



“Give and take”

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment (Luke 7:37).

When I worked years ago as a traveling engineer, I often took a short lunch break with a colleague in the plant canteen, where I could grab a bite from one of the vending machines. On one of these breaks, my friend dropped his quarters into a machine and pressed the “B-11” button, expecting to see the mechanical “curly-queue” twirl around and push a tuna sandwich forward until it fell into the dispensing tray below.

Unfortunately, the sandwich got wedged against the machine's glass window and wouldn't budge. After politely (but vainly) asking the machine to let go of his sandwich, my friend got progressively more assertive and angrier, banging on the glass and physically shaking the machine. Eventually, he crouched down, reached his arm up into the machine, grabbed that sandwich in his fist—and got his arm stuck. It was a while before we convinced him that the solution to the problem was to let go of the sandwich so his hand could relax enough to slip back out of the machinery that had trapped him.

I'm reminded of this strange incident often these days in a culture that seems to teach us increasingly that the only way to get ahead in this world is to take all you can get. Because if you're not willing to be a taker, you will surely end up as a loser. And this, of course, is a problem, because even though losing once in a while may produce character, losing all of the time—losing because the game is rigged or the machine is wired so the same people always win and the same people always lose—simply produces rage, resentment. That in turn produces violence, which in time makes everyone a loser.

In his Gospel, Luke has left us with a story about a woman who came to see Jesus. We know very little about her really, except that “she was a sinner,” which means that she had probably lost her place in her family, in her community, in her relationship



Bishop Wayne N. Miller

with God, and so had lost her future. To say that this woman was a “loser” is an understatement. But for some odd reason, Jesus inspired her to open the fist she held tightly clenched with pain and fear and give what she had left—which was mostly just the saltwater of her tears mixed with a little perfume. And Jesus, in turn, opened his hand to receive gratefully what she had given and, in so doing, gave her back her freedom, her dignity and her life.

We will soon be entering once again into the season of Lent. It is a time when, traditionally, Christians around the world make the decision, for just a few weeks, to open their hands and let go of something they cherish.

But it seems important to me to remember that we do not engage in this annual exercise of self-sacrifice to boast about who among us is the biggest loser. This is a season to open your hand and let go of what you are squeezing too tightly—the habits and attachments, the rage and resentment, the griefs and the grudges that have grabbed you by the throat—and pour them out at the feet of the one who opens his own wounded hand every day to pour back into your open hand a fragrant abundance of freedom, dignity and new life. ✞

South Side church transforms parsonage

By Julie B. Sevig

Members of First Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood wanted to put their radical discipleship training into action. They found just the place to do that—their own parsonage.

This German immigrant parish once supported an elementary school and earned the nickname “Mother Church of the South Side” by branch schools that developed into “daughter” congregations, according to historical accounts. In “mother” style, First Trinity is transforming its parsonage into a place of welcome and hospitality. It is now an Airbnb that offers rooms for a modest fee of \$42 a night, \$15 for an additional person. An Airbnb review called it a “great stay for a great price in an expensive hotel city.”

But parishioners will tell you it's about a lot more than that.

Looking back

For more than two decades, First Trinity hasn't been able to afford a full-time pastor. The parish used supply preachers and rented out its more than 100-year-old parsonage, mostly to nearby Illinois Institute of Technology students. Some renters were part of the congregation, but most were not.

Although rental income helped, Andrew Mack, First Trinity council member, said it didn't contribute to the congregation's mission and discipleship.



In fact, it became “a bit of a headache,” he said. There were leases to manage and little knowledge of what was going on in the house that the community sees as connected to the church.

When tenant leases were up in September 2017, leaders decided to do something different with the parsonage, which was in need of repair. About the same time, members were going through radical discipleship training. “We wanted to engage with other people, people who are different, to live out the gospel,” Mack said. “We held our first radical discipleship training in the house with 15 or so from the community. It felt cool to be in that space. It was different and intimate.”

First Trinity started to let other groups, such as labor organizers and faith-based groups, use the space while tackling cosmetic repair—windows, boiler and roof, fresh paint. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Naperville has been a partner with both volunteers and funding; the two parishes even did radical discipleship training together.

With five bedrooms, the house is larger than much of Chicago's housing. Volunteers collected beds and other furniture; a couple donated sheets and towels. Mack described the kitchen as “tired, but functioning ... it looks like it came right out of the 40s or 50s.” Probably because it did. But they'll tackle that, too, while navigating how to move forward with transforming what is now known as Trinity House into a hospitality and retreat center that could house 12 to 15 people.

Two parishioners have served as go-to hosts, and the church hopes to train others for this role. “It’s a skill not everyone has,” he said. “We’re still learning how to do this, but we want to provide an opportunity for our community to practice hospitality to strangers.”

