four of the counselors' favorite songs. When it was time for lunch we would do the same thing. During the day we would play many fun games. My favorite game was gaga ball. We would also swim, go canoeing, and tell stories about our Faith. When it came time for supper, we would have cabin time that consisted of talking and small games. Once it was late we would do a circle prayer and then go to bed.

On the last night at camp, when it was dark, they had candles lighting up camp and our counselors would tell us what they liked about us and our faith. Then we all gathered as the counselors put on skits and we sang and danced. The following morning we had one last church service, only the children put it together. Camp was a lot of fun, and I wish I could go back soon. **Trevor Griffin**

## I Am So Blessed!

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13*

This verse had significant meaning to me during the early years of my faith journey. More miscarriages than babies, the loss of a husband to Leukemia, a child's diagnosis of a chronic illness were a few of the challenges that defined my life and ultimately my faith story. It was through these moments that I learned, that as a Christian, I would never experience pain, sorrow (or happiness and joy) alone. I realized God uses the circumstances of a sinful world to allow His people an opportunity to draw closer to Him.

The verse still has significance in my life today. Only today, I have grown to look at opportunities and challenges as blessings...and I am so blessed! I am blessed through my family and friends and the congregation of Faith Lutheran Church. I am additionally blessed by the opportunities that come before me and the challenges that bring me into closer relationship with God. Because I believe that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," I also have to believe that my Faith journey is far from over. I pray that God is not yet finished with me and that He loves me enough to continue to bless me—with relationships, opportunities and yes, a few challenges. **Julie Endries**

## A Mother's Love

As a mom, I prayed for my boys long before they were born. My first-born was special in many ways. As I sat by his ICU bed for the third time in two months, at almost 14 years, my precious gift from God struggled with staying alive. The only comfort I could give was singing our favorite song, "*Amazing Grace*", and holding him.

Prayer and song had helped for years, but this was different. After two hours of song and holding him, God gave me the peace and strength to say, "Will, we love you, just as Jesus does. If it is time to go to Him, go. But, please try to say bye to your brother first." He did: 36 hours after coming home, he passed on.

Some ask how I'm doing. With the promises of Jesus, my faith and trust ensure we will be together again. I know God has never given me a thing where He has not been there to help, guide and comfort me. I rejoice in the Lord for He comforts me. Like the song "*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*", He handles my sorrow.

Rev. 21:4; II Cor 1:3, 4; Mat 19:14 **Christine Davison**

J.C.

My parents split up when I was five weeks old. Things didn't work out, and that's just the way it was. I didn't get to see my Dad much, and still don't. He did things that humiliated himself, and in a way, made me ashamed of him. I used to complain about it and feel sorry for myself. I asked God, "Why do all my friends have perfect families? What do they do that is so much better than me?"

Then I met J.C. He came to my school in the beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. He was high-spirited and friendly. J.C. wasn't shy, and he definitely wasn't quiet, but he always had a compliment for anyone who crossed his path. J.C. died one month and ten days later.

I had only known him for about a month, but I was torn apart. I asked God how he could take someone who was so perfect. I never once heard this boy complain. I never once heard this boy insult another. I have done both, many times. Why him and not me? If one of the two of us deserved it, you can be certain it wasn't him.

Two years have passed since he died. Both days on the anniversary of his death, myself along with a few friends have gone to his house and spent time with his little sisters and brother. Each one reminds me of him. They show me pictures of J.C. and I want to cry. I start to tear up and these little ten-year-old girls tell me to stop. They have the biggest smiles, they look exactly like him. They tell me he is happy and wouldn't want me to be sad. These little girls tell me he is with God and that a person shouldn't be sad if someone else gets to be with God.

