

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

July 2014

NALC Convocation is July 24-25

Convocations and Theological Conference to be at The Citadel

“Standing With...to Withstand” will be the theme for the 2014 Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church July 24-25 in Charleston, S.C.

The theme is based on Ephesians 6:10-20, where St. Paul describes the whole armor of God, encouraging followers of Jesus to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.”

The Convocation will focus on the persecution of Christians throughout the world, and our hope to “stand with” these disciples as they witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in spite of opposition and, in some places, suffering.

The Convocation — which will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 24, and conclude at 5 p.m. Friday — will include:

- + Reception of reports and sharing of information about the life and ministry of the NALC.
- + Election of persons to open Executive Council and Court of Adjudication positions.
- + Update on the establishment of the North American Lutheran Seminary and the election of representatives to the NALS Board of Regents.
- + Updates about the discipleship initiative being undertaken in partnership with The Navigators, together with small-group breakout sessions about discipleship.



Summerall Chapel at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., will host the NALC and Lutheran CORE Convocations and Theological Conference. (Photo by Russ Pace of The Citadel)

- + A keynote presentation by Robert Brock of Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry dedicated to supporting persecuted Christians around the world.
- + Welcoming Bishop Roland Gustafsson and the Rev. Bengt Birgersson, General Secretary of the Swedish (Lutheran) Mission Province, who are “Bringing the Gospel Back to Sweden.”
- + Welcome and receive greetings from guests from the IKBG — International Christian Network, an ecumenical confessional association headquartered in Germany.
- + Displays which will introduce NALC missions and ministries, together with the chance to meet other NALC members from across North America.

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16 pastors are nominated for NALC Executive Council

Sixteen pastors and three lay people have been nominated to fill three positions on the NALC Executive Council.

The 2014 NALC Convocation July 24-25 in Charleston, S.C., will elect one pastor and one lay person to fill four-year terms on the Executive Council.

Delegates will also elect a pastor to a three-year term to fill a position on the Executive Council vacated when the Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin was called to lead the North American Lutheran Seminary. Pastor Eddy Perez of Miami, Fla., was appointed to fill that position until the 2014 NALC Convocation.

The Executive Council functions as the board of directors for the NALC, providing leadership for the church between the annual Convocations.

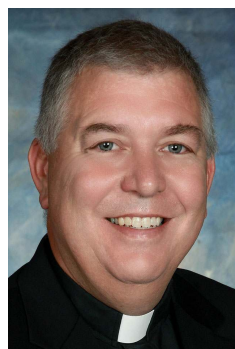
Congregations and NALC members were asked to submit nominations for the positions to the Nominating Committee.

The Nominating Committee asked each nominee to complete a biographical information form.

The biographical information provided by the nominees is available for download at www.thenalc.org.



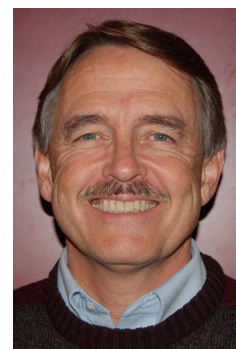
Donald Allman



Lyle Belleque



Mark Braaten



Don Brandt



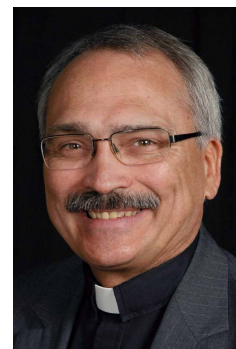
Steve Dornbusch



Joseph Freeman



Phillip Gagnon



Marshall Hahn



Melinda Jones



E. McClanahan



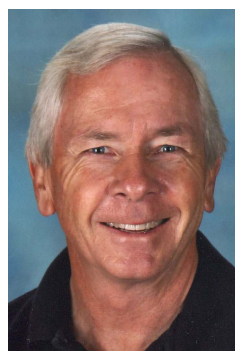
Eddy Perez



Marty Ramey



Russell Saltzman



Daniel Selbo



David Steffenson



Al Towberman

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3 lay nominees for Executive Council

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Lay nominees for Executive Council are Richard Jansak, Hendersonville, N.C.; Stephen Lord, of Colorado Springs, Colo.; and Franklin Merrell, Salisbury, N.C.

The Nominating Committee has divided the clergy nominees for Executive Council into separate slates for the two positions:

Executive Council - Clergy - 3-year term

- + Pastor Mark Braaten, Tyler, Texas.
- + Pastor Don Brandt, Salem, Ore.
- + Pastor Joseph Freeman, Noblesville, Ind.
- + Pastor Phillip Gagnon, Edmonton, Alberta
- + Pastor Eddy Perez, Miami, Fla.
- + Pastor Marty Ramey, Dallas, N.C.
- + Pastor Dan Selbo, San Jose, Calif.
- + Pastor David Steffenson, Rochester, Minn.



