



## Reforming our images

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12).*

On my frequent car trips around town, I regularly pass by the corner of Western and Belmont. It's a very unremarkable place—the site of yet another strip mall. But the other day as I drove by I was carried back to my childhood visits to this same corner, which was then the home of Riverview Park, the prototype of Six Flags and the amusement park that first planted the idea of Disneyland in the mind of a boy named Walt Disney.

There were plenty of reasons to love going to Riverview—the crowds, the excitement, the roller coasters, the parachute drop. But when I was really little I used to love hanging out in Aladdin's Castle and, specifically, in the hall of mirrors, where I could walk from looking glass to looking glass and experience a brand-new *me* in each image. The problem, of course, was that not a single one of them was an image of who I really was.

In a way, though, it was a useful life learning. We all need a certain amount of mirroring in our life; that is, people or experiences that will help sharpen our perception of who we are and how we come across to others. So we seek mirroring from our parents, our teachers, our friends and lovers, our spouses and children. And when the looking glass is straight and true, we are set free to walk into life with courage and confidence.

The problem is that so many of the images that are mirrored back to us aren't really who we are—the cruel nicknames, the limiting stereotypes, the put-downs and gossip, the voices that scream in your ear that you are trapped, that you will never get out, that you aren't going anywhere. Before you know it, you start living as if the twisted reflection that appears in the glass is the truth.

In a way, Martin Luther was a man caught in just such a mirror. From what we know, he grew up



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under the guidance of both a harsh father and a moralistic form of Christianity that regularly reflected back to him all his faults, inadequacies and errors in a way that left him in despair of ever being acceptable to a cruel and unforgiving God.

But, as we remember once again on this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Luther made a fateful decision to look with fresh eyes into the word of God. And though he still saw the truth of all the bends and twists in his personality and behavior, beneath this he was also able to see himself as God saw him—namely, as a precious child, the spitting image of the God who made him, redeemed by the love of Jesus. And in this reflection, he was set free to walk into life with courage and confidence again.

So, for us, who have been shaped as Christians in God's likeness, there is also a gift and a challenge in Luther's discovery. There is, for each of us, the gift of this same straight and true looking glass to remind us each day to see ourselves as God sees us. There is a challenge to notice those who suffer from the curved and distorted images that life has reflected back to them—and then to show them the truth that will make them free. ƚ

## LSSI celebrates 150 years



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) traces its earliest beginnings to the Andover Home for children, pictured here with residents and staff in front of the superintendent's home. Now, 150 years later, LSSI still provides services to children, but also offers early childhood education programs, mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment, affordable senior housing, residential programs for people with developmental disabilities, and assistance as formerly incarcerated individuals integrate back into society.

This year, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) celebrates 150 years of transforming lives. On Oct. 31, 1867, in Berlin, Ill. (now known as Swedona), the doors of an orphanage opened to receive its first ward, Edward from Galesburg. Local Lutheran churches started the orphanage to help children whose parents had died in a cholera epidemic.

LSSI's tradition of caring began quite simply with Lutherans reaching out to help others of their faith, and later more diverse groups of people. When Edward crossed the threshold, that small step marked the beginning of a long history of service to people in communities across Illinois. LSSI now serves neighbors across the spectrum of age, race, income and wellness. Last year alone, LSSI provided service to almost 64,000 people, or 1 in every 201 people in Illinois.

As the decades have passed since its founding, partnerships with the ELCA; local, state and federal governments; donors; volunteers; and community members have allowed LSSI to build a strong foundation that has grown for a century and a half.

The Lutheran Home and Farm School moved to Andover in 1871; Nachusa Lutheran Orphanage opened in 1904. To this day, the Nachusa location still houses offices for part of LSSI's Children's Community Services programs. In 1907 land was purchased to build the Lutheran Home Finding Society at 4840 W. Byron St. in Chicago. Owned by LSSI, the building today is the site for a variety of mental health services for children and adults.



The Lutheran Home Finding Society (pictured in 1947) was built in the early 1900s and was the main Lutheran organization providing foster home and adoption services in Illinois. The Chicago property is still part of LSSI today, housing a variety of mental health services for adults and children.

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The first social ministries to which LSSI traces its roots were primarily homes for orphaned children. As early as 1909, the first effort to coordinate disparate social services took place with the formation of the Board of Charities of the Illinois Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Church.

By 1950 there were as many as 26 separate organizations in Illinois with varying relationships to a Lutheran church body. Services had simply sprung up as needs were perceived and when funding was available. Finally, a series of consolidations resulted in the formation of Lutheran Welfare Services of Illinois in 1965. Fourteen years later, the organization was changed to the current day Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

As one of the largest providers of foster care services in Illinois, LSSI's commitment to children remains strong, while providing other critical programs for Illinois residents, including early childhood education, mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment, affordable senior housing, residential programs for people with developmental disabilities, and programs that help formerly incarcerated individuals integrate back into society.

