



Identity

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:5).

I haven't done it yet, but I've been thinking about it—sending in my sample to one of those companies to test the secrets of my DNA. I was talking with some people on the synod staff about it a few weeks ago, and I have to admit, it sounds pretty interesting. On the other hand, there are some significant risks involved in testing your DNA. I've been hearing horrific stories lately about the havoc being wrought in families when people discover they aren't exactly who they thought they were. And what if I get my results back and find out that my Swedish great-grandparents were actually Norwegian? Why, that would mean that ... it would mean that ... what would it mean, anyway?

I suppose it would mean that I would need to sort out my true identity all over again because we do have a certain tendency to think that our identity is derived from the particular category—the box or basket, the group or gaggle—into which others, or we ourselves, have been sorted.

And we human beings love to sort stuff. We sort dark loads of laundry from light. We sort with file cabinets and spice racks. We sort with small plastic containers on our workbenches, separating cap screws from wire nuts and hex-heads from nails. We carefully separate the people we like from those we despise, those we value from those we disregard

We sort out the ones we call **us** from the ones we call **them**, with us being the Christians and them being the rest ... and then with us being the Lutherans and them being all the rest ... and then with us being the ELCA and them being all the rest of the Lutherans ... until every creature great and small



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as far as the naked eye can see, must look and act and live its life exactly like me.

And if perchance the box or jar that I happen to be sorted into doesn't quite fit anymore because I have grown or changed ... well, I suppose that would mean I have plummeted into an identity crisis; that I am no one at all until I find a new box that fits better or create a brand-new category for myself with no room for anyone else.

But take heart, friends, because this is Easter. This season breaks the jar that contains you to offer the promise that the only identity that matters is because you have been baptized with Christ into a death like his, so you will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. You are a new creation, now, in which there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. And in this newly created identity lies the hope of a world reconciled by the power of the cross. ✞

LSTC Gospel Choir sets lofty goal

By Jan Boden

During LSTC Gospel Choir concerts, the sound of praise nearly lifts the roof off the Augustana Chapel at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). On April 8 at 4 p.m., it will hold its 30th concert, quite a milestone for a group that started as a pickup choir.

In 1988, LSTC registrar Patricia Bartley invited members of the seminary community to form a Gospel choir to sing at the seminary's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day service. They were inspired to stay together and keep singing. "It's God's choir," she said. "There isn't anything that is going to stand in the way of God's plan." To this day, the choir sings during worship at LSTC.

From the start, students have played an enormous role in the choir. Master of Divinity student Christine Thompson was the first director of a choir largely made up of students. Keith "Doc" Hampton, cantor to the seminary community, is the current director. Vickie Johnson, pastor, student and trained singer with an operatic range, is choir manager.

For the anniversary concert, Bartley has invited more than 300 alumni to join a reunion choir. "That's a lot of people," she said. "Most were students, but it's also staff and faculty and members



In addition to concerts, the LSTC Gospel Choir has expanded the worship experience at LSTC. Pat Bartley notes that "not everyone at LSTC is Lutheran or white. Having my own tradition become part of the worship experience at LSTC meant everything to me."

of the wider community. [The choir has] always been open to whoever wanted to sing to the Lord."

Since the 1994-95 academic year, the choir had another purpose—the Grover Wright Scholarship for students of color or whose first language is other than English. Thirty-four students have received scholarships ranging at the beginning from \$1,500 to today at \$2,500. In 2004-05, the choir established a second scholarship in memory of choir member Carol A. Burns. Ten scholarships have been awarded to female African-American students.

This year, the choir hopes to raise enough for a full-tuition scholarship to the Grover Wright recipient and at least a half-tuition scholarship to the Carol A. Burns recipient. ♣

Jan Boden is LSTC's director of communications and marketing.

LSTC launches first online "Giving Day"

On April 18, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) will host its first online "Giving Day," complete with challenges, specially produced and live video, and social media selfie whimsy. That's the hope of Jennifer Thomas, LSTC gift officer/alumni relations who is heading up #LSTCGives18.

"This was inspired by college giving days, seen as a great opportunity to broaden our alumni strategy and reach out to alumni through social media," Thomas said, explaining that it will raise money for



the Annual Fund (lstc.edu/giving/annual-fund), which provides scholarships and helps pay for seminary operations.

