

Wake up

By Wayne N. Miller, bishop

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn ... (Mark 13:35).

I was honored recently to be one of the ELCA bishops who participated in a summit conference with leaders from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. At the opening worship, George W.C. Walker Sr., the bishop of that church body, was the preacher. He built his sermon around a story about an older man who developed difficulty sleeping. The man would wake up in the middle of the night, turn on all the lights and shout out to the household, “Wake up! It’s too late to sleep.”

At this point in my life, I find that I identify with this man in a number of ways. Mostly, though, I am haunted by that warning: “Wake up! It’s too late to sleep.”

For most of us, I think the sentiments run in a very different direction. Often we have a tendency to sleep until the unwelcome daylight forces us to open our eyes, with our heart crying out, “Go back to sleep. It’s too soon to wake up.”

This, by the way, seems to be the inclination of the church. We look at the world around us, which is changing rapidly in ways that aren’t comfortable. Our heart longs to hold on to sleep and comfortable unconsciousness. Our hope: if we can just close our eyes for a while longer, we can continue to do things the way we have always done them. It seems so much better to dream the reality we wish were true rather than behold the reality that is. It just feels too soon to wake up.

On the other hand, there is another choice that is even worse. We might also hear ourselves saying, “Go back to sleep. It’s too *late* to wake up.” We defeat ourselves before we even begin the new day, overwhelmed and paralyzed by a mission field that has become too old, too young, too secular, too “whatever.” Why bother to try something different? Why bother to try at all? Nothing we do is going to make any difference anyway. It is just too late. Might as well hit the snooze button and go back to sleep.

So it may be useful to take a few minutes for a simple little prayer exercise in wakefulness that begins, ironically, by closing your eyes and paying attention to your breath.



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And as you breathe in, be awakened to the abundance of grace that the Spirit is breathing into you: your faith, your skills, your resources, the love of God, the love of others—all the precious gifts that are yours to use in response to the world around you.

And as you breathe out, be awakened to that world you are breathing into. Be awake to the pain, the poverty, the confusion, the injustice, the longing and emptiness, the grief and sadness, the world’s need for the abundance of grace that you yourself have just breathed in.

And then, when you are more fully aware of all that is in you and all that is around you, wake up, sisters and brothers, wake up. It is too late to sleep. □

New LSSI vision leads to 'Hands@Work'

Over the course of a year, with participation from more than 1,000 "stakeholders," Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) has developed a renewed vision for its work. LSSI is the unique joint ministry of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the other two ELCA synods in Illinois.

That vision has led directly to "Hands@Work," an initiative that was

launched Oct. 22 at "Jesus & Justice," a synodwide event co-sponsored by the synod Justice Team and LSSI.

The event offered models of local, regional, national and international justice ministries that are currently working in synod congregations.

Hands@Work is a major new commitment on LSSI's part to be engaged with ELCA congregations across Illinois in order to strengthen

local social ministries, including direct services, advocacy, community organizing and community development. For churches that decide to engage in it, Hands@Work entails a yearlong process that includes dreaming, research, seeking community input and planning for sustainability.

In response to LSSI's initiative, the synod council approved setting up a mission fund to help congregations pay for the professional consultation that LSSI will offer.

A major principle behind Hands@Work is the understanding that, for a congregation to be relevant in its neighborhood, it needs to pay close attention to the community. Instead of looking at ways to get people to "come to church," the church learns how to "serve where it is planted."

Before the church organizes itself to respond to community needs, it must be sure that *the community* really *needs* what the congregation is offering.

A second important principle incorporated into Hands@Work is constantly raising the question: "Who else needs to be at this table?"

Daniel Schwick, LSSI vice president for church and community services, leads the initiative and says local ownership is a primary consideration. "We are trying to develop LSSI's ability to help congregations engage with their communities ... in some way to help shape the communities in which our congregations live."

The Hands@Work initiative works like this. A group in a congregation—it could be the council, outreach committee, social ministry committee or any other committed group of disciples—meets with an LSSI consultant to outline the

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New from the Turnaround Synod Initiative

The Turnaround Synod Initiative is aimed at giving congregations encouragement, support and inspiration as they seek to become more and more what God is calling them to be.

Would any of these upcoming workshops be beneficial for your congregation? They are all free, so plan to bring a group! Please let us know how many you expect to attend so we can plan for refreshments, handouts, etc. Contact Vance Blackfox at vblackfox@mcselca.org or 773-248-0021, ext. 14.

Upcoming workshops for 2012

• **Getting Unstuck:** Has your congregation been spinning its wheels and staying in one place? Do you have trouble deciding on congregational goals and making important decisions? Kathy Nolte, pastor of Good Shepherd, Oak Park, will introduce approaches that can help you get past impasses and begin to move forward.

Saturday, Jan. 28, 9 a.m.-noon, Good Shepherd, 611 Randolph St., Oak Park

• **Transformational Leadership:** Ed Kruse, consultant, pastor and stew-

ardship specialist, presents ways to access the God-given power of transformational leadership in congregations. Learn how to deal with issues and especially how to connect with



and empower the much-needed group of "under-involved, uninvolved, and new members."

