

# So simple

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these (Matthew 6:28-29).*

**A**s I write this I'm reading a book by Jesuit author Jim Martin. He is a very thoughtful and accessible writer, and, among other things, speaks eloquently on the subject of simplicity.

I've long been intrigued by the virtue of trying to simplify my life, but it never seems to work out. I mean, I could probably simplify my life by getting rid of everything in my wardrobe except for a black suit and a few black clerical shirts. But it would be hard not to have any choice or color in my clothing.

And I could go back to making all my food from scratch, but it would be hard to find the time.

I could certainly simplify my life by getting rid of all my electronic gadgets, writing my sermons in a notebook instead of on a notebook computer, corresponding by post rather than posting my ideas on the Web. But imagine how hard it would be for all of us to return to the slow pace of an unplugged life.

And so it goes. No matter how attractive simplicity may seem at first glance, most of us end up returning from the fantasy of a simple life to the everyday reality of a complicated one. The truth is that we have complicated our lives to make them easier. Simplicity is just too hard.

And yet, as the teaching about the lilies of the field reminds us again, Jesus relentlessly calls his friends back to simplicity. Jesus calls us to simplicity because it is in reducing the complications of the "easy life" that we encounter the truth that underlies all the layers of complication: the truth that all that I am and all that I have comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We are getting ready to enter again into Lent—a season that always begins by calling us to acknowledge again the simple reality that we are all dust returning to dust.



**Bishop Wayne N. Miller**

The world is always tempted to respond to that stark reality with a desperate quest for that one elusive, new thing we can create or discover that will allow us to raise ourselves up out of the dust by our bootstraps.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Those who will listen can hear the promise that, if we will raise our eyes from the vanity and frustration of lives of endless striving, we will see the cross—just a simple hardwood cross—standing before us as an invitation into friendship with God and into the glorious company of the saints in light.

In this Lenten season, may you find opportunities to lift your eyes to that cross and find, in its simple form, hope and peace. □

# Metropolitan Chicago



## Youth gather for the 'ultimate' lock-in

**F**or the third year, youth from all around the Metropolitan Chicago Synod gathered for the ULTIMATE Lock-In Nov. 4-5, sponsored by the Chicago Youth Ministry Network.

More than 215 youth and chaperones from 15 congregations began the evening at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Downers Grove, with games, snacks and worship led by Captive Free. At midnight, everyone headed to Enchanted Castle in Lombard, a 60,000-square-foot entertainment center with laser tag, mini golf, bumper cars, go-karts, karaoke and all-you-can-eat pizza.

The fun lasted until 6 a.m. It was another successful event for area Lutheran youth and youth workers who joined in a great night of relationship-building, worship and fellowship.

This event has grown in the past few years — hopefully more youth will take part in the 2012 ULTIMATE Lock-In in November.

### Training opportunity

Leading up to the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering (New Orleans, July

18-22), the event leaders and the ELCA Youth Ministry Network are hosting several training opportunities to help synod youth workers learn ways to facilitate successful youth ministry in their congregations. All adults with a heart for youth ministry are encouraged to take part in the upcoming synod training on Saturday, March 10.

This training, titled “Youth Ministry Events as Faith Formation: Part 3,” is free and open to all who are interested. For more information, contact Penny Harney, Gathering synod coach ([pharney@oursaviours.org](mailto:pharney@oursaviours.org)) or Mike Willis, Gathering synod coordinator ([michael.c.willis@gmail.com](mailto:michael.c.willis@gmail.com)).

The Chicago Youth Ministry Network meets on the second Thursday of each month for resource-sharing, coordinating synodwide events for high school and middle school youth, and fellowship. All are welcome. Contact Lauren Busey ([lauren@trinityevanston.org](mailto:lauren@trinityevanston.org)) for more information and to find out which congregation is hosting the meeting. □

2011 ULTIMATE Lock-In worship at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Downers Grove, Ill.

  
**SECTS and the city**  
Gen X | Y and Mainline Protestant Worship

### Gen X | Y worship conference

**H**oly Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago's Wrigleyville neighborhood (1218 W. Addison St.) will host “Sects and the City: Gen X | Y and Mainline Protestant Worship” on Feb. 11. The conference will explore the question: “While many mainline Protestant congregations are aging, what are young adults finding meaningful in the worship services of urban congregations with a high percentage of Generation X and Y?”

The conference moderator will be Benjamin Stewart, a professor of liturgy at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. The event includes responses from three young adult leaders with connections to Gen X | Y and informal reflections by young adults. Costs: single \$20; seminarian \$10; \$30 at the door; \$50 for three or more from one congregation ([www.sectsandthecity.org](http://www.sectsandthecity.org)). □



ELCA Malaria Campaign  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## Help fight malaria

**A** child dies from malaria every 45 seconds.

Gifts to the ELCA Malaria Campaign help provide mosquito nets, insecticides, medicine, health care, education and more to help eliminate deaths from this disease—for good.