This is my faith story. I complained about not seeing my dad enough, while these people lost someone forever, and haven't a single complaint. No more questions of why not me. If these little girls, who lost their own brother, can trust in God, so can I. **Bobbie Lund**

## Be Still

*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*  
~1Thes 5:16-18 NIV

The things God has given us are pure and beautiful, both the physically visible and the abstract. I have been awestruck and inspired for all the years I can remember by the wonders of God's beautiful creation.

We can find joy in it every day. It surrounds us, if we just look, feel, and *Be still ...[Ps 46:10]*. Sometimes my prayers follow the conventional form. But prayer can take many forms, and often mine are expressed as drawings, or word paintings. Being Christian does not exempt you from sorrow, pain and hardship. On one such occasion my whole being had been hurting for nearly 11 months. Then, with night after night of wondrous sunset, I felt the healing begin, the hurt start to wash away, and offered this humble prayer of thanksgiving.

*Sunset on Lake Superior, a prayer of thanks...*  
*Legends tell of waves and fear, of fury none controls.*  
*Ah, but He who formed your waters sends you now to hold my soul,*  
*With breath to cool my fevered cheek flushed warm by summer skies,*  
*Your face a-shine in twilight hues, and thousand twinkling eyes.*  
*Merganser mom and ducklings come, wee corks upon the waves-*  
*One tender fluff bobs up to find too far behind he strays,*  
*And, madly flapping, dashes, splashing, writing white a trailing skim,*  
*Till he's back abreast with all the rest-*  
*Then peace descends again.*  
*The sun melts down; it fills the rim, then spills the flooded light,*

*Flowing gold to carry drifting loons; some gulls cross low in flight.  
Roll and wa-shhh, roll ...slow...  
now, hu-shhh ...  
soft kisses of goodnight...  
Beside the rhythm of your heart, I'm rocked to sleep tonight*

**Judy Ruenzel Harris**

### **Growing**

When I was in preschool, I would go to a church school in St. John's, but I still went to Faith Lutheran on Sundays. Even if my story is not that long, my faith grows and grows. And my faith will keep growing, from me and the faith of other people. **Elizabeth Robley**

### **All Are Welcome**

I grew up in Brillion and went to a Catholic school and church. Religion was literally force-fed to me and I was quite rebellious. I remember the priest and the nuns telling me I was going to hell no matter what I did to repent. I also had to clock in some major hours in church. (To put that in perspective, it's like feeding a young boy nothing but green beans every day, all year long. Then on his birthday, you ask him what he wants to eat. What do you think is the last thing he's gonna say?..... Exactly!)

At age 18, I received a letter from the church saying that I owed " X" amount of my income. This drove a large wedge between me and religion. I took the letter straight to the priest, and we had it out right there on his front porch. That was the last day I was Catholic.

Then my sons were born. By looking into the eyes of a newborn child I realized all of this did not just happen by chance, this is God's creation!! So in 1996 Shelia and I decided that Faith in Valders-- the church we got married in-- was the church for us.

Since joining Faith, I've accomplished many things, not just musically, but by making the music work for something good like "The God Project" \*which benefits World Hunger relief. At Faith, we sing a song called "All Sre Welcome." And when we do sing it, we can sing it with our heads held high, because in this church we walk the walk; we live the phrase All Are Welcome! And that is something to be very proud of. **Steve Kalies**

*\*The God Project is Steve's DVD featuring songs he wrote and performs*

### **Talon's Story**

Grandfather Will Meyer, who was my best friend, passed away when I was four years old. I have heard many times that he loved and respected all, in a Godly spirit. His acceptance of all is highly respected by me. I am proud to have this Christian man as my grandfather.

Grandpa Meyer was a wise man. As an example, when my Dad was a young child, he broke a vase in the house and would not confess. Days went by and Grandpa left the broken pieces lying on the floor. Finally my Dad's conscience could not take it any longer, and he confessed. I miss him very much. **Talon Meyer**



## Love



There is a drawing by Katherine Brown hanging above my bed, and it has been there ever since I first saw it, which was about the time it was published, in 1982. In the drawing, a shepherd is holding a young lamb in a tight, loving embrace. Of course it reminds me of the 23rd Psalm, and also of the parable of the lost sheep. It is, as well, a most beautiful statement of pure love, a reflection of the amazing, boundless love that God has for us, for the Shepherd in the drawing is obviously a risen Jesus. Looking at the drawing, we need no words to comprehend the depth of Jesus' love for that little lamb, whom He considers his own.

