



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Metropolitan Chicago

Synod supplement

Security

By Wayne N. Miller, bishop

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear ... but strive first for the kingdom of God and [God’s] righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25, 33).

Everywhere these days people are preoccupied with a quest for personal security. It was unavoidable during the January Bishops’ Academy trip to Palestine, where security measures dominate the landscape. The wall and fencing between Israel and the West Bank, between Palestinian neighborhoods and Israeli settlements, is the most striking feature of this obsession with security. But it is certainly not its only expression. Heavily armed soldiers, jeeps and armored vehicles patrol unceasingly. On the Palestinian side there is no less anxiety about safety, economic security, educational opportunity and personal violations.

In the U.S., residents in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, too, struggle to keep their children secure from gangs and drive-by shootings. People who only a year ago began retirement, secure in the abundance accrued through a lifetime of frugality and hard work, now are re-entering the work force to secure enough income to keep their homes.

In our congregations the desire for security becomes the center of community life. How do we keep our building secure? How do we protect the endowment to perpetuate our ministry? How do we hold onto the old customs that have provided a source of continuity and security?

Even the most secure of us now suspect

that, despite our best efforts, security remains elusive. When we realize that security, in the usual sense, is an illusion, there is nothing left to do ... except worry.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers a lesson on security and worry: Let it go. Our security is in God’s hands, so why worry?

People respond to Jesus’ words with some combination of skepticism and frustration. Our Lord’s attitude toward this need for security feels so naïve. Jesus, however, understood that worry is energy detached from a mission. Mission gives our energy a direction—without which it spirals in on itself in an endless wheel of anxiety that we call worry. To set his disciples free from worry, he does not narcotize them with complacency or naïve optimism. He reminds them that God alone is the source of their life, and then refocuses their energy on the mission to strive for the kingdom of God.

The Christian faith does not and cannot offer anyone a life that is financially secure or physically safe. Yet in these times when it is so easy for all of us to freeze up in anxiety and collapse into pointless worry, our faith offers an alternative. We can choose to re-engage our energy with our mission to baptize, to preach, to teach, to strive for God’s righteousness, and to call the world into a vital relationship with the Christ who is the true source of our life and the ground of our being.

In reconnecting our energy with our purpose, we may discover that our future suddenly feels surprisingly secure. □



Wayne N. Miller,
bishop

Metropolitan Chicago

Bishop Wayne N. Miller is interviewed by Chicago Public Radio (WBEZ-FM)



Bishop Miller participates in academy in the Middle East

Thirty-nine bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and five bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada visited the Middle East, Jan. 6-13. Bishop Wayne N. Miller and his wife, Pam, were among the participants.

Miller wrote a blog about the trip that is available at www.crosstheboundaries.blogspot.com.

While on the trip, Miller was interviewed by Chicago Public Radio (WBEZ-FM). The interview was broadcast Jan. 12. It was made available online at www.chicagopublicradio.org/Program_WV.aspx?episode=31381.

More information about the conference is available at www.elca.org. □

Miller serves communion at a congregation in Ramallah.



Denver Bitner started Feb. 2.

Denver Bitner joins LSSI as president/CEO

On Feb. 2, Denver Bitner joined Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) as its new president and CEO. Bitner replaces Frederick Aigner, who retired after 11 and a half years of leading the organization. LSSI is the statewide human services agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Bitner came to LSSI from Zion Lutheran Church in Rockford, Ill., a large, inner-city church with a racially diverse membership of approximately 1,800. He served there for 36 years, 22 of those as senior pastor.

Once threatened with an expressway coming through its sanctuary, Zion has maintained its commitment to the community, engaging local residents and helping the neighborhood to thrive. With Bitner at the helm, the church developed three social ministry organizations.

These include Zion Development Corp., an award-winning organization that works in the areas of employment, economic development, and housing renewal and rehabilitation. Another is the Patri-

ots' Gateway Center, an all-purpose activity center for neighborhood youth.

Over the years, Bitner's contributions to the larger community have been recognized beyond the congregation and Lutheran circles. Most recently the Rockford City Council proclaimed Jan. 5-11 "Denver Bitner Week."

Bitner, who enthusiastically embraces his new call, said, "The mission of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is also the mission of the church—in response to the gospel, to provide holistic care to all people. At its core, our agency understands that it must provide servant leadership in order to fulfill its mission of bringing healing, justice and wholeness to people and communities.

"LSSI has a wonderful staff, which has built a tremendous organization that is known for its excellence as a social service agency. To be invited to serve among such people is a wonderful privilege for me."

