

## Focus

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Presbyopia! It's such an elegant Greek word meaning "old eyes." And boy, do I qualify for this label. I notice it the most early in the morning before I put on my glasses for the first time and I can barely read the large red digits on my alarm clock to check the time.

I've learned, though, that if I squint I do a little better. For reasons that a friendly optometrist will have to explain to me some day, if I narrow my field of vision to a mere slit of light, I can see the thing right there in front of me just a little bit more clearly.

The problem is that by narrowing my vision I completely lose sight of everything else in the room and in the world around me. It's only when I put on my lenses and open my eyes wide again that I am reminded that the world is bigger than the face of my alarm clock.

Of course, this sort of short-sightedness isn't just a function of age or even of weakened eyes. It's pretty common, on a daily basis in fact, for me to narrow my focus so completely on the immediate problem, the worry, the fear right in front of me, that I completely lose sight of all the rest—the wonder and beauty that are also alive in the world around me; the laughter, the love, the compassion; the simple joys of meaningful work, or a ballgame or someone helping an old woman with a bad case of presbyopia step from a crowded subway platform onto a train.

It's a condition all too prevalent in our times when the news media and public leaders are so intent on focusing our view only on the cynicism, the dread of anyone different from us, the apparent threat that they continually place in front of our uncertain and doubtful squint. All this makes us



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wonder, I suppose, if it's not wiser to go back to bed, pull a blanket over our heads and close our eyes the rest of the way.

But we, as children of God and members of the body of Christ, are called to something else, I think. We are called to be those who courageously widen our view by looking at the world through the lens of faith, and so to see the God who continues to be present and active in this world of risk and adventure, of disappointment and imagination, of peril and promise. To see the God who has never ceased to bring new life into being, who wipes away our tears, who feeds the hungry, who cries out for peace and justice, who surrounds us every day with the astonishing beauty and resilience of creation. To see the God who is always at work in the world and in us.

We are the ones called to bear witness to this vision that so many are afraid to behold or trust. And though we may still see the reign of God only dimly through the looking glass of faith, it is enough to call us forward toward the day when we will see it face to face. **L**

## Covenant is a living witness

Why commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 in your congregation alone when you can better observe it with your Roman Catholic neighbors?

The milestone anniversary of Martin Luther's postings on the doors of the Wittenberg church in 1517 will be commemorated worldwide on Oct. 31, 2017. In Chicago we'll observe another important milestone on the same day—the covenant between the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago that was signed on the eve of Pentecost on May 13, 1989.

This is the first covenant between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the U.S. Think of it, 500 years since the Reformation and 28 years since Lutheran and Catholics in Chicago signed an agreement to work together in a living witness to the grace of God in the ministries of our churches.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is not simply about observing the birth of the Lutheran church. More importantly, it is about the why of the Reformation: the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and our witness to a gracious God made known to us in Christ. We can only do that best today in dialogue and in partnership with the whole church. This anniversary challenges us to proclaim a very different relationship to the Catholic Church.

In the coming year we will be sharing stories of ministry together, journeys of faith in partnership with Catholic neighbors, and resources for ways we can join in dialogue,



Lutherans and Roman Catholics celebrate their common baptism.

prayer and service together. A website will be launched for the sharing of resources and faith stories. Look to find:

- Resources for study and prayer together.
- Stories from congregations in covenant.
- Suggestions for congregational programs and ministries together.
- Guidelines for creating a local congregational covenant.
- News about upcoming celebrations.

We have already begun to hear from congregations that are sharing ministry resources, engaging in prayer and study together and entering into local agreements modeled on the 1989 covenant.

We hope to hear from more congregations that are involved in dialogue, partnership and covenant. Please reach out to us and let us know what your church is doing. Contact:

- The Rev. Brian Wise, ecumenical representative for Metropolitan Chicago Synod ([Brian.wise1@gmail.com](mailto:Brian.wise1@gmail.com)).
- The Rev. Nicholas Zook, Lutheran Catholic Covenant Committee ([nzook@concordia-place.org](mailto:nzook@concordia-place.org)).

Meanwhile, mark your calendars for a special 500th anniversary commemoration of the Reformation and the renewal of our Lutheran/Catholic covenant on Oct. 31, 2017, at Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago, at 7 p.m. **L**



Bishop Sherman Hicks (left) and Cardinal Joseph Bernardin attend the Lutheran/Catholic covenant signing at St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church, May 13, 1989.

# The power of why

By the Rev. Tim Robertson

Evangelical pastor and author Rick Warren once said, “If you aim at nothing, you are bound to hit it.”

I’ve been a parish pastor for nearly 25 years. Like many entrepreneurs, I’ve seen projects get muddled down in process. But recently I’ve learned the wisdom of what I call the “power of why.”

