



## Greatness

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

*You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:42b-44).*

It is no secret to anyone that we are now living into a new era in American political life. This happens regularly in our system, of course, but it seems to me that the most recent presidential campaign has, in a particularly intense way, raised awareness of the fact that Christianity does not always share popular cultural values or understandings.

As one prominent example, we all seem to be taken right now with the notion of “making America great again.” But what, I am wondering, does it really mean to us to be “great.”

Not that striving for greatness is, in and of itself, a strange idea. Even though only a few of us aspire to be great on the big stage of global leadership, almost all of us have some place in our lives where we reach for greatness. Some of us want to be great golfers, others great chess players, still others great musicians. Some of us hope to be great at our work or, perhaps, to be great friends to those who are great friends to us. And I suppose many of us look forward to the day when we will deserve a Father’s or Mother’s Day mug lettered boldly “World’s Greatest Dad or Mom.”

And then once we zero in on the thing we most want to be great at, we practice ... and practice ... and practice our ideas and our values and our vision about greatness until, no matter what we say, our lives become the embodiment of what we think it means to be great.



Bishop Wayne N. Miller

So what is it, I wonder—what really is this new or old greatness to which America aspires?

The answer to this question may forever elude me. But what is unequivocally clear is what Jesus believed it meant to be great: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.” There is no room for ego in Jesus’ understanding of greatness—no room for domination or exploitation, cruelty or disrespect; no room for serving your own needs at the expense of others. And we know that it is what Jesus believed about greatness, not only because he talked about it, but because he practiced it, until his whole life and death became the embodiment of a God whose greatness is to be found in service and self-sacrifice.

A time of testing is upon us now, my Christian brothers and sisters. The world is watching, and what they are watching is us, as Christians, to see if, in fact, we will practice what we preach until our lives become the greatness we seek. And how we respond to this challenge will make a very great difference. 卐

# Seminary returns rare New Testament manuscript

By Julie Sevig

When a rare and ancient Greek New Testament manuscript was returned to its rightful owner, its adventures read like a mystery novel. It had been stolen from a monastery following the Balkan Wars, sold to a European book dealer, and eventually landed at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC).

During a Nov. 15, 2016, matins service attended by denominational dignitaries, LSTC President James Nieman handed over Codex 1424 (as it is called) to Archbishop Demetrios, leader of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Later that month, he and Nieman took it to the Greek Orthodox Holy Metropolis of Drama, Greece.

“Our hearts are filled with gratitude to our Lutheran brothers and sisters for this generous and kind gesture,” the archbishop said.

Codex 1424 had been part of LSTC’s rare book collection for nearly a century. Copied by a monk named Sabas, the manuscript was one of many taken in 1917 when thieves ransacked Ikosifinissa Monastery near Drama.

Levi Franklin Gruber, a former president of an LSTC predecessor, purchased Codex 1424 from a book dealer in 1920 and bequeathed it to his wife. LSTC received the rare book collection from her in exchange for an annuity.

Barbara R. Rossing, LSTC New Testament professor, called the codex the “crown jewel” of 12 New

Testament manuscripts in the seminary’s Gruber Collection.

The codex is the oldest minuscule manuscript (written in cursive script) in existence. It was copied in the ninth century, with commentary added to the margins three centuries later. It is in book form, and is unusual because Paul’s letters come after Revelation.

It has very few mistakes, said Ralph W. Klein, curator of the collection, making it even more valuable. He estimates it took more than 50 sheep to provide skin for its 337 pages. “We are indebted to our ancestors in the faith who took such care that the sacred scriptures were preserved for posterity,” he said.

In Nieman’s matins message, he recalled the hands that had cared for Codex 1424 throughout the centuries: “By the gift of those hands and the peace they convey, we now freely return this book to you. ... We are at once delighted—and sad—and thankful to have been its stewards for the past century. May God bless you on its journey home, and may its homecoming indeed be joyful. We have no legal obligation to return it. But we have a moral one. We get to return it and we want to return it. ... It’s not easy for us, but returning it is pure gift.” ☩

**Julie Sevig** is a writer and editor who works with LSTC.



Bishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago (left); Bishop Wayne Miller; President James Nieman; Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton; Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; and the Rev. Donald McCoid, retired ELCA executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations.



The original text and the marginal notes added in the 12th century.

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# God's word, *my* hands?

By Rebecca Dahlstrom

When I moved to Chicago from New York in 1998, I never planned to start the diakonia program in the synod. For those of you who aren't familiar with diakonia, it's a lay education program that has been around for more than 30 years. Diakonia is a transformational program that focuses on spiritual development and faith formation. Started by the Rev. Stephen P. Bouman and others, the goal of the program was to take the message of the font and the table (altar) out the front door of the church into the community.

