



## 2018 CONVENTION WRAP-UP

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# SET IN STONE

Newsletter of the 20th Regular Convention of the Mid-South District, LCMS • June 28-30, 2018 • Memphis, Tennessee

## Re-Cap of Significant Resolutions from the 2018 Mid-South District Convention

Delegates to the 20th Regular Convention of the Mid-South District were presented a number of resolutions for consideration. Some resolutions requested reaffirmation of key ministries, partnerships and principles, while others called for significant change to be voted on. Following is a brief summary of some of the most noteworthy resolutions from the Convention:

**Requesting Synod to Move Ordination Upon Completion of SMP Four-Year Program:** By a large majority (92.1%), delegates supported submitting an overture to the 2019 Synodical Convention to restructure the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program to require students to complete four years of instruction prior to ordination, rather than the current two year requirement. The resolution noted that although the current SMP program structure does require a total of four years of instruction, the provision of allowing ordination after two years has resulted in a less-thorough education status prior to ordination, and removal from the roster for some SMP workers who did not complete, for various reasons, the final two years after ordination. The overture to be submitted to the upcoming Synodical Convention would make the four-year requirement effective for students enrolling in the SMP program after the 2020 academic year and would create an "SMP Vicar" designation after one year of education is completed. It also proposes that Synod request the Council of Presidents and Synod's Pastoral Formation Committee to bring further recommended improvements for the SMP program to the 2022 Convention of the Synod.

**Encouraging Scriptural Teaching Concerning Creation:** By a 93.3% majority vote, delegates voted to request the 2019 Synod Convention to reaffirm the Scriptural doctrine of creation from nothing in six days, as written in Genesis. This would provide an echo to what the Synod has already said in The Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod "Of Creation" (1932); and previous CTCR documents "Creation in Biblical Perspective" (1970) and "The Creator's Tapestry" (2009) as the Synod and its people speak God's Word to a sinful world that doesn't recognize its Creator and too often looks to macroevolution, which pre-supposes death before and apart from sin, for answers to questions about life and its origins. This memorial also asks the Synod include in its evangelism, outreach, and educational materials an emphasis on the importance of the narrative and doctrine of creation (God's First Article gifts), for an appropriate apologetic, witnessing explanation to those with non-biblical world-views, that they may hear of God's solution of redeemed life and a new creation in Christ.

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## Greetings Shared from Madagascar

In the closing session of the 2018 Convention, delegates heard from Rev. Joseph Randrianasolo of the Lutheran Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship (LIME) in Madagascar. He spoke of the many blessings that have resulted from the ongoing partnership between the Mid-South District and the Confessional Malagasy Lutheran Church. The relationship has been especially positive for LIME, where Rev. Randrianasolo is Rector. The Institute was established to offer Malagasy adults (both lay and clergy) the opportunity for advanced studies as part of a three-year curriculum which includes Biblical courses. The Mid-South District is pleased to be part of strengthening this ministry and affirmed its continued support through a resolution adopted at the Convention.



## Rev. Jerry Stobaugh: *A Deacon's Path to Pastoral Ministry*

"It's still sinking in to be called 'Pastor'. For ten years I've been called 'Deacon', and suddenly to be called Pastor—!" marveled Rev. Jerry Stobaugh, who on March 10th became the first deacon to be ordained in the Mid-South District through the SMP colloquy process.

"I would encourage anybody who has an inkling—or even if you don't—to consider this process. Trust me—I never envisioned myself being a pastor, and I never experienced Martin Luther's thunderbolt! God opened this pathway and I've walked down it; but it's only been by God's grace and with his help."

Born and raised a Lutheran, Stobaugh attended Lutheran services every week until he went into military service in the U.S. Navy, where he was often stationed in locations where no Lutheran church was nearby. "We did attend chapel through the military, where we occasionally ran into an LCMS Lutheran pastor, but not often. So I actually have a wide exposure to a variety of different protestant denominations."

Following his retirement after 20 years in the service—"mostly on islands"—he and his family chose a location "where the roads actually went someplace." That turned out to be Memphis, where he attended Christ the King, and found a home in nearby Fayette County.

