

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – December 21, 2011

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NALC and Missouri Synod leaders meet

An initial discussion was held on Dec. 15-16 between representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

The meeting was held at the invitation of The Lutheran Church —Missouri Synod. The NALC had also committed itself in its formal ecumenical statement to meetings with the LCMS.

The NALC was represented by Bishop John Bradosky and Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring, Dr. James Nestingen (retired professor from Luther Seminary), Rev. David Wendel (NALC Ministry Coordinator), and Rev. Mark Chavez (NALC General Secretary).

President Matthew Harrison, Dr. Albert Collver (Assistant for Church Relations), Rev. John Pless (professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne), Dr. Joel Lehenbauer and Rev. Larry Vogel from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations were the LCMS representatives.

President Robert Bugbee of the Lutheran Church—Canada attended as a formal observer.

“I am deeply grateful for the gracious hospitality of President Harrison and his competent staff. Our dialog transcended all of our hopes and expectations. The level of openness, honesty and trust evident in our conversations was commensurate with those whose relationship had spanned years. That experience may be based on the fact that our common commitment to Biblical authority and theological integrity has spanned many years to our formal meeting,” said Bishop Bradosky.

“Our time together affirms that there is much that unites us and very little that divides. It was our hope that we would find ways to work together to strengthen our witness to the world and care for the needs of people while clearly proclaiming the Gospel,” he said. “In fact, we have found more ways than we can deal with in a single meeting. It is apparent that more meetings are both needed and desired by both groups to develop this relationship in ways that will create an enduring bond between us because of the faith we share in Christ Jesus.

“In the spirit of the hope and expectation of the Advent season our hearts are filled with encouragement and strength for all the future holds in this relationship between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the North American Lutheran Church. Thanks be to God!”

President Harrison noted, “Our initial dialogue with NALC representatives has been a rather

joyous surprise. Bishop Bradosky and the men who joined him in our time together have been profoundly molded by the cross and years of suffering as their former church body slipped further and further from the Word of God. We've shared but a small splinter of that cross as we too have been forced to distance ourselves from the ELCA after years of so much good work and many personal relationships.

"The NALC fervently desires to take the Scriptures and the Lutheran confession seriously. These men are creedal Christians who share our own convictions on fundamental issues of life and sexuality. We do have real differences and they will not be easily overcome. But the outcome is the Lord's. And we wish the NALC every blessing as it moves forward. May God grant us all repentance, forgiveness and a renewed hunger and thirst to be faithful to His revealed and inerrant Word," President Harrison said.

Discussion of theological and ecumenical issues facing each church took up much of the meeting time. Areas of cooperative work between the church bodies were also considered.

The group heard presentations by Barb Below from the President's office on LCMS restructuring. The Rev. John Fale of the International Missions office of the LCMS reported on the Synod's work of mercy.

The meetings between the churches will continue with the next meeting planned for May 2012 in Columbus, Ohio. Plans for future meetings include time to address matters of difference and agreement between the churches.

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