



## From Pastor's Desk What does *The Hunger Games* teach us about sacrificial love?

By Rev. Jason M. Braaten

The setting of *The Hunger Games* Trilogy is a dystopian future set in what was once North America—think Roman coliseum gladiators meeting up with Big Brother in a post-apocalyptic alley. The atmosphere is godless and perhaps that's the overall point (though I haven't read too much about the author or her worldview to get a handle on this). Nevertheless, she's an engaging writer and tells a compelling story through a rich character development.

A recurring theme in all of the books is sacrificial love, sacrificing oneself for the sake of someone else. This is nothing extraordinary. Many

books develop this theme. The unique thing that author Suzanne Collins does; however, is to develop this theme not simply around characters coming to grips with giving one's own life up for another, but rather the main character's, Katniss Everdeen's, willingness to receive a gift of sacrificial love from someone else.

From the very beginning, Katniss incurs debt, or so she feels, with every sacrificial gift she receives. She feels she owes the giver. One of the other main characters, Haymitch Abernathy, her mentor for the games, even capitalizes on this very thing during the games to get Katniss to do what he wants her to do.

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In recalling a gift to her years before her selection for the Hunger Games by Peeta, the boy selected to represent the district with Katniss—two loaves of bread which Peeta gave to her when she was starving, and for which Peeta’s mother beat him severely—Katniss feels resentment, despite (or perhaps because of) the importance of those loaves in sustaining her and her family. Years later she reflects, “I feel like I owe him something, and I hate owing people.”

And when we think about it, this isn’t all that uncommon for us either. This is exactly how we feel when we receive a Christmas present and don’t have a gift for them in return. We feel we owe them. We feel like we’re in their debt. We feel as though we must repay them somehow. And so we get them something because we, like Katniss, hate owing people.

This is what works righteousness looks like in our own lives. It’s in all of us. And when we engage in it, we ourselves step into our own version of the Hunger Games arena. We step into a place where we’re fighting to live. We don’t want to die. And so the game makes us who we are. We aren’t allowed

then to get out of the games on our own terms (like Peeta wanted to). We must play the game. And when we do, it is the game that forms us. It’s the game changes us and makes who we are. And in the end, it’s the game that kills us. For there can be only one Victor of that game. There can be only One Who is righteous in and of Himself: Jesus Christ our Lord.

And this is the amazing part, by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, by His sacrificial love, He gives us the victory. He gives it to us as a gift, no strings attached, for free. This, at last, is what Katniss learns in the Trilogy. She finally learns to receive sacrificial love as a gift, not as something to be repaid but as something simply to be received and enjoyed.

Perhaps this is what Suzanne Collins had in mind all the time. Perhaps she set out to write a Trilogy that taught all of its readers to receive the sacrificial love of God in the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ, as it was in fact given—as a gift. You don’t owe him anything, just sit back and enjoy what’s been given.



## The Book of the Month Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood

What does it mean to be called as a husband, a wife, a parent, a child?

How does the grace of the gospel impact how we carry out these particular callings?

How does God’s presence address the struggles that our own family faces?

Gene Veith joins forces with his daughter Mary Moerbe to explore these kinds of questions in light of

Christian vocation and its applications for family life. They show how the Christian faith is lived out precisely in our ordinary relationships, and how a biblical understanding can equip us to move away from common confusions and dysfunctions to persevere in love.

Written with sensitivity and wisdom, *Family Vocation* addresses the perennial problems and joys of family life and provides a compelling paradigm for creating loving families in the face of cultural pressure.

## From the President God Works for All Good

By Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

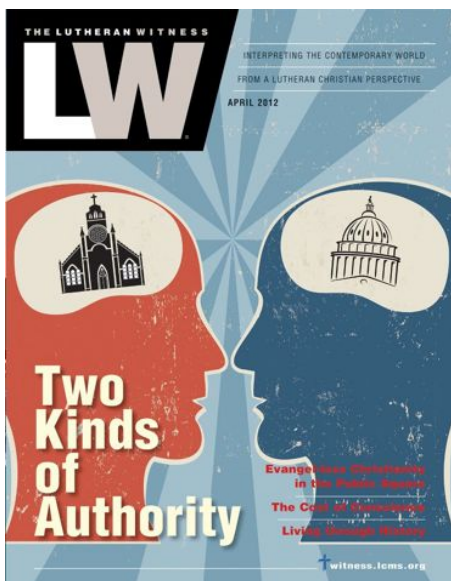
Christians . . . are able to swallow and devour whatever evils confront them and confidently to expect a thousand advantages for one disadvantage or loss.” Thus Luther lectured on Genesis where Joseph told his brothers, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20). So it goes with the church in this life. Quipped Luther, “We see only groanings, tears, troubles, and oppression of the poor; we see the devil’s behind; we do not see the face of God.” And yet just as God Himself worked all for good in the life of Joseph, St. Paul and in the cross of Jesus, so He works all for the good of the church and the Gospel. God is at work in it all, but this remains a matter of faith, not sight.