Much has changed throughout Illinois in the last 150 years, but one thing has remained constant in LSSI's history—the commitment of people in communities to join together to care for their neighbors. ♣

For more information about LSSI, visit [LSSI.org](http://LSSI.org).

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## Covenant renewal to take place Oct. 31

An ecumenical “Covenant Renewal Service” between the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the Archdiocese of Chicago will take place on Tuesday, Oct. 31, at 7 p.m. at Holy Name Cathedral, 735 N. State St. in Chicago.

In a letter dated Oct. 27, 2016, Cardinal Blase Cupich and Bishop Wayne Miller wrote: “Catholics and Lutherans in Chicago have a history of working together in covenant for nearly three decades. The Archdiocese of Chicago and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod have agreed to renew this covenant between our two church bodies, originally signed by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin and Bishop Sherman Hicks in 1989. We are pleased to announce together that this covenant renewal will take place at Holy Name Cathedral on Oct. 31, 2017.”

More information about the service and the covenant may be found at [renewingcovenant.com](http://renewingcovenant.com), a website created by the Lutheran-Catholic Covenant Renewal Committee. The website's purpose is to foster relationships and partnerships between Lutherans and Catholics in Chicago and to promote more positive conversations that build unity. Congregations are encouraged to visit the resource to find out ways to become more



Cardinal Blase Cupich and Bishop Wayne Miller.

involved in living out the covenant in their local setting.

For more information about how to become more involved, contact the Rev. Brian Wise, the synod's ecumenical officer, at [brian.wise1@gmail.com](mailto:brian.wise1@gmail.com) or 630-897-6891. A copy of the covenant is available online at [mcselca.org/who/partnerships/ecumenical](http://mcselca.org/who/partnerships/ecumenical). ♣

## LSTC conference: Storytelling in turbulent times

This fall, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) will gather leaders together to reclaim “evangelical” for our current culture.

The theme of this year’s Leadership Conference, to be held Oct. 10-12 at LSTC, is “Public Church, Public Leaders—Telling Stories: Reforming an Evangelical Mission in Turbulent Times.” An LSTC event for more than two decades, the conference in recent years has been held in the fall (think: returning to school for homecoming).

It is part of LSTC’s mission to not just provide theological education for seminarians but also for the church, said Jennifer Thomas, LSTC gift planner and point person for the conference. Alumni are urged to attend, but so are other leaders. Register at [lstc.edu/lstc-life/events/leadership](http://lstc.edu/lstc-life/events/leadership).

The conference’s keynote speakers are Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, professor of theological and social ethics at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Calif.; Caryn Riswold, professor of religion who also teaches gender and women’s studies at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Ill.; and Andrea Walker, an ELCA Global Mission area director.

William Flippin Jr., pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Atlanta, will preach at Wednesday’s eucharist, and Michelle Townsend de Lopez, pastor of Cross Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, will preside.

Rounding out the leadership team are musicians and other LSTC staff/faculty and graduates, including Philip Ruge-Jones, Jason Chesnut, Richard Perry Jr., Linda Thomas, Gordon Straw, Ray Pickett, Lea Schweitz and Benjamin Stewart.

Faculty panels will respond to keynote addresses. Faculty and staff also will lead workshops, including Generosity in Turbulent Times; Reformed for Mission: Seminary Education; and Honest Proclamation: Preaching Across the Divide.

“We engage alumni in providing their experience and leadership to make this a viable conference,” Thomas said. “It’s not just a conference where we open up the top of your brain and pour information in, but a participatory event where you get something to bring back to your ministry.”

The wide variety in backgrounds of people leading and attending make it a rich experience, she added.

Participants may love academic learning, but may also be at a point in their careers where they want and need to learn what things are working in congregational ministry because that’s their current context, Thomas said. What leaders will learn benefits the congregation as well as the pastor.

“We want to make sure we’re exploring what 21st-century church should look like,” she said.

Central to the conference is the dinner honoring classes with five- and 10-year anniversaries. Distinguished alumni/ae awards will be presented to James Bickel, Faithful Servant Award; Yehiel Curry, Emerging Voice Award; James Lapp, Excellence in Parish Ministry Award; Amy Reumann, Witness to the World Award; Andrea Walker, Called to Lead Award; and George Zachariah, Specialized Ministry Award. ☞

For more information, contact Jennifer Thomas at [jthomas@lstc.edu](mailto:jthomas@lstc.edu) or call 913-269-9825.