Richard Jansak



Stephen Lord



Franklin Merrell

Executive Council - Clergy - 4-year term

- + Pastor Donald Allman, Grove City, Ohio.
- + Pastor Lyle Belleque, Devils Lake, N.D.
- + Pastor Steven Dornbusch, Plymouth, Minn.
- + Pastor Marshall Hahn, St. Olaf, Iowa.
- + Pastor Melinda Jones, North Charleston, S.C.
- + Pastor Evan McClanahan, Houston, Texas.
- + Pastor Russell Saltzman, Kansas City, Mo.
- + Pastor Alden Towberman, Butler, Pa.

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+ Traditional Carolina-style barbeque hosted by the Carolinas Mission District at The Citadel's Isle of Palms Beach House on the Atlantic coast on Thursday evening.

+ Festive Service of Holy Communion on Friday morning with Bishop Gustafsson as preacher.

The NALC Convocation will be preceded by three significant gatherings.

Lutheran CORE's Convocation will meet July 21-22 under the theme "Sharing the Hope that is in Us." The Lutheran CORE Convocation is set to begin at 7 p.m. on Monday, July 21. Featured speakers include the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions; the Rev. Dr. Walter Sundberg, Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary; and Pastor Stéphane Kalonji of Reformation Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in New Bern, N.C.

The annual Theological Conference sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE is held between the

Convocations. "Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed" is the theme of the conference which begins at 7 p.m. on July 22.

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering is on Wednesday, July 23. This year's theme is "We are His Workmanship ... Created for Good Works." Pastor Heidi Punt is the keynote speaker.

Registration information for all four events was sent to NALC congregations and is available online at www.thenalc.org. A list of hotels offering discounted rates is also available online.

Live web streaming of Convocations and Theological Conference

There will be live streaming of the sessions of the NALC Convocation, Theological Conference, and Lutheran CORE Convocation on the internet. For more information or to connect to the live stream go to www.thenalc.org.

23 nominated for North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents

The 2014 NALC Convocation July 24-25 at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., will elect the members of the Board of Regents for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

The Convocation will elect nine members to a variety of terms to establish the Board of Regents.

In the future, three members of the board will be elected to six-year terms every other year.

Twenty-three people have been nominated for the nine positions.

The establishment of the North American Lutheran Seminary was approved by the 2013 NALC Convocation. The proposal calls for a Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., and Houses of Studies to be located throughout North America as needed.

An interim Board of Regents has worked with the Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, Seminary President, and other NALS faculty for the first year of the seminary.

The Nominating Committee asked each nominee to complete a biographical information form.

The biographical information provided by the nominees is available online at thenalc.org.

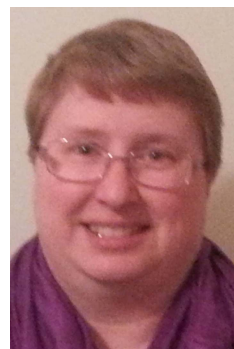
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Trevor Armstrong



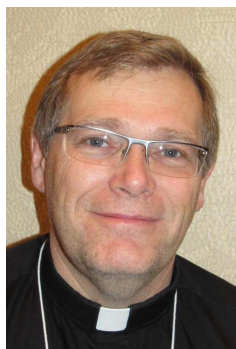
Wendy Berthelsen



Mari Dew



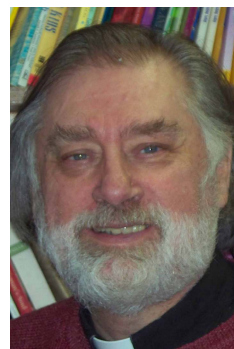
Donna Evans



Phillip Gagnon



Jeffray Greene



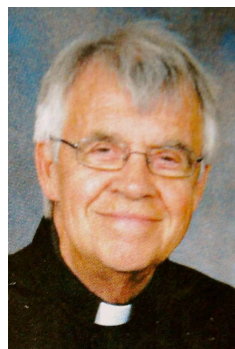
John Harmon



Thomas Jacobson



Ben Johnson



K. Glen Johnson



Roger Keller



Victor Kolch



Kris Madsen



Franklin Merrell



Dieter Punt



Mark Ryman

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The Nominating Committee divided the nominees into separate slates based on length of term.

Three board members will be elected from each slate of candidates:



Hans Scherner



M. Roy Schwarz



Donna Smith



Paull Spring

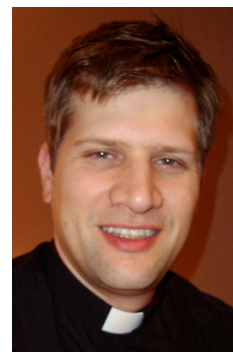
Board of Regents - 2-year term

(Three persons to be elected)

- + Donna Evans, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- + Pastor Jeffray Greene, Rantoul Ill.
- + Pastor John Harmon, Berlin, Pa.
- + Pastor Thomas Jacobson, Menno, S.D.
- + Pastor Benjamin Johnson, St. Cloud, Minn.
- + Pastor K. Glen Johnson, Calgary, Alberta.
- + Frank Merrell, Salisbury, N.C.
- + Pastor Hans Scherner, Bucyrus, Ohio.
- + Bishop Paull Spring, State College, Pa.