When I, myself, look at this drawing, I often think back to that night, the first awesome time years ago, when it really struck me that, oh! All of this is really true! It's not just a wonderful story that people *hope* is for real... it IS for real!! That night I had felt Jesus' comforting arms encircle me, and *I* was that lost lamb. Even now I sometimes imagine I see, peeking out from under Jesus' hand, my name written on a collar worn by the lamb.

Think, for a moment, about all this drawing reveals. We know that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Lamb. The Father embraces the Lamb. It follows, then also that the Lamb holds us, children of the Father through Him. The Lamb is the Shepherd, the Shepherd is the Lamb. The wonder of this comforting love, shown in the expression of the lamb being held, is the love that is ours to claim; pure, vast, immeasurable and unconditional.

Originating from God, this most wondrous. *Judy Ruenzel Harris*

## The Lord is My Shepherd

As I look back over the long life God has given me, I see his hand along the way. My faith story starts with Christian parents who took me to Sunday school beginning at age 6. Another strong influence on me was a single lady named Miss Christina Ulness. She was the Sunday School Superintendent for 40 years. I visited her twice a week.

I was blessed to marry a great Christian girl, Betty. Her love and faith were always an inspiration to me. We were blessed with five children who continue to follow Christ and who married mates who showed true faith.

I have been privileged to be a Sacramentarian for 15 years serving the sacraments to shut-ins, and I have been inspired by all those people. I have been involved in Men's Bible Study for the past fifteen years. As men, we have grown in our faith during these prayer times.

Faith Lutheran has been the center of my life for all my years.

One of my favorite Bible verses is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: the first verse, "The Lord is My Shepherd "...and the last, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." *John Helgeson*

## What a Friend We Have in Jesus- Amy's Experience

*What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and grief to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!*

Growing up in a strict WELS church, I found the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" my favorite. Coming from divorced parents and a father who had forgotten I existed, this hymn was very fitting for that time in my life.

Growing up and living away from home, meeting new people, I began to question my faith and all I was taught. It was when I was 23, divorced myself, and had a beautiful 2-year old daughter, that I was faced with the realization of dying.

I had been born with air pockets in my lungs. My lungs collapsed and began crushing my heart. In the emergency room, as they pulled my daughter from my arms. I felt a reassurance. Not knowing what would happen next, I turned to God for the first time in years.

Now 13 years later, I am happily married with three wonderful children. My Faith in God and his presence in our lives are very strong. **Amy Johnson**

## What a Friend We Have in Jesus- Lorraine's Experience

*What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!*

My favorite song is "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Many years ago when I was young, I remember going upstairs and throwing myself across the bed and saying, "Lord, I need you, help me!" I told this at Circle much later. We were talking about our lesson and one of the leaders who had her older parents to care for and a daughter who was very ill with lupus said, "I remember what Lorraine said about throwing herself on the bed and asking the Lord to help her. I do that too," she said, "when I don't know what to do anymore. I just give everything over to God."

*Oh what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry,  
Everything to God in prayer.*

**-Lorraine Reindl**

## A Ton of Fun

My favorite youth experience was a fishing camp with my cousin at Waypost Camp. I went my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, and what a ton of fun!

We caught lots of fish and got to ride in a canoe. Every morning at camp, we would get together with everyone and sing songs. My favorite song was called "Baby Shark." After the songs, the bell would ring and it would be time for breakfast. We played faith trivia to see which table would get to eat first. Our table wasn't very good, but we still got as much food as everyone else. Before we ate, we would all say grace, and then we would eat. After breakfast, we would have a church service and sing more songs. Then we would go to our cabins and say a prayer. Once we were done with prayer, we would go out and play games with people from other cabins. My favorite game was gaga ball, but I wasn't very good at it.

