



Domestic tranquility

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm (Mark 4:39).

Take heart. It is nearly over—election season, that is. And this year, more than ever, I'm going to be so relieved not to see any more campaign ads about how many houses the candidates have and how many toilets they have in them! The pettiness, the viciousness, the meaningless noise of it all gets pretty overwhelming by election day.

Of course, now that I think of it, campaign advertising is only part of the problem. The tone of political rhetoric and the news in general do a good job of keeping the pot bubbling all year, every year. The stories of cruelty to children and families, violence, racism, diplomatic chaos and dysfunction, and leaders who love to keep things as anxious and impulsive as possible, all conspire to make contemporary life turbulent, at best. I wonder if some of our leaders still take seriously the words from the preamble to the U.S. Constitution:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Insuring "domestic tranquility" definitely seems to have dropped out of the job description. In fact, domestic tranquility may have been replaced by an explicit mission to keep the wind and the sea stirred up as much as possible so we will make decisions based on our anxiety, anger and perpetual fear that our boat is being swamped, rather than making decisions based on good judgment.

But then, perhaps this makes it an especially good time to remember that when God made the



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decision to take on flesh in the person of Jesus, God also made the promise to get into the boat with us—with all of its turbulence and danger, anxiety and noise—and offer a bit of domestic tranquility for our troubled hearts, right here in the midst of the storm.

We may be living in a time when it's important to take a bit of time each day for thoughtful silence, for prayer, to notice and give thanks for the simple gifts of life and love, beauty and laughter—a bit of time each day to turn off the news and the noise, to talk to our children and grandchildren about the blessing of the freedom and abundance of grace that God extends to us even when we don't ask for it.

And during this bit of time, we can allow Jesus to calm the storm that others are determined to stir up, and so to restore a little domestic tranquility to our souls. Because it is from this place of domestic tranquility in our internal deep well that we will be free to re-enter and re-engage with the storms of life, filled to the brim with faithful determination, confidence and courage. ✞

LSSI foster parents:

Advocating for families and children

There are approximately 17,000 children in foster care in Illinois. Foster parents play a key role in providing children who have been neglected, abused or abandoned with a loving home, and working with caseworkers and birth families on a goal toward reunification. Children who cannot be safely reunited with their families may then need an adoptive family.

Although it can vary, the licensing process for prospective foster parents can take about three to four months. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) holds informational meetings for those interested at its foster care offices across the state.

Sheri and Chris Allen of Tremont became foster parents when their children were 7 and 3. Chris said they knew being foster parents was “a route we’d go down.” It’s a road the couple has navigated for the past 11 years, fostering seven children. Along the way, they adopted twin boys who were placed in their home during infancy.

As foster parents, Sheri Temont describes their role as advocates for the children placed in their care. And as any parent can attest, “You learn as you go,” she said.

Their commitment and knowledge has paid off, not only for the children but also for parents working to regain custody of their kids. Reunification is always the goal with foster care.

Shortly after they were married, Evisha Ford Sills and her husband, Robert Sills, began the process of becoming foster parents. The suburban Chicago couple began the licensing process in January 2017. “By March, Josiah (children’s names changed to protect confidentiality) came to us. Eleven months later Ryan was born, and Nolan came along not too long after that,” Evisha Sills said.

They’ve encouraged everyone involved in their experience to grow from it.



Photo: Courtesy of the Sills family

Evisha and Robert Sills have been foster parents to three children. They work closely with the children’s biological families. They adopted two of the children and saw the successful reunification of the third child with his biological mother.

The Sills also understand that a critical aspect of foster parenting is working with the biological family toward reunification. They have stayed in close contact with the boys’ biological families, becoming mentors to their birth mothers and obtaining prenatal care for one when she became pregnant again.

Ryan’s biological mother, who was incarcerated when she gave birth, was released two years early and worked hard, along with the Sills, to provide a stable home for her son. Last year he was returned to her care. The Sills adopted the other two boys.

The Sills host informational meetings about LSSI and foster care for anyone interested in obtaining a license. They enjoy answering questions about their experience and providing guidance to families.

“The journey has been an interesting one,” Evisha Sills said. “We’ve become strong advocates for foster care.”

For more information about becoming a foster parent, visit LSSI.org. 4

From table dreaming to Open Table

It's fitting that when leaders of the ELCA's Book of Faith Initiative were doing some dreaming about the future it was around a dining room table. One vision that emerged became the "Hein-Fry Book of Faith Challenge" (HFBFC), which calls for the innovation and leadership of seminarians. This year, the focus actually is "Open Table," drawing together those who have long studied Scripture and those who are new (maybe even unfamiliar) to it.

