



The inhabited world

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

... all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven (Colossians 1:16-17, 19-20).

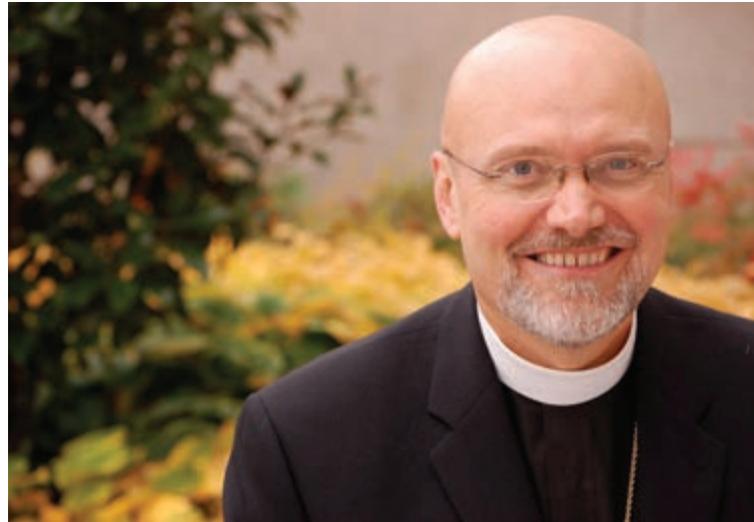
There are so many new things to read, so I rarely indulge in rereading what I have read before. But for some reason I was recently drawn to an anniversary edition of a well-known theological volume called *The Secular City* by Harvey Cox.

When I first read this book as a college student in the late 1960s, it revolutionized my way of thinking about the relationship between the church and the society. Rereading it now, I'm astonished by how many of the developments predicted by Cox so long ago have, in fact, become an undeniable reality in our time.

But there is at least one important difference. When we now speak of the "secularization" of our society, we are almost always lamenting the great chasm that has opened between organized religion and ordinary secular life; that is, life in the "real world." We see secularization as a profane and sinister force that is insidiously destroying the church.

In fact, Cox envisioned secularization in quite the opposite way. As a person of faith himself, he saw secularization as the movement of the church out from behind the safe stone walls of its cloisters and cathedrals so the power of faith would effectively infiltrate every aspect of the *saeculorum*—the whole inhabited world. And, used in this sense, the "secularization" of Christianity becomes a vision of a church liberated for engagement with the world rather than a church cowering in retreat from the world.

It seems an important idea to consider at a time when there is so much public conversation about the need to retreat behind walls of self-interest



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and self-protection, alienation and misunderstanding, delusions of personal purity, and an immutable conviction that "I am right."

It's such a small distance then from a posture of retreat to that place where "faithfulness" is defined by our willingness to use all means necessary to defend our tiny, sacred bastions—our private mighty fortresses—from a bleak and dangerous "secular" existence.

It's so surprising and strangely exhilarating to imagine the possibility that engagement with the whole inhabited world, the "secularization" of Christianity, might be the fulfillment of our mission rather than its enemy.

And, in a particular way, in this Christmas season it seems good to remember that the whole point of this most sacred event is that God chose not to remain safely and securely walled up in heaven, but instead chose to infiltrate every aspect of the *saeculorum*, every dark and lonely corner of the whole inhabited world, with the transforming love of a son in whom all things hold together. For through this engagement, sisters and brothers, God will be pleased to be reconciled with all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

Blessed Christmas. 卐

Credit Union is open to serve your financial needs

“We’ve had a tremendous response from the members of the ELCA in our first months of operation,” said Luis Reyes, chief operations officer of the new ELCA Federal Credit Union. By Oct. 1, four months into operation, the credit union counted nearly 400 members.

The ELCA Federal Credit Union represents a new alternative in banking for ELCA members. The credit union is the fourth financial ministry of the ELCA and the first to offer individual consumer loans, including auto and personal.

“By offering lower interest rate loans, our credit union is able to save our members significant finance charges,” Reyes said. “As a not-for-profit financial cooperative, the credit union exists to serve its members, not to make a profit. Earnings are returned to members through more competitive rates on deposits and loans, fewer fees and enhanced services.”

Creation of the ELCA-sponsored credit union supports the church’s mission to promote wise stewardship of members’ financial resources. “While the ELCA Federal Credit Union is a separate entity from the ELCA churchwide organization, the credit union will operate with the church’s mission and values in mind,” said the Rev. Arnold Pierson, president of the credit union. “When you choose to participate in the ELCA Federal Credit Union, you will work with a financial institution that is rooted in your faith community. This is a socially responsible way to do your banking.”

Currently, individual ELCA members can join the ELCA Federal Credit Union by opening a savings account with a \$25 deposit and maintaining that balance. A more complex, robust online banking system necessary for congregations and ministries—allowing for authorization of signers—will allow those organizations to participate in 2017.

Credit union members have access to an array of financial products and services, including savings accounts, checking accounts, certificates of deposit, auto loans, personal loans, and credit and debit cards. Members have free access to a worldwide network of ATMs, and deposits are insured up to \$250,000. Auto loans start as low as 1.99 percent APR (annual percentage yield) for well-qualified buyers. Credit card interest rates start as low as 7.99 percent APR, and the credit union doesn’t charge transaction fees for balance transfers or cash advances.