After dinner we would have rest time, but we didn't really rest: we would play a game called "Egyptian Rat Killer." This was my favorite thing about the camp because only our cabin actually played it. We would go play small games and sing songs until supper. When we heard the bell, once again we said grace and then ate. After supper we would go back to our cabins and say our high and low points of the day. Then finally it was time for bed, and the next day would come. **-Ryan Valleskey**

## Seasons of Faith

An integral part of my faith is based on the 3rd chapter of Ecclesiastes, there is time for everything and everything has its special season. This very moment is unique. It has never occurred before, nor will it again. It is a part of my life journey. Out of gratitude to my Lord I give thanks for the opportunity to live in this moment. To appreciate His creation, to be grateful for allowing me to be a part of this day.

I have been blessed to live my life within the context of the cycles of life. I put my trust in him as my life unfolds. Just as everything has a season so does my faith. It was sown as I was baptized. It was nurtured through Sunday school and confirmation. It has been through periods of questions and answers, sifting and winnowing. Now, as it matures, it continues to grow and ripen and blossom in richness, a process that is enhanced through Faith Lutheran Church and its members. I expect it to continue growing every day of my life, there is no ending point to my spiritual growth. *Lorin Berge*

## Everlasting Life

I always had a belief in everlasting life. A couple of experiences definitely led me to believe in a higher power.

When my grandpa was on his deathbed, I went to visit with him. It made me very uncomfortable and sad. The next day, I was asked to go by my grandparent's house to see if their phone was off the hook. When I arrived, the hospice nurse asked if I wanted to see Grandpa. As much as I didn't want to, I went in. I found him sitting up in a chair with his glasses on, and reading the paper! I was in shock. He looked great. The following day, I got a call saying the nurse didn't think Grandpa was going to make it through the night. As I hurried to finish work, I received another call. Dad hadn't noticed anything different, so I opted to wait until tomorrow to say my goodbyes. Well, there was no tomorrow for Grandpa. He passed away during the night.

I felt guilty for not taking the time out of my busy schedule to visit with him. As I was finishing up work the next day, my youngest daughter reached her little hand up and gave me a picture. To my surprise it was a picture of my grandparents! Right after that, I felt a warmth come over my body. It was a very calming feeling. Immediately, I knew Grandpa sent Michiela to give me his message and the guilt was gone! My last memory of him was a great one!

The other experience happened shortly after my Dad passed away. My family had been finding pennies all over. We knew they were pennies from heaven--we even joked with Dad to start tossing us something bigger!

One morning when I lay in bed, I had a vision of Dad walking into the family room. He leaned against the back of the chair and cocked his legs like he always did, turned and looked at me, and flashed me his great smile. He looked so good, hair combed, clean fresh clothes on. Again, I felt the flush of warmth come over me and on my face was a huge smile. I know that I wasn't sleeping. It reminded me that one day we will all be together again in everlasting life. *Ginny Schwoerer*

## The Door is Opened

*"Ask and you shall receive;  
Seek, and you will find  
Knock, and the door will be opened to you." Matthew 7:7*

I did not understand the concept of being a Christian until my senior year in high school. I was raised with Catholic stories and prayers, but somehow I never grasped what was being taught. Maybe I was too wrapped up in the prayers I needed to memorize or the random stories that didn't seem to go together. And the Ten Commandments-- they were so overwhelming! How could I ever be good enough?

I decided I couldn't be, so it just felt easier not to believe anything.

Then some school friends invited me to their youth group. This was the first time I actually "heard" the story of Jesus: how he died on the cross for me. How salvation was a gift for me. How I didn't have to do "good works" or be "good enough" to get to heaven. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13).

