



Yesterday, today and forever

By Bishop Wayne N. Miller

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).

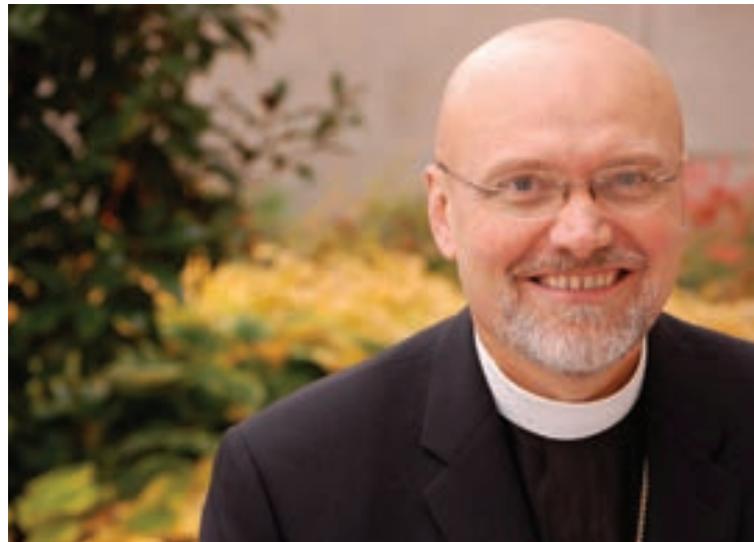
It won't be any surprise that as we get closer to the 2019 synod assembly and the calling of a new bishop, almost everywhere I go people ask if I am looking forward to retirement. This is sort of a self-answering question because, since I've never retired before, forward is about the only place I can look to find it.

But, a while back, I did download a "countdown timer" app for my phone. It is so cool. You just type in some important event in the future, press the button and then you can watch the days, hours, minutes and seconds tick down gradually but reliably, closing the space between now and then. It's a wonderful device. It gives you something to do while you are waiting to get it over with—your life, I mean—and it creates the interesting illusion that you are more in control of the future because you can see the path between here and there a bit more clearly.

And we love the idea of being able to control, or at least to see, the future. It makes it less scary. So we teach ourselves to read the stars and planets, or the tea leaves in our cups, or the lines in our hands or the bumps on our heads

Or perhaps you prognosticate by watching the weather channel, or reading the prospectus for your most recent investment, or asking your doctor how much time you have left (as if she knew)—all to demystify the mystery of "Que sera, sera" (Whatever will be, will be).

On the other hand, for some, I think, the obsession is not so much about how to leap into the future as it is to figure out how to re-enter the past. Just imagine having an app for that, something that in no time at all would return you to yesteryear so you could undo what was done—to the time before you stepped on that patch of ice or the moment before the accident.



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You could see what would have happened if you had stopped smoking when you were 30, or if you had walked away from that relationship before it got too hot to handle. You could relive endlessly the events that are the source of your bitterness and resentment, your griefs and your grudges, until, ironically, you would get that elusive control you wanted over things yet to come. Because the past you can't, or won't, release really does become your future.

And only one moment would be missing from your self-constructed timeline—this one!

Throughout his life, Jesus stubbornly resisted his disciples' attempts to predict the future. But he does consistently call his followers to stay awake to what is right in front of our noses.

And then, Jesus sets us free to engage courageously with it by giving us the gift of Easter and its astonishing promise that whoever you are, whatever you have done or failed to do, wherever you have come from, the past does not ever have the power to determine your future. And that promise, friends, is enough to make every moment of every single day something to look forward to. ٤

News from ELCA World Hunger

Lunchtime ministry

St. Matthew Trinity Lutheran Church's Lunchtime Ministry offers a meal, hospitality and community to neighbors in Hoboken, N.J. With about 65 guests visiting each lunchtime, this ministry welcomes all and is "one lifeline that never goes away." This important work is supported in part by a Domestic Hunger Grant from ELCA World Hunger.