Members also get the convenience of online banking, online bill payment, e-statements, direct deposit, account-to-account transfer to link with accounts at other financial institutions, and person-to-person fund transfers.

The credit union recently introduced a mobile app that allows people to bank anytime, anywhere. Available for Apple, Android and Kindle devices, the app allows people to bank securely from a mobile phone or tablet. Through this app they can deposit checks, pay bills, transfer funds, make person-to-person transfers and find a nearby ATM. **L**



Luis Reyes (left), chief operations officer, and the Rev. Arnold Pierson, president, at the new office of the ELCA Federal Credit Union at the Lutheran Center in Chicago.

Interested in becoming a member of the ELCA Federal Credit Union? Learn more and apply for membership at the credit union website (elcafcu.org). Stop in and visit the ELCA Federal Credit Union office on the sixth floor of the Lutheran Center, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago.

Congregation participates in New Life for Old Bags program

The mission statement for United in Faith Lutheran Church in Chicago is “Why are we here? We are to be God’s hands, feet and voice in the world!”

Much of the focus of this congregation’s ministry pertains to caring for the needs of the community. “New Life for Old Bags” is a good example of this.



A workday in the community for the New Life for Old Bags program held at United in Faith Lutheran Church in Chicago.

A longtime member of the congregation came to the ministry directors’ meeting in August 2011 and explained that as “life enrichment coordinator” at a northwest side retirement facility she had many of the residents making mats for the homeless. She wanted to help the project grow so she asked if United in Faith could provide office and work space for the New Life for Old Bags project. After she explained the purpose and procedure, her request was unanimously approved.

Working and having fun

The following February the first meeting was held in the church’s fellowship hall. Since then the fellowship hall has been filled on the first Saturday of each month with people working hard on the mats—and having fun at the same time.

Making each mat is a simple process. They are made by crocheting together discarded plastic shopping bags. There are many simple and easy steps from beginning to end for making the mats. Anyone can find a task they can master and will enjoy the process.

Once the mats are completed, they are distributed to the homeless by Cornerstone Community Outreach in Uptown.

As of Feb. 22, 2016, 2,762 mats have been completed and approximately 1,933,400 repurposed bags have been used to make the mats. About 220,960 hours of volunteer work has been donated in six years from all the sites that make these mats.

According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, in 2015 there were more than 100,000 homeless people in the Chicago area. Over the last several years the face of the homeless has changed considerably. At one time, a homeless person would more likely be a single male. Now many more women with children are homeless. Of those children, more than 20,200 are Chicago Public School students. **L**

For more information about New Life for Old Bags workdays and locations or to find out how you can help, visit unitedinfaith.org/newlifeforoldbags.html or email Mary at joynnlob@gmail.com.

For instructions for making the mats, visit finecraftguild.com/craft-for-humanity-crochet-a-plastic-sleeping-mat-for-the-homeless/ for video.)

Jazz prayer service enters third season

Soothing. Thought-provoking. Energizing. Spirit-filled. Amazing music.

These are just some of the comments heard after the Jazz Prayer services offered by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Oak Park. Jazz Prayer, entering its third season, started up again in September and will run through May 2017.

The family-friendly services are simple: an interweaving of live jazz music, poetry and prose, and prayer. You can sink into meditation for the whole hour, or you can sing, clap and dance to the music—it's totally up to you (and the audience does it all). The ensemble usually includes piano, bass, sax, drums, a vocalist and often trumpet. Other instruments and singers are added depending on the musical selections.

Services are on third Fridays from September through May. The evening starts at 7:10 with refreshments, so there's a chance to socialize or make up for a skipped dinner. The service starts at 7:30 and lasts an hour.

Why Jazz Prayer? Good Shepherd's director of music, Jonathan Oblander, is a jazz pianist as well as a classically trained organist. So the congregation and Oblander decided to share his gift with the community at large.

The services are designed to be comfortable for people who consider themselves "spiritual but not religious"—or are just jazz fans—as a way of inviting

them into God's presence.

Each month the services attract 60 to 80 people, the majority of whom are not members of Good Shepherd.

This season, highlights have included:

- In September the music and readings were centered around Herbie Hancock's *Speak Like a Child*. The world continues to be mired in the same chaos of police brutality, racial injustice and foreign wars that originally inspired Hancock to write this tune 50 years ago. *Speak Like a Child* was meant to draw us back to the purity and spontaneity of children, to bring back a sense of hope for a better future.
- In October the program examined feeling abandoned even as we rely upon the Holy One, a struggle most of us experience at least once, based on *You Have to Be There* by Brian Ulvaeus, formerly of Abba.

In subsequent months services will feature Duke Ellington's *Ain't Nothing Nowhere Without God*, his third sacred concert; jazz Christmas carols; women jazz artists; and Dixieland jazz.

The Metropolitan Chicago Synod has provided essential seed money through a Fund for Mission grant, which has been supplemented by individual sponsorships and freewill offerings. **L**

Jazz Prayer

Third Fridays, September through May
7:10 p.m. refreshments; 7:30 p.m. service
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