All I needed to do was ASK, SEEK, KNOCK. He opened it and he came through into my heart and life- a feeling that I will never forget. And He changed my life forever. **Terry Huske**

## Take Me Home

*Precious Lord, take my hand,  
Lead me on, let me stand,  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn,*

*Through the storm, through the night,  
Lead me on, to the light,  
Take my hand, Precious Lord,  
Lead me home.*

While caring for my mother during her final days, we watched her slip away from us. After silent hours, she raised her hand into the air. I reached for it to see if I could help, but she sharply pulled away. It was then I knew we were not alone, and it was not me she was reaching for. She was reaching for her Savior to take her home.

- **Anonymous Contributor**

## Born into the Creator's Hands

*"I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."*

I was born and baptized into the hands of our creator, the Lord, Jesus Christ. I've been a Lutheran all of my life and grew up in Freeport, Illinois. I was confirmed in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and attended church and Luther League until high school graduation. After that, I did not attend church till our daughter started kindergarten. Friends invited us to attend Faith Lutheran and we have been here since joining.

Joining in activities and especially Adult Forum, as we called the hour between church services, gave me the opportunity to meet people of Faith Lutheran and feel comfortable getting to know them and learn from them. Participating in groups has developed my character and I feel comfortable taking on various tasks when asked. Also, I feel I can ask for their help when needed, too.

Being a Christian, I try to treat people the way they should be treated with fairness and respect. Sometimes control issues get in the way and thoughtlessness before I speak—that's the sinner in me. I pray to ask God's forgiveness for sins known and unknown.

Since I don't always interpret Bible passages all that well, I've chosen Matthew 25:40 as a verse that sums up what I have written above: "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me.'" An interpretation I read states—simply put, it means that the way one treats other people is seen by Christ as the way we treat Him. --**Penny Larson**

## Remembering Karen

I wanted to share what God has done for me after my sister passed away- it's truly the work of the Lord! My sister Karen is one of the most kind and loving persons I know. I'm saying this because I feel she is still with us in spirit.

The first time Karen let me know of her presence was in the hospital, when I asked for a sign that Karen would be ok. About half an hour later, a lullaby started playing over the loud speaker, and two minutes later another lullaby played. And right at that time, her twin granddaughters were born. Truly unbelievable!

Then, I was planning funeral arrangements and needed to call a friend of Karen's from high school. Unable to find her phone number, I called one of my girls, Darcie. When I was talking on the phone, I received another call. Lo and behold it was the friend I was trying to call. She had heard about the accident. As I was talking on the phone, I looked out the back door and there was a big fat raccoon, with big black circles around the eyes...Karen had donated her eyes. Wow!

Third, when I went back to work after her death, I was alone in the bakery and I caught the words of a song on the radio, which said "Just like a tattoo, I will always be with you." Karen and I had gotten a tattoo of a butterfly on our ankles- we called ourselves "the tattoo sisters,"

I figure God takes our loved ones from us so we can become closer to him. Karen will always be in our hearts. --  
**Roxanne Bubolz**

## Each Day, a Blessing

As a child, I grew up in a family of active and abusive alcoholics, including my father. We almost never attended church and when I was twelve our father left my mother, myself and my 5 brothers and sisters to care for ourselves. The day I graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I moved away from home to live with a family that offered me a job and a place to live.

As a young man I was able to work my way through high school, college, return from Viet Nam, get married and get a job and raise a family. I was able to do this with a lot of hard work, determination and yes ego. What I was not able to do however was to win my own battle with alcohol. It was a crushing day when I was 40 to surrender and fall on my knees and accept the gift of sobriety from God. Today I celebrate the gift of sobriety that I have been granted through no effort of my own. God was able to do for me what I was not able to do for myself.

For me today each day is a blessing and a gift as I have "lived life on the dark side of the moon". Today I can choose not to live in that darkness and thanks to God I know have a soul and that is a beautiful blessing to have.