Soon afterwards, in 2005, the new Holy Spirit Lutheran Church was planted in Oakland, which he has attended for 13 years.

With no conscious idea of pursuing a potential calling as pastor, Stobaugh was nonetheless interested when he first heard about the deacon program. "I'm just somebody who likes to learn things," he explained. "This program gives you seminary-type training in various areas of the church, and I took the first class in 2008."

It just happened to be on Outreach/Evangelism. "That was one area where even the word scares me," he admitted. "It scares most people, I think."

He learned from Pastor Kris Morris, however, that rather than aggressively buttonholing people on the street to recruit or convert them, evangelism is simply proclaiming the good news. "You don't have to make somebody else make the decision that Christ has died for them. With that focus, evangelism isn't quite as scary. "You simply speak the good news and let Christ and his Word do the work."

From 2008 through 2013, he continued taking classes, more from a pure desire for more knowledge and understanding of Lutheran doctrine than any ambition to rise through the ranks. The absence of available instructors within the district slowed his progress somewhat, but now that the District has developed a partnership with the Pacific Northwest District, who offers classes that are conducted online, that barrier has been removed.

When Holy Spirit's pastor, Rev. Josh Willadsen, accepted a call to Bethel Lutheran Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas in 2013, Stobaugh was just one class short of completing the licensed lay deacon program. Guest pastors and an interim pastor came each Sunday to conducted services while Stobaugh moved forward to complete his last course, and thus qualified to serve Holy Spirit as a deacon-led congregation in 2015.

"We are a small congregation, and we were content to operate as such for the last two years," he noted. "But we truly believe that, although we've had a couple of families move away when they retired and sold their business, God put us here 13 years ago for a reason. We have enough given to support our building and pay our bills and support the church in that way, so we are still in the community. Many of our members will not go anywhere else to go to church on Sunday, so I believe we are providing God's services—His gifts are being brought to the people on a weekly basis."

So, when the Synod passed its further resolution in 2016, and the path to SMP ministry was clear, Stobaugh made plans to attend the week-long intensive course of study held here in the District during the final week of June 2017.

"If I had been a lay licensed deacon for ten years, I could have taken a different path to general ordination rather than Specific Ministry," he pointed out. But his church clearly needed him to bloom where they were planted.

The course included discussions on Lutheran identity and scripture interpretation or hermeneutics, and was conducted by Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Mueller, First Vice President of LC—MS, and seminary professors from Concordia-St. Louis and CTS-Fort Wayne.

"It was most interesting," Stobaugh recalled, who had seen online videos of seminary classes. "It was a great benefit for those of us who don't have the time or the resources to actually go to the seminary, but still we can see and hear what the professors are teaching and how they are teaching."

"Having done some instructing in the military, I appreciate people who can teach well, and they have some fantastic quality instructors at both seminaries."

At the end of the week, Stobaugh and four of his fellow pastoral candidates submitted their packages for the SMP colloquy.

It took several more months of waiting before the regional colloquy meeting was scheduled in December, including Synod First Vice President Mueller, President Paavola, District First Vice President Chuck Neugebauer, and two other District pastors.

When the colloquy date arrived, there were naturally some moments of nervous anticipation: "I was afraid it was going to be one of those 'stump the chump' type interviews," Stobaugh admitted. "But the word 'colloquy' really means 'conversation' and that's what the interview was—a conversation. They had read my packet, the sermons I had submitted, my letters of recommendation from my congregation, from Pastor Mark Goble (my supervising pastor), and they just asked a question and we talked about it. They asked me about areas I thought I needed help in, and I volunteered those things—like marriage counseling. I had done counseling in the military, but it's a lot different than counseling a marriage. I've been married for 40 years, and I kind of know 'Yes, Dear,' but I felt there was probably a little more to it..."

Ultimately, when colloquy concluded, "I didn't come out feeling beat up—I came out feeling encouraged by the questions and their comments. It was a lot less fearful than what I had dreaded."

The Synodical colloquy then met in January or February of this year and, following their evaluation, each of the candidates received a letter from the Synod, and met with Dr. Paavola to decide on his ordination dates.

Stobaugh stressed that since he and former deacon Jim Belles went through the process together, it was pure happenstance that Stobaugh was first to be ordained, with Belles' ordination following just two weeks later, delayed for personal reasons of convenience.

