



A beautiful reflection

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me ... (John 14:11).

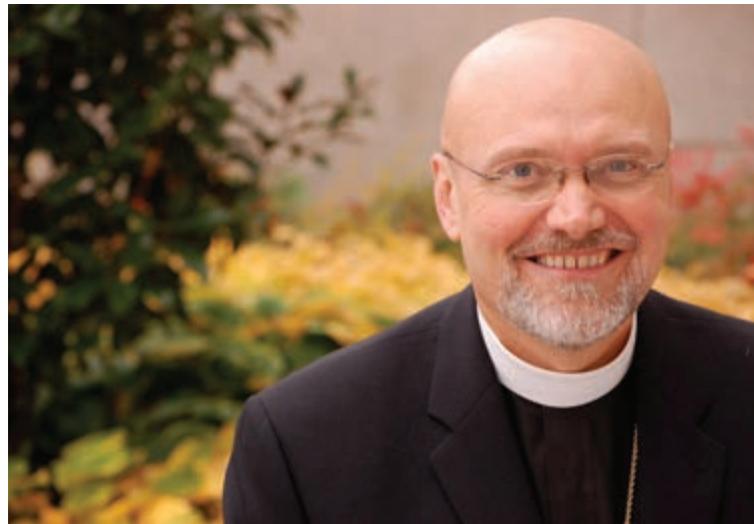
I am guessing that it's not a surprise to anyone to hear that this is an election year. Perhaps that is the reason why, a few weeks ago, my attention was drawn again to a photograph hanging on the wall in my study.

The photo, given to me by my elder son many years ago, is a portrait of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington—at least, I'm pretty sure that's who it is. It's a little hard to be certain even from up close because it is, in fact, a portrait of the late mayor's back taken from behind him as he stands facing a crowd of admirers, a crowd whose faces are those we actually see in the picture.

At first glance, I suppose, it might seem a little crazy to take a portrait of a leader from this vantage point. But what I love about this photo is its insight into the truth that if you really want to see the face of a leader, the place to look is into the faces of the crowd that faces the leader. Particularly in a society where we choose our own leaders, the face of a leader always reflects to some degree the longings and appetites, the disappointments and fears, the values and priorities, the hopes and the dreams of the crowd.

Understand the expression on the face of the crowd and you will know a great deal about the leader. Understand the face of the leader and it will always reflect something important about the crowd.

This mirroring phenomenon is particularly important to us Christians as we enter our annual remembrance of the last week of Jesus' life. Because in this oldest of all Christian stories more than anywhere else, the crowd becomes a main character in the drama. And it seems to me that remembering the many and various faces and voices of the crowd might also call us, in this season, to consider what sort of Jesus is reflected by our gatherings, our communities, or our ways of dealing with one another.



Bishop Wayne N. Miller

It's an important question for us because for most people most of the time the very first face of Jesus they ever experience is our face. If they see a crowd that is hopeful, they will encounter Jesus as a source of hope. If they see a crowd that is bitter and conflicted, they will see a Jesus they have no need for at all. If they see a crowd with compassion for the vulnerable and passion for justice, they will be given a clear and open window into the heart of God. If they see a crowd that races to judgment or shames imperfection, how could they ever see in Jesus the face of forgiveness? And if they see only our anxiety or our inflexible attachment to a bygone past, how could they possibly see Jesus as the one who calls us into the possibility of an open future?

This season of Lent that calls us all to the foot of the cross to gaze for a while into the face of the crucified God is also a time to pause and consider the character and brightness of the light we shine before others. Because in seeing us look squarely into the face of the empty tomb, with undying courage and confidence, they might also see the first glimpse of their own resurrection. **L**

Building energy in the church

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran in Batavia, a midsize congregation with a history of challenges, is a warm, accepting place, growing slightly in number and perhaps doing a bit better than some financially—but still worried about it.

Two years ago the congregation council retained the services of a consultant who polled members and reported that Bethany was complaisant and low-energy. Most members were happy and didn't feel change was necessary.

But some members thought an undiscovered energy existed within the congregation that they wanted to find and use. In December 2014 a small group met and decided to see if it could build momentum by creating a group called Energy Builders that would look for things that could be done.

The pastor had the idea to turn three unused spaces in a 60-year-old addition behind the narthex into a chapel. Since the congregation had no space for small weddings, funerals or small Sunday services, the idea had potential. The congregation council had previously solicited bids that came in at \$90,000 or more, but they were too much.

Energy Builders decided this would be its first project, and it redesigned the plan using almost all volunteer labor and some donated materials. It quoted the job at \$26,000, to be completed in two months. The project, after approval, was completed with 25 volunteers donating more than 1,800 hours of labor in 6 1/2 weeks.

The group's next projects were the renovation of two sacristies (with the help and guidance of the altar guild), heavy cleanup of an old house that the congregation owned and needed to sell, start-up of a Saturday morning men's group, a new Facebook page, replacement of more than 150 incandescent bulbs with LEDs, analysis of the HVAC systems, cleanup of cluttered spaces in basements, painting of exterior windows and trim around the sanctuary, installation of door and window insulation, some landscaping, and a bit of plumbing and electrical work.

Energy Builders has contributed more than 3,000 hours of volunteer work in less than a year. While saving money is not the primary focus, it does provide a metric—it's estimated that the group has benefited Bethany by more than \$150,000 in its first year.

Here are some guidelines for starting a group:

- Keep Energy Builders out of the formal authority structure of the church, but make sure it reports to that structure appropriately and keeps church leadership fully informed. In essence, leave the big decisions where they belong.
- Recruit workers who aren't looking for personal credit, but who want to give back to the community.
- Make sure the work is top-notch, and earn the right to purchase materials and handle jobs without micromanagement.
- Don't limit the work to construction projects. Program development, learning and teaching, community support activities and more can be built through the group.
- Have fun.

