



## Looking for something?

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

*As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet?" (Matthew 11:7-9).*

It is Advent now—a time of year when a lot of us are being asked to make lists of what we are looking for this Christmas. It's the great season of preparation for whatever it is we are expecting. But I must admit, the older I get the harder it is to make those lists—the harder it is even to know what I'm looking for. Like the crowds in Jesus' time who ran out into the wilderness to see John the Baptist, I know there is something that I am longing for, looking for, hoping for ... but what is it really?

So I'm wondering now about you. Deep down in the quiet regions of your heart, what are you looking for this Christmas?

Are you waiting this year for something that will cheer you up, or satisfy the hunger, or numb the discomfort? Are you looking for an estranged friend or a difficult family member suddenly to tell you whatever it is that you have been looking for them to say? Are you looking for a preacher who will bend with the winds of popular opinion to tell you something pleasant, who will never challenge you to rethink your prejudices or your convenient, conventional morality?

Are you looking for something that will rescue you from your feelings of being overwhelmed and overburdened by a life that is spinning out of control right now?

Is it some amusement, or maybe some personal knight in shining armor that you look for to rescue you from the loneliness, the boredom, the pointlessness? Are you expecting some political leader dressed in the soft raiment of omniscient power to save you from the anxiety of living in this dangerous and violent world?



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Are you expecting a wake-up call—that unwelcome but much-needed prophetic slap in the face that will snap you back to reality—some thunderbolt that will jolt you out of your addictions, or attachments, or bad habits ....

Or, better yet, a prophet whose only vision of the future is to call us back—to call us back to the simple virtue of an imaginary world now lost in the mists of time—to call us back to some sentimental illusion that never did match up very well with the world that could actually be seen and heard?

Whatever it may be that you are looking for in your heart of hearts this Christmas, know this: when the living Christ is born into your life, he always comes bringing something a little different from what you were expecting to see. He always comes bringing the gifts of trust, courage, energy and joy. He also brings the freedom you will need to prepare you for a future that you cannot possibly be looking for because it is something that you have neither seen nor heard. And in this, sisters and brothers, is a new birth of hope. ॥

## LSTC strengthens preacher and parish with advanced degree program

By Julie B. Sevig

Kelly Faulstich is only half joking when she calls the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) “Preacher Camp.” But the program does happen with intensity in the summer (three weeks) and it *is* for preachers. It attracts preachers from across the country and beyond, who do most of the work in their local setting.

Faulstich entered that program in 2010 during her second call as a pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Ill. Now, as pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Chicago, she uses what she learned in the program on a weekly basis.

LSTC’s three-year program was a good fit for her. She was with six other students, including preachers from the Baptist, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic traditions. “A concentrated residency was an asset for me,” she said. “We were expected to disengage from our regular work so living on campus was good.”

Learning with classmates from other faith traditions turned out to be a gift, she said. Surprisingly, she found that she had the most in common with a Baptist pastor, who also preaches law and gospel.

### Finding her voice

When she entered the program, Faulstich was at a place of fine-tuning her preaching. “I was searching for a voice from the pulpit, including nongendered language for God,” she said. In both her first call (in Ohio) and at Grace, congregants were more traditional than the progressive, millennial base she now experiences at Resurrection.

But at Grace, she also found a fertile training ground among the church’s school and an abundance of young families. Her sermon preparation was often shaped by feedback from second- and seventh- graders, she said. As one who understands and values the breadth of those listening to



Caroline Edlund (left), Malin Strindberg (both from Sweden) and Kelly Faulstich at graduation in 2013, after completing LSTC’s Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program.

sermons (even those doodling with crayons), she knows the importance of including children and youth in her preparation and preaching.

Her first two calls also propelled her toward her thesis topic: “Preaching from the Second Chair.” What does it mean to preach as an associate pastor? To preach periodically? To preach to the periphery (to the single-person household, for instance, in a congregation dominated by families)? How does it affect how you prepare and how people hear you?

A strength of the preaching program is that it is grounded in congregational participation, making it a benefit to the congregation as well as the pastor. A parish preaching group walks with the student all three years, meeting before and after sermons, giving an abundance of feedback—“good, bad and otherwise,” she said. “Engaging in that way can deepen the understanding and appreciation for how a pastor prepares thoughtfully each week.”

Jan. 31 is the application deadline for the preaching program, done in partnership with the Chicago Theological Schools. For more information on this and the Ecumenical Doctor of Ministry program, visit [lstc.edu](http://lstc.edu) or contact [admissions@lstc.edu](mailto:admissions@lstc.edu). **L**

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# Christ's sacred ministry of reconciliation: Resources and opportunities

"I wouldn't still be in ministry if I hadn't attended the 'Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process.'"