It's been five years since HFBFC was birthed at the table of Diane Jacobson, professor emeritus of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. On Oct. 18-19 the challenge will be held at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. The public is invited to attend.

One student from each ELCA seminary is chosen to participate in, and present at, the event. This year, six students will present projects they've developed over the past year with a team from their (in most cases, internship) congregation and a faculty adviser. The goal is for them to find faithful, innovative and effective new ways for God's people to teach and learn Scripture.

Historically, the main speaker at the Hein-Fry Lectures has been the draw, but for the past two years it's been somewhat different, said Sara Vanderpan, a Minnesota pastor who most recently served as special projects director for the Book of Faith Initiative. The HFBFC is meant to be a learning experience that helps seminarians understand themselves as teachers and their work as welcome contributions to the life of the church and the community around them.

"We want the focus on the students. They are our teachers," Vanderpan said. There will be a main respondent and two or three other local leaders on a panel who are meant to give feedback from their areas of expertise and take

learning to a new level, connecting audience and students for further engagement.

Students are asked to present short TED Talk-style versions of what their fuller projects entail. This year the event will include a production of a video (or audiovisual production) of the experience, highlighting important teaching/learning moments and ideas.

From them, the HFBFC is eager to learn:

- What sorts of teaching/learning experiences of Scripture seem to work well in your context to gather and sustain an open table of significant learning?
- In what ways did participation in such an open table affect the understanding, faith and Christian witness of those who were already relatively "biblically fluent"?
- In what ways did participation in such an open table affect those who came with little or no familiarity with Scripture?



Kyle Symanski represented the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago at the Hein-Fry Book of Faith Challenge last year. In his presentation, he reminded listeners that "hope is a function of struggle."

"This is about the coming together of churchwide leaders, bishops, pastors, seminary leaders or teachers, and congregational members and students end up being the key piece that ties these leaders together," Vanderpan said.

"Our goal for this year is that our seminary students, and the congregational representatives who come with them, understand the potential they have to contribute to the church's engagement with Scripture. They have different topics and structures, and our interest is in seeing the beauty, power and grace around the table as we bring together those who have long been in Scripture and those who are new." **L**

St. Cyprian's food pantry needs your shoes

By Carolyn Doughty

St. Cyprian's Food Pantry had been a ministry of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church on the northwest side of Chicago since 1983. But in 2000, the church closed, leaving the food pantry without a place to call home. Then in February 2002, United in Faith Lutheran Church opened its doors and welcomed St. Cyprian's Ecumenical Food and Clothing Pantry to be part of its ministry.

United in Faith, 6525 W. Irving Park Rd., Chicago, became a congregation on Easter Sunday (1998) when eight churches merged. It adopted "We are to be God's Hands, Feet and Voice in This World" as its mission statement.

So, why do they need shoes for a food pantry?

The congregation has supported the pantry in many ways. It not only offers food for daily living but also gives children new backpacks with school supplies in September. Each Christmas the pantry distributes presents to the children and baskets at Easter, with turkey and "all the trimmings" meals also provided on these holidays. Often these projects are spearheaded by parishioners who also donate gifts and other supplies.

St. Cyprian's also has a clothes closet with new and gently used clothing for its clients.

A few ecumenical groups and congregations support St. Cyprian's, but the need is great. In 2017, the pantry served 16,429 individuals, of which 4,578 were children. (St. Cyprian's is the second largest food pantry in the Chicago area.) Creative fundraising has become a necessary part of the pantry. For example, baby needs, such as diapers, baby wipes, etc., are not only expensive but also can't be bought with food stamps. So once a year St. Cyprian's has a "baby shower" to stock up on these items for client-families with infants and toddlers.

Another creative fundraising effort is the "perpetual shoe drive." St. Cyprian's works with Funds2Orgs, which pays for the shoes that are



St. Cyprian's Easter Baskets.

collected. The money St. Cyprian's receives from this organization is used to purchase food for the pantry. Funds2Orgs then trains people in 25 developing countries to be independent business owners by selling the shoes collected, thus being able to support their family.

Shoes can be dropped off on Mondays and Thursdays between 8 and 11 a.m. at St. Cyprian's Food Pantry, 6535 W. Irving Park Rd., Chicago. Pickup of donated items also can be arranged by emailing hidinka5rules@yahoo.com.

St. Cyprian's appreciates all the help it receives. If your congregation would like to be a supporter of the pantry by volunteering, or by giving food, clothing, shoes or monetary donations, call 773-283-9178.

Visit unitedinfaith.org/stcyprians.html#Ways for more information. ♋

Carolyn Doughty is a member of United in Faith Lutheran Church, Chicago.

Clarification: On page B of the print version of the August 2018 synod insert included in *Living Lutheran*, LSTC's Guild has changed its name to "Village," not "the Village."