

# Are we having fun yet?

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

*Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it (Mark 10:15).*

This makes twice, now, in two months that I have been asked the same question: “What do you do for fun?”

Both times I have had an extraordinarily difficult time answering it. There are certainly many things in my life and work that I find pleasant and enjoyable. I certainly am not gloomy or pessimistic, and for the most part my sense of humor is still intact. But fun ... hmm.

“Fun,” for me, implies some combination of freedom and playfulness—the capacity to take reasonable risks while remaining more focused on the excitement of the adventure or the discovery of the unknown than the fear of loss.

The opposite of fun is “worry,” which is the paralysis that results from squandering spiritual and physical energy trying to control what is not ours to control or to cling to that which we cannot keep.

Just about everyone prefers fun to worry. But for us mature, responsible, adult types, the sad truth is that our lives tend to be more filled with worry than fun. There is so much to lose by trying and failing. It seems safer to stay on solid ground, to hold on to what you have, to stay focused on what you know rather than risk seeing the world through the fresh, clear eyes of a beginner. But even though it may feel more adult, I wonder if shunning fun is more faithful.

In the famous saying quoted at the top of this article, Jesus warns his disciples that those who do not enter the realm of God as children will never make it. And I don’t think he was making a case here for infant baptism. He was reminding his friends that for all of the deadly seriousness of their mission, it would be disastrous for them to lose their child-like capacity to risk, to try, to face the world with open hearts and to look at things they have seen a hundred times before with the fresh new eyes of discovery. You just can’t get there unless you are willing to risk having a little fun.



Wayne N. Miller, bishop

And perhaps the same warning is offered to us modern disciples in this time as we struggle to find solid ground in a world that seems out of control and out of balance, as we grope to figure out how to hold on to what we have and how to avoid the risk of being knocked down or put down for imagining and trying something new.

Jesus offers a reminder that for all the seriousness of our mission, we dare not forget the importance of keeping the hearts and eyes and minds of beginners, stepping forward into the open future that Christ now calls us to enter. And while we’re at it, to have some fun. □



## Be all the church can be

Last fall at my home church—Redeemer in Park Ridge—we did a fitness program that involved twice-weekly boot camps. Each session involved 45 minutes of constant strenuous activity, spurred on by instructions from discipleship coordinator/drill sergeant Mike Willis. Most of the instructions were for the whole group, but Mike could get specific if he saw someone slowing down or opting out.

Now, I haven't been in peak physical condition for some years (decades?) now, and I heard my name a lot: "C'mon, Carol, you can do five of these. You choose which five." (This when the group was doing 15.) But even though I kind of went easy on myself, I still did more work than I would have if Mike hadn't been pushing me and if the rest of the group hadn't been there sharing my misery. And, so, I reaped more benefits too.

There's a reason why I bring this up. Over the many months that I've been talking with leaders about what it would mean for their church to be a Focus Congregation in the Turnaround Synod Initiative, I've come to see that it's really very simple. Here's the deal:

If your church has even a relatively small number of people who are energized by a sense that God is calling the congregation to be more than what it is now, and if your

elected leaders are open to seeing where that energy and that openness to God's call might lead, then ...

... signing on as a Focus Congregation can give your renewal efforts the extra push that Mike gave our exercise efforts during boot camp workouts.

With introductory workshops, coaching, networking for information-sharing and mutual support, and regular check-ins, the Focus Congregation option provides the gentle push that can help your church get started with the work of revitalization and, then, having started, to keep moving forward.

If you'd like someone from the synod staff to meet with your church council to give you more specifics and to answer questions about what it means to be a Focus Congregation, please get in touch with the pastoral staff person who relates to your conference. Or call or e-mail me, Carol Breimeier, at 773-248-0021, ext. 13; [cbreimeier@mcselca.org](mailto:cbreimeier@mcselca.org).

A new group of Focus Congregations will get started with introductory workshops in January or February.

You can also get in touch with me for more information about the Turnaround Synod Initiative. Or read more at [www.mcselca.org/what/mission/tsi/about](http://www.mcselca.org/what/mission/tsi/about). □

Carol Breimeier  
*Breimeier is an associate to the bishop.*

### Present and active: Experiencing God through preaching and worship

Hearing the word and responding to it in worship are at the heart of our life together as congregations. The 2011 LSTC Leadership Conference focuses on the important and sometimes overlooked partnership between preaching and worship.

The conference begins April 4 at 9 a.m. and runs until 4:30 p.m. April 5.

Keynote speakers Maxwell Johnson, professor of liturgical studies at Notre Dame [Ind.] University, and Craig A. Satterlee, Axel Jacob and Gerda Maria (Swanson) Carlson Professor of



Homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and dean of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program, will look at the relationship of worship and preaching.

Through a series of worship "mini-events," participants can experience a variety of liturgical settings and preaching opportunities in the life of the church.

Frank A. Thomas, a pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., and a founder of [www.theafricanamericanpulpit.com](http://www.theafricanamericanpulpit.com), is the conference preacher. And Ben Stewart, Gordon A. Braatz Assistant Professor of Worship and dean of the chapel at LSTC, is coordinating worship.