Things got convoluted very quickly (and intentionally) during and after my testimony before the House Committee on Government Oversight on Feb. 16. I stepped into that “monkey cage” for one reason: The Health and Human Services provision requiring church-owned and related institutions to provide contraceptives (including drugs used intentionally to kill life in the womb) is a clear violation of the First Amendment rights of religious people. Moreover, even though our Concordia Health Plan is “grandfathered” in the policy so that



we are not forced to provide such drugs to our 50,000 participating church workers and their families this very provision freezes our health plan

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in perpetuity. In essence, we are stuck between very narrow walls and no longer have the freedom to make the best economic choices for the benefit of our congregations and workers. This, too, is a violation of our religious freedoms.

The bologna came fast and furious. I refused to take the bait when Republicans tried to get me to carte blanche condemn the Obama administration. The Democrats created a sideshow, which worked. The media went on a feeding frenzy. The issue was soon framed in terms of “women’s access to healthcare.” My photo (along with the four other clergy on the panel) was shown far and wide and used by political opportunists with the most vile of rhetoric. The caption: “The Church does not care about women.” No argument in the hearing was truly heard. In fact, our antagonists weren’t even in the room. They were busy running out and grabbing the next sheet of talking points to lob the next grenade.

Regrets? None. The issue is simple. We are not telling the government not to provide drugs or healthcare for women. We are not pushing for legislation to limit access to anything. Our own health plan does provide medications for specific health needs (which in other cases are used as contraceptives). I would argue that contraceptives (which the LCMS does not reject out of hand) and abortion-causing drugs are as available as bottled water in this culture of death. The “accommodation” offered by the president is a red herring. “Churches and their institutions won’t pay for offensive medications; their insurers will.” Oh? Most Catholic health plans are self-insured, just as the Concordia Health Plan is. At the end of the day, the issue is purely and simply about religious freedom.

The government is seeking to narrow and redefine religious freedom down to merely what churches do in houses of worship, and not a matter of their health, educational and other institutions.



The U.S. Constitution is on our side. But that isn’t what gives me solace.

“Therefore let us learn not to follow our own thoughts or to measure and understand by our own counsels our misfortunes or works and experiences. . . . Before the world Christ is killed, condemned, and descends into hell. But before God this is the salvation of the whole world from the beginning all the way to the end” (Luther).

I was delighted to be ridiculed by the world. And I am especially delighted to know that precisely through cross, trial and ill-report, God works His good things. Count on it.

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# Education Corner

## October Baby

By Ed and Ruthie Szeto

*October Baby* is a touching movie about a young woman who, upon learning that she was adopted after a failed abortion attempt, embarks on a journey to find her birth mother. The movie's tagline, "Every life is beautiful," plays off of Psalm 139: "For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (vv. 13–14).

The main character, nineteen-year-old Hannah, collapses on stage during a play. After a series of medical tests, her doctor and parents tell her of her premature birth and adoption after a failed abortion. Hannah's doctor explains that her life-long and current medical issues (epilepsy, asthma, etc.) are related to her traumatic birth.

Hannah struggles with anger and betrayal at her parents for concealing her adoption and the circumstances of her birth. At the same time, she struggles to understand who she is, where she came from and why her mother would make the decision to end the life of her own child.

With little information to go on other than her birthplace of Mobile, Ala., Hannah embarks on a road trip with her best friend, Jason, hoping to find something that will lead her to her birth mother and answers to her questions.

Hannah finds her birth mother (a very strong and moving performance by Shari Rigby) but is devastated when she receives no answers and no happy ending. Instead, she is rejected and denied. Defeated and lost, Hannah is brought home by her father.

Although she and her parents are Christians and Hannah's father finally apologizes to her for hiding the truth, Hannah is stuck in her anger and pain. Searching for something she can't name,



Hannah visits a Roman Catholic church. A caring priest tells her that what she's looking for can't be found on a road trip or in a cathedral but only on the cross. He reminds her of God's forgiving love and the blessings that come with forgiving others.

In this forgiveness, Hannah finds her way back home, forgiving her adoptive parents and, ultimately, giving her birth mother the gift of her forgiveness. This provides the most compelling moment of the movie as her mother faces the reality of the choice she made 20 years earlier.

### Why we like this movie

Despite some of the weak dialogue and superfluous plot devices used to move the story forward, *October Baby* is a credible and refreshing movie with beautiful cinematography and some terrific performances. The primary themes of forgiveness and redemption (along with its clearly pro-life, Christian message) will be satisfying to

Christian viewers. Conversely, secular critics and those squarely in the pro-choice camp posit that the movie is trite, melodramatic and unbelievable because of its basic premise of a child surviving an abortion.