Saturday, March 3, 9 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Edison Park, 6626 N. Oliphant Ave., Chicago

• **Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations:** Working from Robert Schnase's book by the same name, Dennis Kelly, pastor of Ascension, Northfield, will introduce five practices—from radical hospitality to extravagant generosity—that characterize fruitful congregations.

Saturday, April 21, 9 a.m.-noon, location TBD

Resource guide

Check www.mcselca.org/what/mission/tsi/about to download a *Resource Guide for Turnaround Congregations*. Organized according to the steps of a renewal process, the guide suggests proven resources for use all along the way. □



**Coming in Lent 2012:
Leadership training
opportunities**

Over the six Saturdays of Lent (Feb. 25 and March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31) from 9 a.m.-noon, the Metropolitan Chicago Synod office will sponsor six congregational leadership training opportunities.

The February opportunity will be held at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Park Ridge. The other five will be held at the Lutheran Center, Chicago. We anticipate congregations sending two to three leaders to each session.

The opportunities being offered and examples of who might attend are:

- Basic Legal (council president and council secretary).
- Church Council Leadership (council president and vice president).
- Property Management/Risk Management (property team chair and a council member).
- Accounting/Payroll/Reporting/Auditing (treasurer, bookkeeper, and finance team member).
- Stewardship & Mission (Stewardship and mission team members).
- Volunteer Management/Resources for Congregations (volunteer coordinator and council member).

More information will be published when available. □

LSTC's online course offers new way to understand St. Paul's letters

Ray Pickett, professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), says Paul's letters are fundamentally long-distance conversations with communities of faith. For that reason, studying these letters in an online course offers students some unique opportunities to understand Paul in a new way.

"Groups in online courses form their own identity and hold conversations modeled on *ekklesia*, a democratic assembly," Pickett said. "In an online course, students are discussing with one another how to embody the gospel in life and community."

In an online environment, students don't have the option of spontaneously conversing with each other as they would in a classroom. Because of this, the students need to deliberately formulate what they want to express to each other. Thus they learn the value of carefully crafted and

well thought out communications. For any student of Paul, it's clear that he understood this value as well.

When asked whether or not his students could really experience "community" in an online course, Pickett said, "A virtual community is different from the kind of community formed in the classroom, but both are effective learning communities. Paul's letters are fundamentally concerned with what it means to be the community of Christ, and virtual online communities are yet another way we experience this in the church today."

By enrolling as a "special student," individuals may sign up for Pickett's online class "Life and Letters of Paul," as well as Peter Vethanayagamony's class "Church History II." For more information, contact R. Scott Chalmers, LSTC director of admissions (schalmers@lstc.edu or 773-256-0727). □

Synod musician attends music academy & festival

The 30th Lutheran Summer Music Academy (LSM) took place at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, June 26-July 24. Jennifer Crawford of Faith Lutheran Church, Glen Ellyn, Ill., was one of 151 students accepted into the program.

LSM is part of the Lutheran Music Program, Minneapolis. Its mission is to transform lives and connect people through faith and music. It fosters musical excellence and spiritual growth for high school band, orchestra, choir, piano and pipe organ students from all faith backgrounds.

Last summer, students were immersed in:

- **Music instruction**—Led by a faculty of 34 educators, professional musicians and teachers, students received two private lessons each week, played in large and small ensembles, and were placed in a musicianship class led by the composer-in-residence. They were given elective options, including conducting, church music, handbells. The Concert & Recital Series featured more than 50 events, including performances by faculty, students and guest artists.

- **Worship and devotions**—LSM's 2011 chaplain, Wayne Weissenbuehler, led students in worship twice daily and in devotional study weekly. Evening Prayer and Holden Evening Prayer settings were used centrally. Worship also included a hymn festival and Bach cantata.

LSM also uses a commissioned musical arrangement of Martin Luther's Morning Prayer. Written by Carl Schalk for LSM and introduced in 2009, this piece is sung by the entire



Jennifer Crawford (right) was the principle clarinetist in both the band and orchestra.

community each morning and is a beloved tradition.

LSM culminated in Festival Week: a hymn festival, student solo and chamber recitals, and evening concerts by the band, choir and orchestra. More than 3,000 people attended.

More than 90 congregations provide scholarships for youth attending LSM through the Young Musicians Partnership (YMP). In return, students in "partner" congregations receive a 10 percent discount plus matching dollars from LSM for the local scholarship. In the YMP's fourth year, 46 percent of LSM students in 2011 came from partner congregations, including Faith.

LSM 2012 is set for June 24-July 22 at Luther. For more information, visit www.lutheransummermusic.org or contact Sue Olstad, director of admissions (888-635-6583 or solstad@lutheransummermusic.org). □

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approach. If the church decides to proceed, it then applies to the synod for a grant to fund the yearlong engagement with LSSI's church-based community development experts. LSSI staff will facilitate a process in the congregation (or cluster of congregations) that will ultimately yield a sustainable local mission project.

Denver Bitner, LSSI president/CEO, said, "These efforts are already under way as LSSI and congregations in Metro Chicago have begun the conversations that will lead to a new generation of ministry where the church leads the way, calling the whole community to love their neighbor as Christ has loved us."

For more information, contact Schwick at dan.schwick@lssi.org or 847-390-1418. □