

For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

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**The Holy Supper: A Taste of Heaven - p.6**

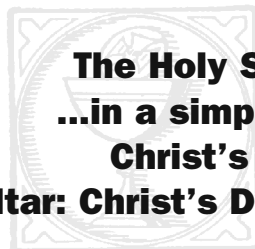
**...in a simple way to his household... - p.8**

**Christ's Body and Blood Saves Us - p.10**

**Sacrament of the Altar: Christ's Daily Food and Sustenance - p.12**

**Coming Home - p.14**

**In the Field - p.16**



  
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P R E S S

# CONTENTS



page 6

page 8



page 12



page 14



page 16

## For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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## FEATURES

### 3 From the President

### 6 The Holy Supper: A Taste of Heaven

by the Rev. Dr. William Weinrich  
Professor Historical Theology  
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

The Bread and the Wine are the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which He has commanded us to eat and to drink. The Lord's Supper is something concrete, particular, real; it is Body and Blood.

### 8 In a Simple Way to His Household

by Leonard Payton  
Chief Musician  
Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Austin, Texas

The Catechism teaches that the Sacrament is "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ," so that the soul self-evidently believes the words, "given and shed for you for the remission of sins."

### 10 Christ's Body and Blood Saves Us

by Kevin Leininger  
A Member of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Fort Wayne, Ind., and Chief Editorial Writer  
for the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel

Holy Scripture and confessional Lutheranism make it clear that the Lord's Supper is where God works His forgiveness.

### 12 Sacrament of the Altar: Christ's Daily Food and Sustenance

by the Rev. Prof. Lawrence Rast  
Professor Historical Theology  
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance to comfort the person whose heart feels too sorely pressed. The Supper gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

### 14 Coming Home

by Ron and Marge Shumaker  
Members of Grace Lutheran Church  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Ron and Marge Shumaker find the Lord and a new church home at a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation.

### 16 In the Field

by Pam Knepper  
Managing Editor  
*For the Life of the World*

Features the Rev. David Stechholz, Pastor at West Portal Lutheran Church, San Francisco, Calif.

Cover Photo: The cover photo features the Walther Chalice. Popular myth states that it is one of two ornate European chalices that were brought over to the United States in the 1830's by the Saxons. Photo by Concordia Publishing House from the collection of Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.

# ...in a simple way



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**“How can this man give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink?” the people asked in John 6. The catechism provides this hermeneutic simply by taking “this is my body” at face value and with no further comment. It teaches that the Sacrament is “the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,” so that the soul self-evidently believes the words, “given and shed for you for the remission of sins.”**

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I am writing as a dad, a dad with the world’s best wife and four kids strewn over ten years. Now with that kind of distance of age, what does it mean to teach the catechism to one’s family in a simple way? After all, the conventional orthodoxy of child growth and development looks at this picture and sees no solution. How odd! After all, this is a rather normal nuclear family. Were the reformers wrong to suppose that this thing was relevant to the entire family? Is there something inside the structure and nature of the catechism that causes us to shrink its application to the pastor meeting with junior high kids once a week during the school year?

As the Lord has granted me courage to embark on the adventure of simple fatherly catechesis, along with Band-Aids when I stub my toe and smelling salts when I faint, I have found that the catechism itself contains all the necessary pedagogical tools for such a diverse family. And nowhere does this become more apparent than in consideration of the capstone of the catechism—the Sacrament of the Altar. It is the last word on a complete hermeneutic of life, much less of Holy Scripture. It is a hermeneutic as relevant to my sixteen-year-old as to my six-year-old.

Our catechism times together are not grand, nor are they tightly structured. Most evenings we spend from five to fifteen minutes doing mostly rote memory with little or no commentary, not that commentary and explanation are necessarily bad. Rather, repeating the words over and over in exactly the same way elicits reflection at other times, reflection that results in personal discov-



eries. These are always the most thorough kind of learning. They bubble up seemingly spontaneously and unbidden. It is one of the ways the Holy Ghost calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, and keeps and sanctifies us in the true faith.