For more information, contact Alan Spear at 847-323-9439. [L](#)



The chapel at Bethany Lutheran Church, Batavia.

Powering generosity

By Mark L. Vincent

If you walk into a dark room that you've not entered before, the first response is to start groping the walls for where you intuitively feel the light switch must be. Repeat the action a bit later and the groping requires less effort. Enter the same darkened room repeatedly and the switch gets flipped on without looking or thinking. The action becomes an extension of you that you assume will keep working

Even when you looked for the light switch that first time, you thought the action would bear fruit simply because the switch gets moved from off to on. We aren't thinking of how the power reached the building, whether all the breaker switches are on, what protects against power surges or whether the switch has been wired to code. You only think of those things if you find the light switch, flip it and it doesn't work. Then, to make the switch function, a deeper diagnostic and repair work needs to be completed.

Let's compare flipping light switches to the experience of financing Christian ministry, particularly through congregations.

Congregations provide means to contribute financially to ministry on a weekly basis, usually through an offering conducted in the context of a worship service. Inviting offerings and reporting on them form the mechanics of flipping a financial light switch that we think will work. And when it doesn't we increase the frequency of opportunity, try to make messages more appealing, and offer tailored choices for the destination of one's gift. This is like a person standing at a non-working light switch, flipping it again and again and again, hoping that the light will finally start working. It won't.

When the mechanics of offering and making appeals don't work, we need to look more deeply. In the Open Hands Open Hearts process fostered in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, the way to rebuild a culture of generosity begins with an assessment that evaluates the six congregational arenas within which this culture is built. Then

a congregation picks and chooses specific strategies they will implement across a one- to three-year period, touching on everything from worship services to financial administration to educational initiatives.

At the heart of it, are three assumptions:

- At the heart of any initiative is the ongoing development of a profound understanding that God gives grace and by grace we give in return.
- Small steps engaged in sequence create a momentum that changes a culture.
- Some steps are better than no steps.

Nearly 50 Chicago area congregations have completed the Open Hands Open Hearts assessment and formulated steps for action. They are digging more deeply to rewire to the power source of generosity instead of just doing more of what they've always done.

For more information about the Open Hands Open Hearts process, visit openhandsopenhearts.com or contact Steve Homberg at the synod office (shomberg@mcselca.org or 773-248-0021). [L](#)

Vincent is CEO of Design Group International and guide for Open Hands Open Hearts.



WeRaise: God's work; your crowdfunding project

What do human trafficking advocates in Washington, missionaries in Costa Rica and a youth group in Michigan all have in common? They all raised funds for ministry projects through **WeRaise.us**.

WeRaise is a Christian crowdfunding platform hosted by Wheat Ridge Ministries that is designed to be a user-friendly fundraising tool for ministry leaders. The site is now home to several projects that have raised funds for a wide variety of ministries, from sabbaticals to National Youth Gathering expenses to health clinics and mission trips. The site offers a variety of free crowdfunding resources and minimal platform and credit card processing fees.

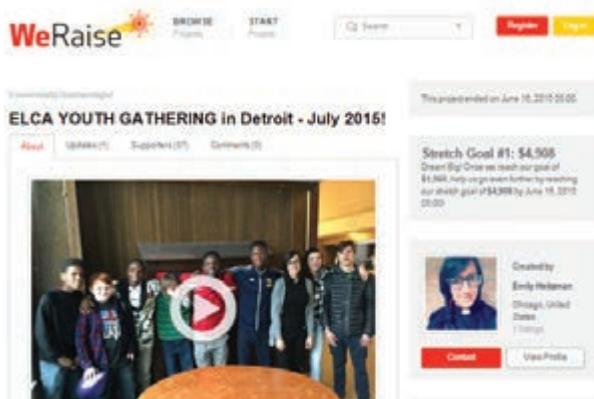
Crowdfunding has become an increasingly familiar term with plenty of sites from which to choose. WeRaise is intended to help Christian leaders get their ministry ideas off the ground.

The support goes beyond just the platform and free crowdfunding tutorials. Wheat Ridge Ministries offers additional ministry resources, including grant funds and topical webinars.

To be eligible for WeRaise, leaders must explain how their ministry project will meet a need in their community. It also must be hosted by, or partnered with, a Christian organization with 501c3 status. Projects can't simply be general fundraisers. Instead, each project must have a focus, a funding goal and a set campaign length between 30 and 45 days.

Leaders considering a sabbatical have an extra incentive to look into WeRaise. Projects funding a ministry leader sabbatical automatically receive a \$500 pledge from WeRaise, as long as the goal is at least \$5,500.

The benefits of crowdfunding go beyond fundraising, although that is the primary purpose. Crowdfunding is a strategic effort to connect beyond the existing donor network. The nature of an online crowdfunding campaign allows leaders



The youth group from The Edgewater Congregations Together Youth Group used WeRaise to raise funds to cover costs for the 2015 Rise Up ELCA National Youth Gathering.



Mirror Ministries in Washington raised more than \$13,400 to fund an advocate position that will seek out and assist victims of human trafficking.

to connect with potential donors anywhere in the world anytime it's convenient. Unlike car washes and bake sales, donors don't have to be present to participate. The specific goal and focus of the project, along with the set timeline, create urgency and build excitement among donors.

For ministry leaders who don't have a project in mind, a visit to the site is still encouraged. The projects show the work God is doing through people around the world, in a variety of ways. Visit **WeRaise.us** and find a project to support with your prayers or maybe even a few dollars. **L**