Registration is \$150 for the two days. For more information see [www.lstc.edu/events/conferences/leadership-conference](http://www.lstc.edu/events/conferences/leadership-conference) or call 773-256-0744. □

# diakonia<sup>®</sup>

## What Is It?

**D**iakonia is a venture to a deeper level of understanding God and how we might better serve. It's a journey. It's growth. It's enlightenment. It's challenge. It's discovery. It's service. It's renewal. It's awakening. It's relationship. And, it has, perhaps, piqued your curiosity if you have read this far.

Diakonia is a two-year process of spiritual formation and theological education for ELCA members. It consists of 12 courses—six per academic year. Each course is five sessions in length, meeting weekly for three hours. All of the courses are introductory in nature. Weekly readings and class presentations with discussion

will give participants a background in a broad spectrum of disciplines—Old and New Testament, church history, creeds and confessions, Christian living, doctrine, ethics, worship, practical applications of our faith in daily living and in the church, etc.

Diakonia might be for you, if:

- You are at a place where you would like to go deeper in your faith.
- You would like to develop understanding and skills that will enable you to better serve God through your church.
- You find satisfaction in grappling with new insights and tough issues among a fellowship of faithful believers.
- You have ever wondered if God might be calling you to serve in ordained or rostered ministry.

I have been a diakonia instruc-

tor of Old Testament for four years. I have been privileged to get to know some wonderful people and fellow travelers. I'm excited about the things that God is doing in and through the lives of diakonia participants. When asked to serve as executive director of the Northern Illinois Synod diakonia, I could not decline.

Nor could I decline the invitation to serve on the national diakonia board. I enthusiastically endorse this program.

Enrollment is open for the beginning of classes in the fall. For more information

about diakonia in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, please contact Carolyn Doughty at 773-583-0320. □

Gary Heedum

*Heedum is an interim pastor in the Northern Illinois Synod.*



## Christian Women's Conference at Valparaiso in April

**F**rom April 8-10, the Valparaiso University Guild will host its sixth biennial Christian Women's Conference on the campus of Valparaiso [Ind.] University. This year's conference theme, "The Story for All People," is based on Luke 2:10.

The week-end will feature keynote speaker Louise Williams, director emeritus of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, and special guest

speaker Walter Wangerin Jr. Speakers from around the country will

join Valparaiso faculty members to lead 12 sessions on topics related to understanding, telling and living the story of Jesus Christ.

A workshop will also be available to those interested in writing their own story.

Opportunities for worship include the Holden Evening Prayer on Friday night, a Saturday afternoon hymn sing followed by a Valparaiso liturgical group,

and a Sunday morning Bible study prior to worship. All worship ser-

vices take place in the Chapel of the Resurrection.

This conference gives a community of women a chance to grow spiritually through worship, education and fellowship opportunities. It is a ready-made retreat for your women's groups.

The registration fee for the full conference is \$125 and includes a lunch and banquet on Saturday as well as all materials. Friday only is \$50; Saturday only is \$115. The registration deadline is March 18. A full brochure and registration form is available at [www.valpo.edu/guild/cwc](http://www.valpo.edu/guild/cwc).

For more information, contact the Valparaiso University Guild office at 219-464-5315 or e-mail [guild@valpo.edu](mailto:guild@valpo.edu). □



# Metropolitan Chicago



## Deepening the welcome

### Living out Jesus' welcome for LGBTQ people in our congregations

**A**ll are welcome.” What does this mean in your congregation? What does it mean to be explicitly welcoming to GLBTQ members already in congregations and those looking for a place to worship?

People at every stage of the conversation about GLBTQ inclusion, including those who have never addressed such topics in their con-

gregations, are invited to a day of workshops—“Deepening the Welcome: Living out Jesus’ Welcome for GLBTQ People in Our Congregations.” The event will take place on Saturday, Feb. 19, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 611 Randolph St., Oak Park, Ill. Attend and consider how to deepen the church’s welcome to all people

through proclamation and hospitality. Attend and discuss, among other things, the recent suicides of gay teens and the bullying that contributes to the tragedy, and consider the church’s role and voice. Attend and add your voice.

Richard Perry, theologian and professor of ethics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, will offer the keynote address.

Workshop offerings include: Welcome in the Bible; Starting the Conversation; Coming in in Mission as a Welcoming Congregation; Marriage Equality; Considering Same Gender Blessings; and Talking with Our Children. There will also be a specific workshop on youth and bullying.

The church’s voice of welcome is important as we consider the concept of being “welcoming” in a diverse synod and metropolitan area.

Good Shepherd is hosting the event as part of its 75th anniversary celebration. The Rev. Kathy Nolte reflected: “As we planned our year of celebration, we recalled the journey we’ve taken as a congregation to consider the “all” in our welcome and make the invitation intentional and visible. We are retracing our steps to renew our passion for welcome and deepen its expression. We are excited to host this event and learn from other congregations on their journey.”

A registration fee of \$10 per person covers lunch and materials. Registering groups of four per congregation can access the group discount of \$30. For a printable PDF registration brochure and bulletin inserts, and online registration, go to [www.mcselca.org](http://www.mcselca.org). For more information, contact the Rev. Carla Thompson Powell at [revctp@gmail.com](mailto:revctp@gmail.com). The event is sponsored by the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Justice Team and the Chicago Chapter of Lutherans Concerned North America. □