Once in a while, one of the kids will ask a clarifying question during catechism time that brings my rote memory program to a grinding halt. That’s OK. After all, isn’t this the permission given to the inquisitive boy in Deuteronomy 6?

Sometimes I will initiate some discussion. One night, a couple of years ago, we were contemplating coveting. What is coveting? Each child supplied thoughtful answers that clearly showed the weak points in their hearts. They had a strong grasp of how this sin works, all of them, that is, except for my then four-year-old son. His definition of coveting was “going potty on the carpet.” Needless to say, this has become a fixture in the family lore. This much, however,

# Way to his household...

By Leonard Payton

can be said for the little guy: On the basis of the other kids' answers, he knew that coveting was something bad, and for him, going potty on the rug was the worst thing he could invoke at the moment. I chose to defer an explanation of covetousness to a later date, knowing that with patience, he or some friend would craftily seek to get his neighbor's Matchbox cars or Beanie Babies or obtain them by a show of right. Then my little guy would see and understand the mechanics of this black sin and know more fully that he needs to hear the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

My ten-year-old daughter and six-year-old son ride to school with me each weekday morning. We do a small portion of the catechism along the way, perhaps two to five minutes. It was during one of these rides that my ten-year-old discovered the structure of the catechism, that the Law comes first, then the Gospel. She was quite pleased because she understands from repeated hearings and intimate knowledge of her own life that whatever else the Law does, it always accuses us, for we never obey it perfectly.

Now to the Eucharist. We understand that we live in a world that has largely bowed to the false god of empirical truth, to the god of rationalism, a god made after our own image. So much for the evidence of things not seen! There is a lot of pressure to drive our hermeneutics with that empiricism. Kids feel this even early on. And no matter how much we may shelter them, no matter what kind of schools we may have them attend, there is simply no avoiding the subtle attack empiricism levels on biblical faith. The ladder of speculation remains a sore temptation. Even when we are doing

theology, when we speak of "the fall" of our first parents, this very formulation contains a philosophic abstraction that misses something important, namely, that our first parents wanted to know more than God intended them to know. Such is our flesh that still wars in us today. The old Adam needs to drown and die daily with all sins and evil lusts, and among them is the lust to have clean explanations of those things our Father in Heaven has graciously, and for our well-being, hidden from us. The Formula of Concord meets these speculations head on, continually censuring them. The catechism meets them by providing a healthy diet, which engenders stable faith.

I have no idea how many times we have said, "it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine." "How can this man give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink?" the people asked in John 6. It was the perfect empirical question, yet the silence was deafening. Only those who didn't ask were still with Jesus at the end of the chapter. The catechism provides this hermeneutic simply by taking "this is My body" at face value and with no further comment. Of course, modern man will want to know how this can be. What he really needs to know is that it simply is because it stands written in God's Word. The catechism knows what it is and that body is body. Rationalism says, "but a body cannot do that," or "that body is out in heaven and, therefore, most expressly not on earth." My children answer, "but that body rose from the dead on the third day; bodies are not supposed to do that kind of thing; what's the big deal?" Is the body of Christ somewhere out in the Orion Nebulae? Has the Hubbell space

telescope sited the right hand of God? Of course not! There is more to that body than our minds can or should grasp.

A Bible teacher recently speculated that Christ somehow miraculously opened the door to the upper room (by the way, this was also Calvin's speculation in his commentary on Luke 24). My twelve-year-old daughter looked at me perplexed and said that the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost. For her, the simple reading of the biblical text was not that Jesus opened the door to walk in. After all, that is just what we would do. Rather, she understood it that somehow Jesus had mysteriously materialized in the room, and that to convince the disciples that He was not a ghost, but fully body, He ate a piece of fish in full view. Her catechetical theology helped her biblical theology, and her biblical theology helped her catechetical theology.

Good catechesis nurtures simple and steadfast faith while at the same time circumscribing speculation. It teaches that the Sacrament is "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ," so that the soul self-evidently believes the words, "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." This catechesis inculcates in us the child-like expectation of good things from our Heavenly Father so that we may be confident that the wicked foe will do us no harm; and when the day is through, that we may go to sleep at once and in good cheer; and that when our last hour has come, God will graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven where we will serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

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