One of the strongest performances in the movie is by Jasmine Guy. Guy portrays the nurse, Mary, who was present the day of Hannah's mother's abortion attempt. Most of the truth about the reality of abortion comes from Mary's re-telling of the story of Hannah's mother, the abortion attempt and Hannah's subsequent birth. "It was tissue," Mary says to Hannah, explaining what the culture led her to believe about the abortions she assisted with. "Tissue that couldn't survive. Non-viable tissue."

Mary's penetrating line, "When you hear something enough times, somehow you start to believe it" also explains much of our culture's rapid shift toward the acceptance of the incomprehensible: women killing their pre-born children while calling it a personal choice.

The additional themes of post-abortion healing, chivalry, adoption, sexual purity, obeying the

Fourth Commandment and parental sacrifice make *October Baby* a life-affirming movie that does not disappoint.

Shari Rigby, who portrays the birth mother, is post-abortive but had not revealed that to anyone until the writers sent her the film's manuscript. Her heartfelt revelation during the closing credits gives us the final "ah" moment in a movie that has already delivered.

Playing a role that so closely mirrored her own life helped to bring "complete healing in the moment. That wasn't acting," she said. Instead, it gave her a chance to find comfort and assurance from Christ. "It's over," she said, and "[I've] been forgiven."

For more information on the movie, go to [www.octoberbabymovie.net](http://www.octoberbabymovie.net). An additional resource containing short messages can be found at "Every Life is Beautiful" ([www.everylifeisbeautiful.com](http://www.everylifeisbeautiful.com)).

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# Facts and Figures; Dates and Times

## Greeters List

6 May Joan Vukelich – West  
 Laverl Byers – East  
 13 May Becky Kappes – West  
 Tim & Teri Pollock – East  
 20 May Harold & Irene Wattjes – West  
 Donna & Gunnar Campbell – East  
 27 May Jim Dyer – West  
 Joan Vukelich – East  
 3 Jun Joan Vukelich – West  
 Laverl Byers - East  
 10 Jun Becky Kappes – West  
 Tim & Teri Pollock – East  
 17 Jun Harold & Irene Wattjes – West  
 Donna & Gunnar Campbell – East  
 24 Jun Jim Dyer – West  
 Joan Vukelich – East

## Coffee Committee

May Arleigh & Mary Jane Jones  
 Jun Pastor & Lauren Braaten  
 Jul Ruth Sims  
 Aug Josh & Jaimee Whitson  
 Sep Laverl Byers

## Altar Committee

6 May Carol Munson  
 13 May Carol Munson  
 17 May (Ascension) Pastor Braaten  
 20 May Donna Campbell  
 27 May Donna Campbell  
 3 Jun Janet Stumeier  
 10 Jun Janet Stumeier  
 17 Jun Janet Stumeier  
 24 Jun Wanda Long

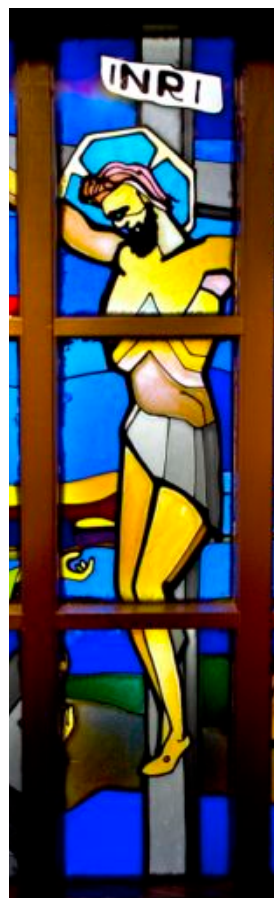
## Elder On Duty – Communion

6 May Greg Nau  
 13 May Greg Nau  
 17 May (Ascension) Geof Danielson  
 20 May Geof Danielson  
 27 May Geof Danielson  
 3 Jun Jack Appleby  
 10 Jun Jack Appleby  
 17 Jun Jack Appleby  
 24 Jun Josh Whitson

ATTENDANCE			OFFERINGS		
Date	Saturday	Sunday	General	Missions	Building
1 Apr	19	108	\$3,615.10	\$0.00	\$180.00
5 Apr	60	0	\$427.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
6 Apr	54	0	\$1,557.76	\$0.00	\$0.00
8 Apr	13	157	\$235.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
15 Apr	18	90	\$2,547.85	\$0.00	\$0.00
22 Apr	21	84	\$497.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
29 Apr	22	89	\$1,901.08	\$0.00	\$0.00
Subtotal	277	528	11015.01	\$0.00	\$180.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>805</b>		<b>\$11,015.01</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$180.00</b>

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Immanuel's stained glass window in the Narthex.