His path toward ordination took just under two years; and, in the process, during classes, he recalls not only learning a lot, but establishing friendships and relationships that he'll continue to cherish through the years.

"I believe strongly that it was a God-given movement by the Synod to offer this opportunity and bring us into conformity with our Lutheran confessions; and I praise God that I've been part of it."

For those yet to pursue SMP ministry, the path will be still easier, he believes, because classes are offered now on a regular schedule and available online, without the difficulty and expense of coordinating travel to a central site convenient to both Mid-South and Pacific Northwest candidates.

His enthusiasm grew as Stobaugh described the new and expanding educational opportunities technology is making available within our own district, like the online Tuesday night study for deacons and people like himself, who are not seminary-trained pastors.

"Pastors from across the District volunteer, and they go through pericope readings for upcoming Sunday services," he explained. "The District office sends out information to all licensed lay deacons and whomever else is on the list of interested parties, in the form of an email that includes a go-to-meeting link. You click on that on Tuesday night at 6:30 p.m. to participate, as the pastor shares great information about the original language, what the feel is of the service for that day, or what is the main theme and what should be mentioned or stressed in delivering these readings."

"I tune in to it every Tuesday, because it's for everybody. This is a great thing—we have technology and I think we can use it to further enhance everybody's ability to study the Word of God."

"I've been blessed," he adds reflectively. "I learn more and more—and the more I learn, the more I learn what I don't know. It all goes back to my initial desire to learn more about the Lutheran denomination, its confessions,

## Opening Worship Offering Announced

The offering from the Convention's Opening Worship Service raised over **\$6,700** for the District's education debt fund, providing financial assistance to Mid-South pastors and commissioned church workers who are burdened with significant educational debt. This total included District Sunday offerings from a number of congregations. Many thanks to all who shared their financial gifts in support of this important fund.



*The Ordination and Installation of Rev. Jerry Stobaugh was held at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Oakland, TN in March. Rev. Stobaugh is shown in the center with (L to R) Rev. Josh Willadsen, President Roger Paavola, Rev. Mark Goble, Rev. Jim Belles and Deacon and SMP Candidate Jeremy McDonald.*

## Re-cap of Significant Resolutions *(continued)*

**Affirming Church Planting:** With overwhelming support (92.6%), delegates voted to affirm the need for the Mid-South District's Church Planting efforts, citing the Synodical goal of establishing 2000 new LCMS ministries by the year 2020, as well as the current Synod-wide shortfall in progress toward the goal. The resolution emphasized partnerships with and encouragement of congregations, pastors and circuits which initiate and support church planting efforts that uphold Holy Scripture and Lutheran doctrine. The resolution also cited the Mid-South District's long history of establishing new ministries that focus on reaching the lost with the bold witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For a complete look at the resolutions presented, as well as the voting results for each, please visit the Convention Page of the Mid-South District's website ([mid-southlcm.org](http://mid-southlcm.org)). Thank you to Rev. John Gierke, Secretary of the Mid-South District, for his input in the resolution summaries shared here.

## A Dog's Life... of Love and Service: LCC K9 Comfort Dogs Are On Call

Never underestimate God—nor the power of his amazing creations. We understand so little of his miracles, often failing to recognize their potential. Fortunately, however, we are beginning to penetrate some of the mysteries surrounding one of his most beloved creatures—the dog; and the more we learn, the more impressed we are by its unsuspected powers and abilities—and its amazing gift for empathy and outreach to those suffering the shock of grief, loss, and senseless victimization.

Lutheran Church Charities, LLC, understands that gift well, however, and harnessed it in August of 2008, when they established the K9 Comfort Dog Ministry, based on the unique, calming nature and skills of purebred Golden Retrievers. The Comfort Dogs provide a bridge for compassionate ministry, their website notes, “opening doors for conversation about faith and creating opportunities to share the mercy, compassion, presence and proclamation of Jesus Christ.”

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There’s no question that these dogs are working animals, carefully prepared for their job through 2,000 hours of training that enables them to interact calmly and peaceably with people of all ages and circumstances who are suffering and in need.