Too many good and great projects have been mired well before takeoff due to not asking and answering good “why” questions first.

The most pertinent and specific example to date has been the process of incorporating retrofitted projection screens into my church’s very traditional worship space. Please note that my congregation had discussed the possibility of screens for more than a decade. The congregation often got stuck at “how” we would do it—so the conversation was repeated over and over and went nowhere.

About a year ago, the projection screen topic arose again. And, once again, secondary questions arose first. How would the screens fit? Where would the screens be placed? How many would we use? How big would the screens be? Who would install the screens? How much would it cost? You know the drill.

I encouraged the leadership to slow the conversation down. I asked for permission to start the conversation with “why” questions. I backed up the logic of starting with “why” with the assertion that if we didn’t have good reasons why we would add screens, we probably weren’t ready to ask how, where or who. Breakthrough!

These leaders now could set aside the big, bad uglies of “how much” and “where” and just talk about “why” or “why not.” Quickly they came up with nine solid reasons why now was a good time to add projection screens. After the meeting, one family privately pledged matching funds up to \$25,000.



One of the “whys.” We have to move our contemporary space upstairs to our main worship venue because downstairs is often full.

The leadership decided to form a study group, which then researched preliminary design possibilities of location and size. The study group created a packet that started with the nine “whys,” which was shared at the congregation’s annual meeting. The congregation was asked to give feedback to the “whys.” Only one clarification was requested. The study group showed their preliminary plans for a layout, size and costs. Again feedback was requested. Nada. One council member broke the silence: “Where do we go now?”

I answered: “Frankly, we were anticipating lively dialogue, lots of feedback and many questions. Ah ... I am just ‘spitballing’ here, seeing no strong opposition in the room, how about we take a vote to see if the congregation is ready to charge the council to form a task force to investigate a professional bid contract?”

“The professional bid will then be shared in another congregational Q&A. And if that Q&A is well received, we will then follow with a mini-capital campaign for implementation.”

Unanimous! God is good!

The “power of why” is an amazing tool. Good “whys” take the angst out of tough “whos, wheres and hows.”

May our story bless your story. Give ’em heaven! 🙌

**Tim Robertson** is pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Downers Grove, Ill.

## Planting new churches to reach new people

Research shows that new church starts are eight times more effective in reaching and retaining unchurched people than congregations that have been around for

40 or more years. Church starts can go to new places, reach new people, experiment with new forms and grow quickly. Moreover, when healthy existing churches reproduce and plant in new locations, they often find themselves reinvigorated. That means there's both potential and a great opportunity for new churches to be planted across our denomination.

Just as the Metropolitan Chicago Synod's Turn-around Synod Initiative is designed to help existing congregations experience revitalization, the goal of the Lutheran Church Planters Network (LCPN) is to help plant *new* churches here and beyond.

LCPN was established in 2013 by Redeemer Lutheran, a multisite church in Park Ridge and Chicago. As we made our move to becoming multisite, we started holding bimonthly gatherings for people in the Chicago area who were involved with starting new churches or interested in church planting. The plan was to connect with each other, learn from each other and encourage each other.

We've become a growing network of people committed to equipping and connecting church planters across the ELCA. We're coming alongside existing churchwide, synodical and seminary efforts in a collaborative way to add value by helping in the ongoing development of a church planter pipeline. We envision a new movement of the Spirit—one that will raise up a generation of faithful and effective people who are actively planting healthy, reproducing churches that are connected to and learning from each other while reaching and discipling new generations of followers of Jesus.

To move us toward our vision, we've launched a three-year pilot program called "Growing the Orchard." This is a collaborative effort, spearheaded by



Redeemer with support from the synod and ELCA Domestic Mission. We're focused on four mutually reinforcing activities, namely:

- 1. Yearly church planters boot camp.** Our goal is to bring together 20 to 25 participants per year from across the ELCA for training in the nuts and bolts of church planting.
- 2. Church planter residency program.** Each year during the three-year pilot program we hope to give thorough training and rigorous experience to a church planter resident at Redeemer's Portage Park campus. The resident will then be ready to go out immediately to plant a new church. We're currently accepting applications for a one-year (paid) residency at Redeemer, starting this fall.
- 3. Expanding the Lutheran Church Planters Network.** We're hoping to help launch five local LCPN networks in the next three years.
- 4. Providing coaching and consulting for church planters.** Timely coaching and consulting can be invaluable to the demanding task of planting a new church. We want to help fill that need where we can.

Sound interesting? Want more details? Ready to talk about the next steps? Check us out at [LutheranChurchPlanters.net](http://LutheranChurchPlanters.net) or call the Rev. Fred Nelson at 847-323-3774. ☒