***Bryce Larson***

## Amazing Bible Camp

My most memorable faith experience was attending Camp Bird in Crivitz. I attended it when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It was an amazing experience to see all the kids gather there and share their faith. Every morning we woke up to the sound of a bugle, and would gather in the mess hall for a daily devotion. The days were filled with games, swimming and many contests.

Every night, everyone at the camp would gather at the campfire to sing religious songs. My favorite was "Jacob's Ladder."

Camp could be a scary place, especially being away from home, but the counselors made me feel so comfortable. The experience of helping the camp run smoothly was not always fun, but I can look back at it and laugh about being on kitchen clean-up duty. As a 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grader, it wasn't fun, but the canoeing and campfires were the best!

***Joan Griffin***

## My Faith Promise

I grew up in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church in Collins. Our school consisted of two classrooms. We had daily devotions, Bible stories and many hymns, Bible verses, and passages out of Luther's Small Catechism. I joined Faith Lutheran when I married my husband, Guy.

One of my favorite faith stories is being a mentor here at Faith for my Godchildren Hunter and Trevor Griffin. When they were baptized, I promised to be involved in their faith journey. It has given me an opportunity to be part of their confirmation process. We are able to share our favorite Bible stories and Faith experiences. It made talking to the boys about their Faith and beliefs so comfortable.

I know they ask students to find someone who is not a family member to mentor them, but it has meant so much to me to follow through on my promise to bring them up in their faith, and to be there to help them understand our beliefs.

We need more time and ways to bond with our Godchildren throughout their faith journey. I hope that I have made their journey as memorable as it is for me. - ***Judy Valleskey***

## The Sailboat

It was a time in my early ministry when I was facing burnout as the result of taking on too much of the workload of the congregation. The dream came early one morning as I lay in that state between sleep and being awake.

I found myself on a small ship. I was working to keep the engine going – but it seemed like there was no use. It wouldn't run consistently. I looked around and saw all the people I cared about: my family, my friends, and the people in the congregation I was relating to at the time. As I looked beyond them, I discovered there were people from all over the world present there. I felt responsible for them all in some strange way I couldn't understand. I felt overwhelmed – a reflection of how I was feeling about my ministry and my life.

Then there came a voice: "Get up, Jim, and explore." As I did, I nearly ran into the mast holding a great sail. It was a sailboat! The message for me was clear. I was trying to keep a ship running that was firmly in the control of the winds of the Holy Spirit. . . .

That is the meaning of how we are to live our lives of faith. We are to allow God to direct us and guide us in the ways of his will and purpose. **Pastor Jim Rasmus**

## Crossroads

My faith journey is very diverse and consists of living in four states and six different towns. Each move provided an opportunity or a crossroad with many decision points. One decision was to find a church that provided our family with a good Christian foundation but also allowed growth spiritually. Our family took this opportunity to experience many different "organized religions." I found the differences in Christian churches typically were the manmade laws. What is common is the belief that Jesus Christ is our Savior and by His Grace we will have eternal life.

Twenty years have passed since landing in Manitowoc and calling Faith Lutheran church home. During this time I have grown spiritually and my batteries have been recharged through involvement with different boards, youth activities, and musically supporting Wednesday evening services. As I have grown older, I find my spiritual needs continue to change and recharging my spiritual batteries requires different inputs. I find myself at another crossroad in my faith journey.

Looking ahead I see multiple roads to take and each road provides different opportunities for growth and inputs to charge my batteries. I check my rearview mirror and am pleased with the roads traveled so far. I pray for God's guidance in choosing the next leg of my journey and am excited to experience what the Good Lord has in store for me along the way. **Greg Saueressig**

## My Faith Story

I believe you can always find good about something bad. When my grandfather passed on, my whole family was crushed. We didn't see it coming--it felt like the worst thing that could happen in life. My family had a very hard time and we all lost someone we loved very much. We all cried and missed him.