Looking forward

It’s been a year since Trinity House opened its doors in a new way—for its annual holiday beer and carols event open to the community. “It sort of helped us set the tone, re-establish that the

house is going to be something different moving forward,” Mack said.

“It’s exciting for our people to reimagine this and help incorporate Trinity House into the mission and vision of the church, making it welcoming and inviting. What was once an obstacle for our church is now being utilized in a good, productive way. We want the community to own it. We want the neighborhood to be proud that this place is here.

Continued on page D

Giving students a “Step Up”

Children and teens face a variety of issues that contribute to the need for mental health counseling. Karah Kohler, director of children’s mental health programs at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), can recite a long list: depression, anxiety, family problems, peer pressure. It’s these issues—and a lack of timely interventions—that inspired Kohler and her team to create the Step-Up School-Based Counseling Program four years ago.

Working in collaboration with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the program has grown from being in six schools at its start to 20 as of the 2018-19 school year. Last year, Step-Up served 230 youth between the ages of 5 and 19 at CPS elementary and high schools.

“Step-Up School-Based Counseling started out as a need in our community,” Kohler said. “The children in our care were forced to access crisis services. So we looked internally and asked, ‘How can we serve these kids better before they hit the point of crisis?’ When your kid is experiencing depression or anxiety, you can’t wait six to eight months to get them services.”

The program reaches children and teens before their mental health needs reach a crisis stage. It empowers students and provides a needed resource at often under-resourced schools. The counselors are embedded in the schools, so students can conveniently see them when needed.



Photo: Tim Frakes

Jackie Bobinski is a counselor in LSSI’s Step-Up School-Based Counseling at Taft High School, one of 20 Chicago Public Schools served by the program.

That students can access care convenient to them in their community is a strong tenet of LSSI’s whole-person care. This approach looks at not just one symptom or issue, but considers a whole host of influences in each client’s life. For students, that takes into account not only their academic life, but their social and family life as well, all of which may contribute to the reasons a child or teen seeks or is referred to counseling.

“The most fulfilling thing for me is being able to offer the services that the students need without the barriers there,” said Jackie Bobinski, a clinical counselor and caseworker in the program who is based out of Taft High School in Chicago. “Until you can get to the root of the problem and get the family involved, and get the family healthy, the [student] can take it upon themselves and take initiative and get the help they need.” ♣

LSTC lifts up congregational resources in videos

Search “Public Church Shareables” on YouTube, and you may see some familiar Chicago faces in the videos that come up.

In *Lessons from Peace Camp* and *Public Worship for a Public Church*, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago profiles two congregational resources. One comes out of a Chicago congregation and the other from LSTC faculty research. Both are meant to help churches grow their public ministry.

“The idea is to identify and lift up practices of public church ministry—both in congregations, and here at the seminary—and make them available to congregations far and wide,” said Ryan Fordice, LSTC campaign and engagement manager and the project manager.

Lessons from Peace Camp features an alternative to vacation Bible school developed by Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Beverly neighborhood. The weeklong camp for children who have completed first through fifth grades teaches peaceful ways to deal with conflict. It serves dozens of neighborhood children who have no affiliation with the congregation.

Public Worship for a Public Church, developed by Klaus-Peter Adam, associate professor of Old Testament, shows how witness or testimony can be used in worship to address issues in the congregation’s community. Adam drew on his research, “Love Your Neighbor! Private Hatred and Public Violence,” and how Old Testament models apply to the street gang violence in Chicago.

Supported in large part by a grant for innovation from the Association of Theological Schools, these videos were designed to bring together congregations and the seminary in new and generative ways.

“The idea is not to say, ‘Here, let LSTC show you how to do public church,’” Fordice said, “but rather to celebrate good work that is already being done, and share it for the good of the whole church.”



In addition to Fordice and consultant Luther Snow guiding the project, Jason Chesnut (Class of 2010) of ANKOS Films edited video recorded by others.

Find the videos here:

- *Lessons from Peace Camp* (3:33). Presenting a congregation’s discernment around new ministry for their community; youtube.com/watch?v=AJFhmqpxB8Q.
- *Public Worship for a Public Church* (3:55). Presenting a public worship resource addressing gun violence; youtube.com/watch?v=1vFaKd17cvY. ㄿ

South continued from page C

This place is not public or private, it is a productive member of our community.”

Before this, young groups staying at the church helped serve First Trinity’s primary mission, God’s Closet, which provides free clothing and a community meal. Now they have an option to sleep in beds and get a shower.

Mack returns often to the phrase “meeting the other,” which he said is what drew him to First Trinity eight years ago. “Meeting so many different people on Sunday, or at God’s Closet on Tuesdays or Fridays—it’s a chance to interact with people on an equal basis. We don’t do charity. We do community.” ㄿ

Sevig is communications specialist at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.