"We want to encourage first-time givers," she said. "If you have always loved LSTC and never given to an appeal, it's a way to participate and to show school pride." ♣

Synod's million-dollar hunger challenge

Thank you, Metropolitan Chicago Synod! You met and exceeded the "Million Dollar Challenge." Thank you, 124 congregations and 1,124 individuals who gave so generously. Thank you for telling the stories of God's love and abundance, for teaching and preaching about the transformative impact of this signature ministry of the ELCA, for studying and praying, for planning and leading events and activities for all ages in all seasons, for walking church to church creatively and courageously toward a world of justice where all are fed.

In steadfast love, God has truly provided an abundance. There is more than enough food for every man, woman and child on the planet to have plenty to eat, twice over. And yet:

- Around the world, 815 million people can't access the food they need to live active, healthy lives—that's 1 person in 10.
- For the first time in a decade there has been an increase in the finite number of people experiencing hunger, a 38 million person increase.

Thank you for responding to God's call to care for our neighbors. Your challenge dollars are supporting nearly 600 projects here in the United States and in more than 60 other countries, accompanying companion churches and partners that are getting at the root causes of hunger and poverty through agriculture, livestock, water, health, education, gender justice, advocacy and so much more.

You are walking side by side with vulnerable people and communities as they become strong and resilient now and for generations to come. You are participating in Isaiah's prophecy shared on Easter morning: *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food* (Isaiah 25:6a).

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bit.ly/thankyoumetrochicago

Thank you,
Metropolitan Chicago!

\$1,060,000



Here is just one example of the many transformative, holistic, integrated projects you make possible:

At St. Andrew's Refugee Services in Cairo, Egypt, children and adults have access to education. Adults also have work opportunities, psychosocial support and links to other care providers. Children are provided protection and legal aid, and a feeding program provides nutritious meals for 350 youth daily to enable concentration and success at school.

elca.org/hunger
hunger@elca.org

Want to continue the fight against hunger and poverty both locally and globally?

**Sign up for the Metropolitan
Chicago Synod ELCA World Hunger
Ambassadors Training
Saturday, April 21**

Wheat Ridge Ministries becomes We Raise Foundation

In the tradition of an organization that learns, connects and grows, Wheat Ridge Ministries has changed its name to the We Raise Foundation and refined its mission.

The new name speaks to a new emphasis on raising consciousness of issues, community leadership and the capital required to do their work. We Raise aims to be a place where people with a heart for the underserved can learn more about these issues and ways to connect to organizations working on solutions that make an impact.

After much prayer, study and deliberation, the board of directors resolved that the We Raise Foundation would focus on issues within the intersection of poverty, violence and inequality. Moving forward, We Raise is poised to support innovative programs emphasizing education, workforce development and criminal justice as a way to move people and communities from hurting to healing.

As the We Raise Foundation moves forward, it will focus on today's pressing issues under a meaningful name that not only speaks to the important work done with the help of longtime donors, but has the potential to attract new supporters who share its commitment to ease suffering. From its beginnings in 1905 as a tuberculosis sanitarium in Wheat Ridge, Colo., the We Raise Foundation has a track record of engagement with the big concerns shaping communities. Today the issues around the intersection of poverty, violence and inequality are shaping communities in a similar dramatic way.

"At a time in which there are more resources—intellectual, financial and technological—than any time in our nation's history, to have millions living in poverty is simply unacceptable," said Paul Miles, We Raise president and CEO. "We intend to be part of the solution."



We Raise Foundation's new mission focus brings with it a revitalized commitment to help grantees become more successful at finding resources needed to implement and sustain their programs. This benefits grantees and their communities, of course, but it also doubles the value of a We Raise donor's investment. Miles said this added value to grantees is a distinguishing factor for We Raise in the grant-making community. "It speaks to the No. 1 need that our grantees have shared with us," he said. "The changes we've made are about our ability to be impactful for the next 100 years."

With this transition, We Raise will continue to rely on God's grace and the faithful supporters who have sustained the organization since it began. Join the We Raise Foundation in supporting innovative organizations and emerging leaders and affirming their good work in these challenging times. By working together, we can demonstrate God's love for his people in a way that makes an impact. ✚



Learn more at weraise.org.