After a while, our family became closer and closer. That's the gift God gave us for hurting us. His gift was to bring us closer than we have ever been before. By bringing us together, dealing with hard times is now so much easier than you can ever imagine. God made us fall but then he picked us all back up together. We all stay closely in contact and see each other very often. I love God for helping us. Now our Dad and Grandfather and Great Grandfather are looking over us and giving us pennies to remind us. **Cheyenne Popp.**

## The Eyes of All

*The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season.  
Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.*  
--Psalm 145

This little passage from Psalm 145 was the favored table prayer of my grandfather George Garbisch, son of German immigrants, guitar player, WW I soldier and stalwart man of faith. From generation to generation, praying "The Eyes of All" has been passed down in our family, a much-loved faith heirloom.

Using the lilting King James English, we've shared it over campfire meals to the music of calling loons; blessed the food before Thanksgiving feasts around groaning tables; whispered it as a benediction over the bed of my dying father, and prayed it joyfully together during baptisms, weddings and confirmations.

"The Eyes of All" is perhaps the Bible's most simple and beautiful expression of abundant living-- the satisfaction of both physical needs and the deep stirrings of the soul, all given by a loving and all-knowing God in "due season." In it is both blessing and promise: As the body of Christ, how can we not trust God to open His hand and satisfy our desire to live out His love to every living thing. **Kim Bremer**

## Grandma's Faith Story

My faith story began when I was very young. The memories I have of my Swedish grandmother will always be a part of who I am. In her lifetime she buried three of her babies. Her son-in-law was killed in a work related accident, her three year old grandson died of diphtheria, my grandfather of cancer and then her daughter died of a brain tumor, leaving her to look after five girls. Her daughter-in-law was killed by a drunk driver. Through all of this she never wavered in her faith.

My mom, too, was a devoted Christian. She was deaf as well as having other health issues. Being an artist, she was able to lose herself in her beautiful paintings. Both my grandmother and mom loved the hymn "Children of the Heavenly Father." It was sung at my mom's and sister's double funeral.

I was blessed in my life to have a husband who shared my faith. We raised four children and learned the meaning of unconditional love and forgiveness, just as God has given this gift to us. Philippians 4:13 *'I can do everything through him, who gives me strength.'* This passage has been meaningful to me throughout my life, giving me courage and strength. **-Marge Klessig**

## Grandpa's Faith Story

I regularly attended Sunday School as a small child. But when my family moved to the Northwoods, church became much less important than making a living. As a family, we worked seven days a week building a resort and logging. Through high school, church was a Christmas and Easter thing that we did.

Then I met my wife Marge, graduated from college and started a family. Marge's faith brought me back to church. On moving to Manitowoc we joined First Lutheran Church. And I clearly remember Pastor Anderson saying that he loved trout fishing and while the serenity and beauty of a trout stream were pretty awesome, and some people said that fishing was their way of worshipping God, he found it very hard to concentrate on prayer while he's trying to catch a trout. I guess that's why you go to church on Sundays instead of fishing.

A few years later, while attending a Bethel Bible Study, the fact that we are saved by God's grace alone and that we can't work our way into heaven really hit me. As part of the conversation with our instructor, Nan, I remember asking, "You mean I can sin and do bad things, but if I can say and really mean I believe in God and Jesus Christ, I would still be saved?" Her reply was "yes, you would. But if you really believed in Christ, would you want to sin or would you want to try to please Him?" That question is something I keep coming back to in life. It has been a guide for my faith because I know I'm a sinner and always will be, but I know God will save me. WOW! -**Bob Klessig**

## A Musical Faith

I grew up the youngest of four girls on a farm in between Valders and Manitowoc. We were all baptized at Gjerpen church and my parents and I have been lifelong members of Faith Lutheran. We were raised with Christian beliefs and as with many of you, going to church services on Sunday mornings was not an option, it was a given.