Since the program's start in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, it has changed the lives of more than 150 people. But it nearly didn't happen.

I went through the diakonia crucible in New York and came out the other side a completely changed person—revitalized in my faith and ready to work in the church. I helped with the diakonia program in New York, but knew it didn't exist in Chicago. When I moved here, I planned to find a new church home and volunteer. One day I prayed that God would help me find a place in Chicago where I would feel Christian fellowship and be part of God's work here on earth. God shocked me by responding to my prayer by telling me to start the diakonia program in Chicago.



More than 15 years later, I still can't believe what has been achieved, but my prayer was surely answered. The fellowship of the diakonia program has been a blessing in my life. I believe this is truly a case of God using someone to achieve something. I can't believe he used me, but I'm grateful and blessed because of it.

I started with the staff in the synod office, who from the bishop on down gave their blessing to starting the program (you angels know who you are)! I made a few cold phone calls to pastors who miraculously didn't hang up on me, but instead said, "Yes, I'll teach" (a few of whom are still involved after all these years). Even more unexplainable was the interest and commitment of the six original class members. To this day I wonder how the word got out enough to have those original people sign up. Since then, we have had about 150 people complete the program.

Each one is a miracle. They have done some amazing things after finishing the program—from church leadership to taking communion to home-bound people, and helping with prison ministries to teaching Sunday school. A few have gone on to become pastors and deacons (formerly known as diaconal ministers, deaconesses and associates in ministry). They are an awesome spirit-filled group of people who I am proud to know. They represent the diakonia program well in the synod.

To learn more about the program, see [mcselca.org/congregation/leadership/diakonia](http://mcselca.org/congregation/leadership/diakonia). You can also contact me at [centurywanderer1@hotmail.com](mailto:centurywanderer1@hotmail.com). ☺



The colophon page at the end of the manuscript that includes the inscription by Sabas, a monk, and what Ralph Klein has called graffiti by others over the centuries.

**Rebecca Dahlstrom** is former chair of the diakonia program for the Metropolitan Chicago Synod.

## Helping children reach their fullest potential

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is the largest statewide provider of foster care services. It serves approximately 10 percent of the children under the guardianship of the state's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

LSSI provides placement and casework services for children who have been removed from their families because of abuse and/or neglect. While some can't be safely returned to their families and may become available for adoption, the goal of LSSI's foster care services is to reunite children with their families. Its services include training and licensing for foster families. Working with LSSI, foster parents support a child's connection to his or her family by providing transportation to or hosting sibling visits, and visiting with parents when the child welfare team mutually agrees upon this.

### Providing a place called home

Osayande and Nanyamko Watson know the challenges and blessings of being foster parents. They have welcomed more than 30 foster children into their home over 25 years. "We know that African-American boys with special needs are the hardest to place, and their adoption rate is almost zero," Osayande said. He and his wife thrive working with these boys, believing they have the tools to set them up for success.

"For all of those people who say, 'How do you do it? I could never do it.' I just say, 'How do you not?'" Nanyamko said. "I forget I didn't give birth to these kids because I love them exactly the same."



Photo: Rob Austin

Arthur McGriff, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois youth coordinator, helps build confidence and self-awareness with teens in foster care who participate in the Steps to Life program.

### Lifebooks

Every child in LSSI's foster care program receives "My Awesome Life." This Lifebook is a fun, healing tool to help children in foster care celebrate special milestones and understand difficult aspects of their lives. Similar to a scrapbook, it celebrates the child's life through photos, drawings and memories. It also helps them make sense of the difficult emotions and situations they are facing.



LSSI's Lifebook, "My Awesome Life" is filled with original artwork and was designed based on experiences from children in its foster care.

Since 2008, nearly 5,000 Lifebooks have been distributed to foster children in LSSI's care. In 2015 and 2016, DCFS purchased copies of "My Awesome Life" for use with *all* children in foster care in Illinois.

### Offering opportunity

Steps to Life participants are conventional kids in many ways, yet their lives have been touched by experiences that are anything but typical. As children in foster care, they have been exposed to situations that can range from abuse and neglect, separation from families and violence. Many have lived in multiple foster homes, creating uncertainty in their lives.

Steps to Life provides positive interventions that introduce new experiences to kids beyond their immediate community, with outings to museums, restaurants and businesses. Staff help youth develop and improve skills for self-identity, self-expression and communication.

"It is a growth opportunity for these teens to meet new people, and be molded and guided," said Arthur McGriff, LSSI youth coordinator. "It provides them with an opportunity to step out of their communities and gain life experiences."

For more information about foster care, call 888-322-5774, email [ccs@lssi.org](mailto:ccs@lssi.org) or visit [lssi.org](http://lssi.org).