—Comment from an ELCA pastor

"It's the best and most thorough model for mediation with individuals and congregations that I have experienced in more than three decades of ordained ministry." —Comment from an ELCA bishop who attended the "Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders"

Conflict is a universal part of life. We live in a conflicted society, fraught with anxiety that is reflected in our politics, communities and families—as well as in our congregations. Amid this anxiety and division, the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC) engages in its mission to "proclaim Christ's good news, the gospel of peace and justice—and to be active in the sacred ministry of reconciliation—wherever and whenever we can." The LMPC ministry is grounded in the conviction that conflict doesn't have to be negative—it can also be an opportunity for growth and transformation, as well as an arena for God's revelation.

Begun in 1983, the LMPC offers a variety of resources to churches of all denominations. First, it offers hands-on workshops in "Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches," as well as "Healthy Congregations." These workshops can be use-



Clinic participants view a presentation on scapegoating and church conflict.

ful for churches that are currently experiencing conflict or that want to equip leaders to prevent destructive conflict in the future.

Such workshops have often been hosted by ELCA synods for a pastor-lay leader training event that is promoted among all congregations in their region. The "Leadership and Anxiety in the Church: A Family Systems Perspective" workshop has been particularly popular for such synodwide events.

The five-day "Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders" offers more advanced training that is designed to equip leaders with the skills necessary to deal effectively with interpersonal, congregational and other forms of group conflict. Past participants have gone on to establish synod mediation teams, which serve to train others in conflict transformation skills, while also being available to provide mediation services to churches within the synod.

LMPC's "Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process" is designed to help church leaders serve in a non-anxious manner amid congregational anxieties. The extensive training program enhances the ability of participants to function as self-differentiated leaders within their ministry setting.

Finally, LMPC offers consultation and mediation services to congregations that are experiencing high-intensity conflict and need outside help. This transformational model of mediation has brought healing to countless churches over the years.

LMPC has been blessed by the opportunity to serve with many ELCA synods, pastors and lay leaders. It is grateful for such continued ecumenical connections and looks forward to fostering new partnerships in a shared commitment to help Christ's church grow increasingly in health and wholeness into all that God wants it to be.

For more information, visit [LMPeaceCenter.org](http://LMPeaceCenter.org), email [admin@lmpeacecenter.org](mailto:admin@lmpeacecenter.org) or call 630-627-0507. 4

## LSSI responds to children and teens in crisis

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) offers a variety of mental health treatments for children and teens. Treatment is geared toward those who experience moderate to severe mental health symptoms that reduces their ability to manage daily routines, relationships and responsibilities.

In particular, teenagers face continual emotional and physical changes. Children, too, have times when they need someone to talk to, help with handling emotional problems or someone to turn to if they are being bullied. Help navigating these challenges can make a critical difference in their lives.

Through a state-sponsored program called Screening, Assessment and Support Services (SASS), LSSI provides crisis intervention and follow-up mental health on Chicago's northwest side to youth who have no insurance or Medicaid coverage.

Karah Kohler, LSSI's director of children's mental health programs, emphasized the dire need for services to help youth in crisis, which can include self-injury, suicide thoughts or suicide attempts.

An appointment at a community mental health clinic can take up to a year.

SASS is a mobile program—clinicians bring their services to clients within 90 minutes of a call. A pre-hospitalization screening is done to understand the level of a crisis, and outpatient services are available for 90 days, which can be extended if needed.

Counselor Tanya Puente said gaining a child's trust is key to helping, but parents play an instrumental role too. "Parent follow-through is huge," she said.

Cathy Artista agrees. Her 10-year-old son realized great success through SASS. "Tanya helps me with guidance," she said. "That has been a positive road for me and my family."

LSSI also has taken the lead in preventative care. Budget cuts have forced many Chicago Public Schools to eliminate counselor positions, making more children at risk for crisis. So LSSI created "Step-Up," a program that provides a clinician at the school for preventative counseling. Address-

ing concerns and problems proactively, counselors can intervene before a child is in crisis. Step-Up's services are available to any student in the schools served by the program.

"The team approach is very effective," said SASS supervisor Laura Szwalek. "Clinicians know teachers and the family. The barrier is removed for the family in terms of access. There is a constant point of contact for the student."

For more information on Project SASS and Step-Up, visit [LSSI.org](http://LSSI.org) 



Counselor Tanya Puente meets with a young client in the Screening, Assessment and Support Services (SASS) program, which provides crisis intervention and follow-up mental health to youth.