Known fondly as the “Tennessee Bookends,” Comfort Dog Job—based at Christ the King, Memphis—and Jewel—based at Christ Our Savior, Loudon, Tenn.—serve from opposite ends of a lengthy state. But they also live up to their title in another sense: like bookends, they help hold things together for individuals whose lives are changed drastically by disaster.

Whether serving every day in their communities, or responding elsewhere in times of disaster and crisis, the dogs are trained to bring comfort to all those

affected, including first responders and volunteers in service. They provide an oasis of peace—the touch of warm, soft, fur that begs to be petted, and calm, tranquil eyes—amid the jagged edges and broken shards of pain and loss. (Jumping, barking, and licking are discouraged by the dogs’ intensive schooling.)

The dogs inspire us to marvel at God’s wisdom as we observe them, recognizing insights and behaviors that seem to be designed expressly for humans in need, and wondering how much of their “on-the-job” interaction is trained, and how much comes from their hearts.

Recent research tells us that the emotional bonds they form with humans cause those hearts to accelerate from the stress of separation, and to return to normal when reunited; some human-canine partners even develop matching, synchronized heart rates that beat as one.

No other animal—not even those closest to us genetically—can adjust their behavior by ‘seeing’ and perceiving from a human perspective, as laboratory tests repeatedly record in canine experiments.

And although service dogs are trained, even some untrained companion dogs instinctively sense human weaknesses and choose to warn and protect their loved one against periods of vulnerability that medical science cannot diagnose, predict, nor understand. They consciously moderate their pace, control their strength, and limit their exuberance around the weak, the helpless, and the innocent.

Those who know Job and Jewel best agree that sometimes the dogs’ instinctive outreach efforts toward a particular person clearly exceed what their training has taught.

Barbara Schmitt, from Christ the King, serves as Job’s facilitator and scheduler—and holds the official title of “Top Dog”. She notes that the comfort dogs do instinctively sense where there’s a need. Although they’re commanded to lean into people who visibly need the contact, the dogs show uncanny ability to identify those who need their comfort less obviously, and even exhibit intelligent disobedience in order to do the work for which they were trained.



### A Very Special Gathering

*After the final Convention session, Mrs. Pat Paavola, wife of President Dr. Roger Paavola, hosted a luncheon for the wives of pastors. This was the second Pastors’ Wives Luncheon hosted by Mrs. Paavola at a District Convention. She also coordinates annual retreats for the wives of pastors, providing unique opportunities for fellowship and encouragement for this special group of ladies.*

On a visit to a GriefShare support group, Job focused on a woman and homed in on her to the extent of ignoring others present. Job’s handler later learned from the session leader that the woman in question had just lost her son to an overdose and was experiencing the rawest form of grief.

Serving in the aftermath of the Parkland school shooting, Job disobeyed his command to stay, repeatedly getting up and going to interact with one isolated boy, despite repeated corrections. A teacher advised that the boy truly “needed” comfort. It wasn’t till later that the handler learned that the boy had been shot in the attack, but survived, while many of his friends had died; he was suffering terrible distress as he wrestled with the “Why me? Why didn’t I die like my friends?” question.

Steve and Judy, two of Jewel’s handlers, have witnessed similar situations. Steve notes that they arise at odd and unexpected times—and for sometimes unknown reasons. But God knows—and sometimes they learn, too:

One day at a hospital, when Jewel had been inexplicably uncooperative and persisted in mild misbehaviors, she suddenly switched into “perfect dog” mode for a visit to one particular patient. Her behavior was perplexing—till they later learned that the gentleman for whom Jewel was suddenly on her best behavior had died the day following her visit. Did Jewel know? Did the dying patient somehow convey his urgent need for her peaceful presence?

There’s no question, they all agree, that the dogs have a sixth sense, and respond differently at times. They “know” things we can’t perceive. Perhaps God speaks to them in voices we can’t hear.

Although the dogs are most often deployed separately, and make a lot of local visits, they both went to Parkland after the school shooting; Job went to Kentucky for the school shooting there; Jewel joined him in visiting with grieving family, friends, and survivors from the November 2016 Chattanooga school bus crash.