Find more information about the ELCA Malaria Campaign at [www.elca.org/malaria](http://www.elca.org/malaria).

To give:

- Send checks or money orders to ELCA Malaria Campaign P.O. Box 71764 Chicago, IL 60694-9300. Make checks payable to “ELCA Malaria Campaign.”

- Call 800-638-3522 to donate by credit card.

- Make your check payable to your congregation, indicating “ELCA Malaria Campaign” in the memo line. Place your gift in the offering plate.

## Hands@Work: Mobilizing the church

**L**utheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) unveiled its church-based community development initiative, “Hands@Work,” at the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Justice Team’s “Jesus and Justice” event Oct. 22.

Hands@Work is designed to build on the ELCA’s tagline: “God’s work. Our hands.” It is intended to provide concrete “soles on the ground” opportunities for ELCA congregations across Illinois to focus on strengthening local social ministry.

The initiative, overseen by Daniel Schwick, LSSI vice president for church and community services, leads a congregation or cluster of congregations through a yearlong investigation of needs in their community, an assessment of assets available to address those needs, and the willingness of the congregation(s) to lead the way in addressing the needs.

LSSI professional staff will lead and provide resource experts to help congregations understand a community’s needs and assets. Members of participating congre-

gations will be actively engaged in dreaming, strategizing, implementing and sustaining local social ministry initiatives.

The Metropolitan Chicago Synod Council will provide grants to congregations to engage LSSI’s professional services in facilitating the development of social ministry initiatives. Some of these initiatives may involve establishing or deepening relationships with local LSSI programs.

Schwick is currently signing up congregations to undertake a Hands@Work project beginning in early 2012. If your congregation is interested in exploring this opportunity, contact him at [dan.schwick@LSSI.org](mailto:dan.schwick@LSSI.org) or 847-390-1418.

Learn more about Hands@Work by reading “Where the Church Meets the Public Square: Helping Congregations Respond to Needs in Their Communities,” in the fall 2011 *Eye on LSSI* magazine, available at [www.lssi.org/Publications/Eye-Fall2011.pdf](http://www.lssi.org/Publications/Eye-Fall2011.pdf).

ALLEN BOURGEOIS



**The Rev. Daniel Schwick (left), vice president of the Office of Church and Community Services; Valerie Everett, director, LSSI Connections; Joy Medrano, LSSI coordinator of church and volunteer relations; Valora Starr, director for discipleship, Women of the ELCA; and the Rev. Lester Newberry-White, United Mission in Christ Lutheran Church, discuss how a cluster of three ELCA churches in Chicago’s North Austin neighborhood can develop social ministry for families affected by incarceration.**

# Metropolitan Chicago



Elana Kirshenbaum, LSSI Life-book specialist, works with a child on a page called “This Is Me” in LSSI’s new Life-book, which was developed for foster children.

‘My Awesome Life’:

## LSSI’s new Lifebook for foster children

**M**y Awesome Life, a new Lifebook developed by and now available from Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), helps foster and adopted children create a meaningful, chronological narrative of their lives.

Lifebooks are used to explore the children’s thoughts, feelings and histories. They include such items as photographs, birth certificates, letters from birth and foster parents, and explanations of transitions in their lives. Foster care caseworkers, along with foster and adoptive parents, can use the Lifebook to help children separated from their birth parents make sense of change and difficult experiences, and maintain connections with important people in their lives.

Ruth Jajko, LSSI’s statewide director of adoption services, said, “Children who aren’t living with their original families really need to understand why that is.” She noted that

Lifebooks help the children answer that and other questions “through their own memories and voices.”

Information on *My Awesome Life* is included in a new section on LSSI’s website. “We are very excited about being able to introduce our new Lifebook on **LSSI.org** to help people learn more about this powerful therapeutic tool for children who’ve been in foster care,” Jajko said.

Since 2008, when the project was launched, LSSI has worked to make sure that every child in its foster care program receives a Lifebook.

The Lifebook area of LSSI’s website includes such information as what is a Lifebook?; the Lifebook program at LSSI; Lifebook training; and success stories. There’s also an order form.

For information, visit **[www.lssi.org/Support/MyAwesomeLife.aspx](http://www.lssi.org/Support/MyAwesomeLife.aspx)**. □

**STAND for WELCOME**

*LIRS Advocacy with Migrants and Refugees*

### Host a DREAM Act Sabbath

**C**onsider joining Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and faith communities nationwide in hosting a DREAM Act Sabbath at your congregation.

This Interfaith Immigration Coalition initiative is an effort for people to raise awareness of the DREAM Act, proposed federal legislation to allow undocumented youth who want to attend college or serve in the military to earn a pathway to legal status.

The 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to support compassionate immigration reform measures such as the DREAM Act. Participating in a DREAM Sabbath offers your congregation a way to engage in dialogue around immigration issues and reflect on the role people of faith play in welcoming newcomers.

To find resources to plan a DREAM Sabbath, visit **[lirs.org/dream](http://lirs.org/dream)**. □