Sermon starters

As you proclaim God's grace in Jesus Christ, incorporate themes of hunger, poverty, justice and hope in your sermons, children's sermons, and your congregation's educational activities. Sign up to receive biweekly sermon starters at goo.gl/EFw88d. Use the box on the right side of the page to subscribe.

Bulletin insert

Include this new, expanded ELCA World Hunger insert in your worship bulletin or use it as a brochure on a resource table. Learn more about how your gifts make an impact and get an overview of our church's response to hunger and poverty in

the U.S. and more than 60 other countries. Download or order today at resources.elca.org/hunger.

Global Farm Challenge DIY Experience

ELCA World Hunger's Global Farm Challenge is an initiative to raise awareness and funds to equip our neighbors experiencing hunger with livestock, seeds, tools, training and more. Inspired by the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering experience, the do-it-yourself guide allows you to create your own Global Farm Challenge experience at your church. Included are step-by-step instructions for setup, story signs and more! Download the guide at elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger#GlobalFarmChallenge.

Thank you for your generosity, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, and for joining with the whole church to end hunger and poverty. Want to have the latest ELCA World Hunger news at your fingertips? Sign up at elca.org/subscribe. ♫

LSTC launches new data system

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) is in a yearlong process of moving the school's data to a cutting-edge cloud solution for higher education. LSTC is one of the first higher education institutions of its size to use this system from Blackbaud LLC.

As a panelist at Blackbaud's convention, Martha Stocker, the seminary's software support administrator, told how LSTC is benefiting from the system. In an interview later with the company's media team she said, "Our admissions team is creating processes that can be done in the software instead of manually—it's very freeing to have all of these options that we never had before. Blackbaud's education management capabilities provide us with one system that maintains all the information rather than



Students used their "jazz hands" to put data into the Lutheran School of Theology's new cloud solution system: Wu Mee (left), Baiju Markose, Denise Rector, Veronica Mwakasungura, Karen (Di) Kang and Alex Aivars.

multiple systems that don't talk to each other. There is a lot of excitement here because we have not had the tools to be strategic with how we recruit."

Storybook Project builds bonds

"I've been incarcerated my son's whole life. He is 4 years old. Storybook is the only way I correspond with him most of the time. I finally got to talk to him last week. Thank you for this program from me and my child" (father and Storybook Project participant).

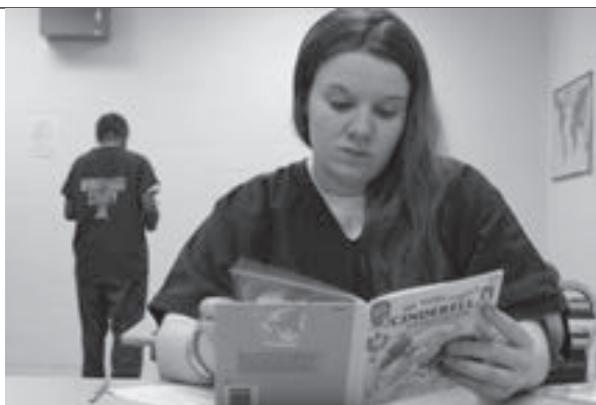
The Storybook Project, part of the Prisoner and Family Ministry at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), might seem simple in concept: parents who are incarcerated in Illinois are recorded reading a book to their child, who then receives the recording along with a copy of the book. At the heart of the project is helping those parents maintain important family connections that are crucial to both the child and mom or dad.

Children are the hidden victims of parental imprisonment. Studies link parental incarceration with children's poor school performance, aggression, emotional problems and post-traumatic stress. With regular contact between a child and incarcerated parent, the child's emotional, scholastic and social adjustment improves, along with the positive impact on parole success when the parent is

The system manages the complete student life cycle from admissions to alumni, and will save the school money for years to come, she said. It is being used to track finances, and improve communication among students and faculty and with boards and committees. It also allows the school to put policies and procedures on a secure site and archive decades of records in one place.