Job has been “employed” by CTK for a year and a half—two years in October. He’s been deployed to major disasters four times, but works daily at local and regional nursing homes and hospitals, and also visits GriefShare support group sessions, autistic preschoolers, the homeless, and others in need.

He lives with caregivers, and has 10 CTK handlers who take turns accompanying him on his visits. Each has to learn how to issue the 40 commands Job



*Comfort Dogs Job (L) and Jewel are affectionately known as the “Tennessee Bookends,” serving from opposite ends of the state.*  
PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROLINE JOHNSON

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## A Deacon’s Path to Pastoral Ministry *(continued)*

and what it stands for. That’s why I originally went into the deacon program—and when I got done, I knew I had a lot more to learn.”

What’s different—or difficult—about being a pastor, now, instead of a deacon?

“When I first started doing sermons, or even leading the worship, it was not scary or challenging, because I had been used to standing in front of people as an instructor and teacher. What really got my knees to knocking was preparing the communion: blessing the elements for communion. It gets me—and it still affects me—how unworthy I am as a man to do this. And yet God commands I do this so that the people can receive his gifts. That—and proclaiming absolution—are two of the areas that, as a pastor, I am still in awe about: performing those functions as gifts for the people of the church.”

His responsibilities for Holy Spirit remain largely the same: he visits elderly members and even non-members at nursing homes to make sure they have communion and hear the Word of God; he guides Wednesday night Bible studies at Holy Spirit and also an “inherited” Bible study originally implemented by Trinity Lutheran at Lutheran Village on Covington Pike—ironically held in the apartment of a Presbyterian. “God’s Word gets around,” Stobaugh smiled. “I think she’s learned some things; she’s very open to what we have to say.”

His past exposure to other faiths has clearly made him comfortable in keeping such outreach opportunities appropriately joyful and low-pressure—like the Baptist friend who worries about “getting right with God”.

“Sam, don’t worry about it! I keep telling him,” said Stobaugh. “God has made you right with Him!”

In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, Stobaugh continues his full-time work for Collierville-based Helena Agri-Enterprises, where he serves in the IT department as a software engineer specializing in middleware.

He and his wife live Fayette County, Tenn., and have two grown sons living in Arkansas and Nebraska. He considers himself blessed to have been brought up a Lutheran and to have this opportunity to be a servant of God and provide God’s gifts to others.

His advice to others contemplating the pathway to pastoral ministry: “If you even have the inkling—step out. If you’re unsure—step out. You’ll be blessed beyond all measure and God will make things happen that you never could imagine.”

## A Dog's Life... (continued)

understands, and must reinforce the relationship and periodically remind him that they are the "alphas" in the partnership.

The dogs are always in training, Barbara explains, and they go each year with handlers to a Comfort Dog conference for refresher training, where they are observed by the experts.

Steve confirmed that each of Jewel's handlers also goes to Chicago for two days of training with the LCC program experts, but agrees that "we're like the Navy SEALs—we train every day!"

Judy points out that Jewel has 12 different handlers who take turns working with her each day of the week, but agrees that her regular work (like visits to assisted living and schools) also qualifies as training.

Jewel has been serving through Christ Our Savior for four years, and has responded to about nine disaster missions, including the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, the Baton Rouge Police shooting, several floods, a Nashville convenience store shooting, the Parkland school tragedy, and the recent Great Mills High School shooting in Maryland.

Judy speaks of the Orlando shooting aftermath, where Jewel visited one of the shooting victims in the hospital, and she points to a photo of the same victim—Angel Santiago—hugging Jewel with a huge smile during their reunion a year later.

Both Job's spokesperson and Jewel's two handlers mentioned experiencing what Steve identified as "God moments"—where it becomes clear that God has orchestrated a meeting and a connection with a person in great need.

Steve shares one such moment in Nashville last year, where a convenience store worker had been killed in a shooting. "Jewel was present during the visitation, and the widow's sister later asked if Jewel could be allowed to sit next to the widow during the funeral service, which she did."

Jewel was there following the Baton Rouge police shooting, too, and was asked by the widow of a fallen officer to stand at the back of the chapel during visitation. For five hours, Jewel greeted and shared comfort with the endless stream of police officers who came to pay their respects to fellow officers killed in the line of duty—forming the legendary "sea of blue".