In taking the reins at LSSI, Bitner is building on a long-established relationship. LSSI has partnered with the Zion Development Corp. in a variety of projects, including its Transitional Living Program, which serves youth who are aging out of foster care. LSSI's Prisoner and Family Ministry's AmeriCorps program is also based at the Patriots' Gateway Center.

Serving the most vulnerable

Bitner acknowledges that current economic issues "have had major repercussions for the residents of Illinois, especially those who are most vulnerable."

He added, "LSSI has a wonderful history of being there for people at the time of their greatest need. I am confident that we will find new ways

of collaborating with our governmental partners, churches and community groups to assist those who are facing either a major life crisis or grappling with an ongoing need."

In addition, Bitner has served on LSSI's Board of Directors (2004–2007) and on the board of the ELCA Division for Church in Society (1997–2003), overseeing the work of

the division with national and global social service ministries and chairing its board (2000–2003).

He has served as a consultant on Urban and Multicultural Ministries for the ELCA Northern Illinois Synod.

For information on Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, visit www.LSSI.org. □



Brian Hiortdahl (left), Gov. Pat Quinn and Doreen Reifel show award.

Resurrection receives 2008 Environmental Hero Award

Citing the fact that it is the first church in Chicago with solar hot water, then Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn presented Resurrection Lutheran Church in Chicago with a 2008 Environmental Hero Award on Dec. 30, 2008.

Brian Hiortdahl, pastor; Doreen Reifel, office steward; and Jim King, council president, were joined by Clare Butterfield, executive director of Faith in Place—which made the solar panel installation possible—and Wayne N. Miller, synod bishop, for the afternoon press conference at the Thompson Center.

Resurrection was one of 26 recipients in Illinois. For a list of winners and more information, visit www.standingupforillinois.org.

Lutherans Against Violence—grants available



As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15).

Wheat Ridge Ministries is launching a grant initiative, in cooperation with the Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the ELCA Metropolitan Chicago Synod. The Lutherans Against Violence Grant Program will assist congregations interested in starting projects or programs to address violence in their communities and to assist congregations already engaged in projects of this nature.

Congregations are encouraged to submit proposals covering any aspect of violence including, but not limited to, domestic abuse, violence in schools, gang violence and suicide.

The statistics are bleak. The numbers are unimaginable. Even more

discouraging is that the numbers represent real people—individuals, families, entire communities.

- In 2005, 5,686 young people ages 10 to 24 were murdered—an average of 16 each day.
- People under the age of 25 accounted for 50 percent of those arrested for murder and 65 percent of those arrested for robbery in 2006.
- About one in three high school students say they have been in a physical fight in the past year, and about one in eight of those students required medical attention for their injuries.
- Domestic violence is the single greatest cause of injury to women.
- Handguns are used in 80 percent of homicides, nearly 70 percent of suicides and nearly all accidental shootings.

(These and more national statistics are available at www.thepeacealliance.org.)

Hope—our Lutheran response

Despite such desolate numbers, Christians respond with hope knowing that, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2). It is this peace—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—that Lutherans proclaim to the world, knowing that with God all things are possible.

Grants will be available to member congregations of the Northern Illinois District and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod for either individual or collaborative efforts involving two or more churches. Grant proposals will also be accepted from Lutheran congregations partnering with local agencies.

Recipients will be expected to match one-fourth of the grant amount awarded.

The deadline for grant proposals is Oct. 15. Grant recipients will be notified by Dec. 15.

Applications are available at www.wheatridge.org/lav. For more information about the Lutherans Against Violence Grant Program, contact Wheat Ridge Ministries at 800-762-6748 or by e-mail at grants@wheatridge.org. □



Center for peace grows

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago founded the Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice in 2006 on the conviction that Christians, Muslims and neighbors of other faith traditions are called to know, respect and learn from one another, despite or even because of our differences.

CCME offers resources to LSTC seminarians and other area schools and to congregations, scholars, members of the Christian and Muslim

communities in the Chicago area, global visitors, the ELCA and other church bodies.

CCME sponsors public lectures, dialogues and other educational events to promote interfaith understanding and cooperation.

During the spring semester, The Rose Ensemble presented a free workshop, “Music from the Land of Three Faiths.” Christians, Muslims and Jews gathered to talk about their sacred texts.

CCME recently began “coffee

hour” discussions with students about practical and theological matters important to various faith communities.

It supports student-led gatherings that foster interfaith dialogue, including a monthly gathering called “Abraham’s Children Interreligious Prayer.”

To learn more about the center and the resources available to your congregation, call Sara Trumm, program coordinator, at 773-256-0708, e-mail her at strumm@lstc.edu or visit www.lstc.edu/centers.html. □