Stocker recently hired six students, with two of them taking the lead, to save materials used in the current system to be uploaded into the new one. Their task was "mission driven," Stocker said, and started with a meal and devotions. A fair wage was just part of her goal to "treat and appreciate" them. ☒

By Julie B. Sevig, communication specialist at LSTC.



A mother at a local Illinois jail chooses a book to record for the Storybook Project.

released. LSSI's Storybook Project is a simple and effective method to help incarcerated moms and dads stay in touch with their children.

Implemented at 18 prisons and jails in Illinois by LSSI and dedicated, well-trained volunteers, incarcerated moms and dads select a book to read and record. Then LSSI mails the book and recording to their child at no cost to the family. Financial contributions and donations of new books for the Storybook Project are given by more than 100 congregations, as well as individuals, across Illinois. The incarcerated parents also make small donations of under \$10.

Randi Cowan is a Storybook volunteer from Trinity Lutheran Church in Olney. She coordinates eight others from her church. Cowan said the volunteers are as enriched by the experience as the parents and children who participate.

At her first Storybook event, Cowan remembered feeling intimidated by a physically imposing prisoner until he turned to her, waving a book about princesses. "My daughter loves princesses," Cowan recalled him saying. "They are dads who want a relationship with their children. God works through us to accept these men as fathers and treat them with respect."

Last year, 6,210 children received books from their incarcerated parents, with over 2,000 children receiving books for the first time. The impact of the Storybook Project is reflected in the notes received from the prisoners, including a father who said, "I am so thankful for Storybook. My little girl is 5. She is my heart and joy. She loves getting the books and CDs. God bless all of you." ☒

Congregation reaches 20for20 anniversary challenge

Twenty years ago, United in Faith Lutheran was created from a consolidation of eight Northwest Chicago congregations. The congregation was founded with “mission” as its intention and direction. When the congregation’s leaders were looking toward their 20th anniversary, they didn’t want to celebrate in a traditional way. Instead, to commemorate this milestone United in Faith embarked on a challenge to partner with neighborhood organizations and bless the community around them during the year surrounding its anniversary. Although they said it felt very ambitious at the start, they achieved their goal and reached the 20for20 challenge.

In just over 13 months, members of United in Faith hosted a blood drive (LifeSource), a book fair (donations to Bethesda Senior Care), a winter farmers market (with Faith in Place), and a toy drive (benefiting the Ronald McDonald House). They also provided volunteers for a walk-a-thon (Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church), farmers market (in Portage Park), a neighborhood outdoor festival (at Lydia Home), a birthday party for seniors (Central Baptist Village), and a senior social event (Portage Park Senior Center).

In addition, members participated in fundraiser events to benefit the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center, Olive’s Neighborhood Garden, the Northwest Side Housing Center, St. Cyprian’s Diaper Drive, and the National Veterans Art Museum. The congregation thanked volunteers and staff by providing a meal at Youth Outreach Services (on Irving Park) and St. Cyprian’s Food Pantry.

United in Faith also:

- Planned and implemented a veterans salute event in partnership with the Billy Caldwell American Legion post, Chicago Public Library, and Portage Park Chamber of Commerce.
- Staffed a stress relief study break table during Wright College’s finals week.
- Handed out free ice cream at Portage Park Pool on National Ice Cream Day.
- Visited women with developmental disabilities at St. Mary of Providence and presented gift cards for them to go on an “outing.”



Members of United in Faith Lutheran Church, Chicago handed out free ice cream at Portage Park Pool on National Ice Cream Day.

- Adopted a family of four from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, donating food, clothing, household items, toys, winter clothing, furniture and much more.

Throughout this anniversary celebration, parishioners built new relationships and partnerships, learned more about their community, reached out with the love of God, and found new resources within their immediate neighborhood.

United in Faith’s members wanted to share their accomplishment with others in hopes that they might be inspired to find a way to turn their anniversary activities “outward.” Maybe 125 projects for a 125th anniversary wouldn’t be achievable, but maybe you, too, can get creative with the ways you might honor your congregation’s history and develop its future at the same time.

For more information, contact United in Faith at 773-283-2326. 4