Two little girls wearing black jumpers—daughters of a slain officer—were given stuffed "comfort dogs" of their own on that occasion, as a reminder of the comfort they experienced from Jewel's peaceful presence.

The most profound "God moments" come unexpectedly—when one feels His presence and recognizes His intervention with a sense of awe. Judy describes her own such moment: at the beginning of each of her visits with Jewel to an assisted living facility, "I pray that God will put in our way the people who are in need," she explains.

At the end of one visit, an unknown man approached Jewel as she and Judy were leaving the building. "God put him in my way," she says confidently. This was a man, she learned, who received no visitors—a man who loved and still misses his own dogs, and drew special comfort from Jewel's attention. He is now there, waiting to see her, every Wednesday when they visit.

Sometimes, Judy admits, it is hard not to take on the emotional issues of those whom Jewel visits, and to refrain from responding on a personal level to the pain and suffering and difficult conditions and tragic lives of those they encounter. Steve refers to it as "Compassion Fatigue"—a state in which it becomes easy to relate too much to those who are suffering.

The danger, apparently, is not developing a hard shell, but just the opposite. "It gets harder instead of easier," Judy shares, "after repeated exposures to these kinds of situations."

Stress affects the Comfort Dogs as well, Barbara explains. "The dogs do absorb emotions; during their effort to restrain their natural inclination to express emotions, their cortisol levels build up, and they have to play hard afterward to work it out—like humans who are under similar stress for a long period."

Some people ask if Job is "not feeling well" because he lays so calmly and patiently on his mat in the midst of groups of people and passing pedestrians, but that's the result of his training, says Barbara. "Take off the vest, and he's just a regular, high-energy dog who plays with a tennis ball like any other dog."

But it's also clear that the Comfort Dogs enjoy their work, recognize the need for their presence, and even fret from the boredom if they're off the job for an extended period.

"Job loves to work," says Barbara. "He gets fidgety and irritable if he's idle for too long—like many people do. He gets a lot out of his work; he 'feels' for others."

The dogs often serve as a bridge—breaking the ice with people who might otherwise be unapproachable. "Sometimes we talk to them; and sometimes the dog's comfort is all they need," Judy finds.

Job and Jewel's partners have seen the power of their love at work, and encourage persons of any faith to remember their Comfort Dogs. "Any time you feel the dogs can be a blessing, please call us," Steve encourages. "These are non-denominational dogs. They are happy to share their love with anyone!"

Perhaps that, too, is part of the lesson dogs teach us: they exhibit Christ-like unconditional love, serving not just as a source of comfort to the bereaved, but as an example to the rest of us of not only patient, but joyful, acceptance of God's will, and ready forgiveness for even the grossest neglect and cruelty.

That amazing lesson is aptly illustrated by the Wendy Francisco "G-o-D & D-o-G" YouTube video that became an internet sensation in 2009. The song (hear and see it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m381J7WsE2A>) reminds us that "God thought up and made the dog; Dog reflects a part of God...In my human frailty, I can't match their love for me."

The LCC Comfort Dog Ministry has placed over 130 K9 Comfort Dogs in more than 20 states, and the organization has recently developed specialized programs in support of law enforcement and family members (LCC K9 Police Ministry), and our veterans, active military, and their families (LCC Kare-9 Military Ministry).

There are currently only two LCC Comfort Dogs in the Mid-South District, and they are sorely needed in other parts of the District. To learn more about establishing an LCC Comfort Dog ministry through your church, visit [LCC@LutheranChurchCharities.org](mailto:LCC@LutheranChurchCharities.org) or call (866) 455-6466.

To schedule a visit from Job or Jewel, contact Christ the King (901) 682-8404 or Christ Our Savior (865) 458-9407.

### THANK YOU Set In Stone Team!

Many thanks are extended to the great volunteer team who made *Set In Stone* possible. Ace reporters Judy Otto and Genie Swan prepared the exceptional stories, Sheila Adcock captured the memorable images, and Diane Reimold assisted in numerous ways to get the publication printed and into the hands of readers. What a pleasure to work with this team!

*Renae McElwain, Editor*