Music seemed to be a big part of our lives in some fashion and at a young age I developed an interest as well. My parents sought to nurture that interest by seeing to it I was able to take piano lessons from second grade until a freshman in high school. Many years later at my eldest sister's encouragement, who also played organ here at Faith in her high school years, I took one year of organ lessons at Silver Lake College and have been playing organ for nearly twenty years now.

In spite of my Christian upbringing and religious beliefs I traveled some rocky roads throughout my life. It was at one of my lowest points a little over eight years ago when my Faith changed and it was through my music that happened. I had an enlightenment that everything was going to be all right and I was never going to be alone. And whatever path my life was to take, my Creator would be right by my side.

It was during that time that I regained a deep desire to offer my blessings to the Lord as he had given me and I found it easiest to do that through my music. I believe that nothing happens by chance. There is a purpose for everything and in some cases our troubles can lead us to a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior. I try to live each day being grateful for the many blessings I have and know that "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me". (Philippians 4:13) *Peggy Madson*

## The Road to Emmaus

*"Were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking to us on the road?" Luke 24:32*

I started to attend church (FLC) regularly with my family 37 years ago. Attending worship, participating in adult forum and teaching Sunday school for 13 years taught me a great deal. Twenty-two years ago I started reading a chapter a day out of the Bible as part of my daily morning meditation. The discipline gained by doing this has been rewarding. Several years ago a small group of men started a Bible study and what I am gaining today from sharing scripture with others is a broader perspective of scripture and a much deeper faith.

My favorite Bible story is the story of those believers walking the road to Emmaus in the last chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Faith is indeed a journey and one that builds, grows and burns as one deepens in faith and becomes closer to God.

My journey has been filled with work, pleasure, hardship, joy, roadblocks, good and generous people and an ever present and ever caring God. Learning to enjoy the journey and being willing to trust more in God is a challenging, frightening yet freeing and powerful journey. A journey that even though it started later in life for me is the most spiritually powerful journeying I have ever embarked upon. *-Bryce Larson*

## I Love You. That's All.

I don't consider myself an easy person to love. In fact, at times I can be downright difficult. Often I'm impatient, insecure, and judgmental. I have high expectations for myself and others and I tend to overreact.... a lot. Oh yeah...I also don't like to admit when I'm wrong. My hyper-awareness of my "difficultness" might be why I struggle so much with faith. How can God love all of that?!

My mom was also a difficult woman and a woman of faith--definitely not your ordinary saint. She had many weaknesses and admitted to only some of them. In fact, she once said, "I hope God lets people in heaven who have a hard time forgiving. Because I've tried, but I'm just not very good at it." In spite of those weaknesses, or perhaps because of them, she clung even tighter to God. During her 11-year battle with cancer, she prayed without ceasing and hoped when it seemed there was nothing to hope for. Her Bible and her journal were often by her side the last years of her life. In her journal she wrote to us, "I won't leave you until God calls me home. So when I go, you can know that I'm with Him."

That time came when I was sitting in the emergency room next to my mom's bed with my dad and sisters. We had just learned that the cancer would cause her heart to stop beating. While we sat digesting this news, our pastor asked my mom, "So Penny, is there anything you want to say to your children?" For a split second it was silent. In that moment of silence I started to think about all the ways that I had let my mom down. The fights we'd had, the words screamed in anger, the decision to move far away in the middle of her battle with cancer. I was consumed with feelings of unworthiness.

And then came her reply. She said, "I love them. I just want them to know that I love them." That's all. Nothing else. Here I was listing off in my head all the ways I had disappointed her, and all she was thinking about was how much she loved me.

That is how Jesus loves me. He doesn't look at me and see me for all my faults and failures. He doesn't measure me by what I do or don't do. He looks at me, and he sees his beloved. And he says.... I love you. That's all. Nothing else. *-Becky Scharnhorst*