Eric Waters



Nathan Yoder



Solveig Zamzow

Board of Regents - 4-year term

(Three persons to be elected)

- + Pastor Wendy Berthelsen, Midlothian, Texas.
- + Pastor Phillip Gagnon, St. Albert, Alberta.
- + Pastor Victor Kolch, Fort Wayne, Ind.
- + Pastor Donna Smith, Champaign, Ill.
- + Pastor Eric Waters, Powell, Ohio.
- + Pastor Nathan Yoder, Maiden, N.C.
- + Pastor Solveig Zamzow, Grafton, Iowa.

Board of Regents - 6-year term

(Three persons to be elected)

- + Trevor Armstrong, St. Albert, Alberta.
- + Mari Dew, Connersville, Ind.
- + Pastor Roger Keller, Cabot, Pa.
- + Pastor Kristopher Madsen, Fresno, Calif.
- + Pastor Dieter Punt, Statesville, N.C.
- + Pastor Mark Ryman, Asheboro, N.C.
- + Dr. Roy Schwarz, Winchester, Va.

Nominees for Court of Adjudication

James Gale and Pastor K. Glen Johnson have been nominated for the NALC Court of Adjudication. The 2014 NALC Convocation will elect two members of the court to four-year terms.

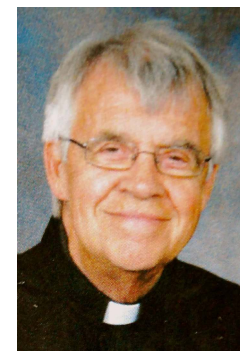
James Gale, an attorney in Washington, D.C., has served on the Court of Adjudication since the founding of the NALC. He was involved in the drafting of the NALC constitution and other governing documents.

Pastor Johnson is pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Calgary. He served as the president of Augustana University College (formerly known as Camrose Lutheran College) in Camrose, Alberta, for 28 years.

The Court of Adjudication hears disciplinary claims and appeals from disciplinary decisions and resolves questions of the interpretation of NALC governing documents.



James Gale



K. Glen Johnson

Biographical information on the candidates is available for download at www.thenalc.org.

2014 Theological Conference

Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed

“Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed” is the theme of the 2014 Theological Conference July 22-23 at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

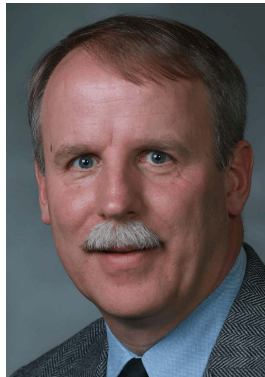
The annual theological conference is sponsored by the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE and is held between their Convocations.

Dr. Robert Benne, one of the conference organizers, will open the Theological Conference with a reflection on the theme. Dr. Benne is the Jordan Trexler Professor Emeritus and Research Associate at Roanoke College in Salem, Va.

Dr. Benne’s introduction will be followed by six major presentations. Speakers for the Theological Conference and their topics include:



Robert Benne



Mark Granquist



Stephen Hultgren



R. David Nelson



Amy Schiffrin



Christopher Seitz



David Yeago

The Scripture Controversy in American Lutheranism Infallibility, Inerrancy, Inspiration

The Rev. Dr. Mark A. Granquist
Associate Professor of Church History
Luther Seminary - St. Paul, Minn.

On Being “Lovers of Truth” The Canon of Scripture and the Church’s Commitment to Truth

The Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Hultgren
Lecturer in New Testament
Australian Lutheran College - Adelaide, Australia

What Is Theological Exegesis? Practical Resources for Preaching the Gospel Today

Dr. R. David Nelson
Lutheran Theologian and Acquisitions Editor
Baker Academic and Brazos Press

Knowing the Bible through Worship and the Liturgy

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin
President
North American Lutheran Seminary
Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics
Trinity School for Ministry - Ambridge, Pa.

The Ethics of Sex, Marriage, and the Family According to the Bible

The Rev. Dr. Christopher Seitz
Senior Research Professor
Wycliffe College - Toronto School of Theology

Luther’s Way of Reading and Interpreting the Bible

Dr. David S. Yeago
Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics
North American Lutheran Seminary
Trinity School for Ministry - Ambridge, Pa.

Inter-Lutheran consultations meet in Canada

Representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), and Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC) met at LCC's synodical headquarters in Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 24-25. This is the first time the meetings have taken place in Canada.

"These consultations have happened twice each year since they began at the invitation of LCMS President Matthew Harrison in late 2011," explained the Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee, LCC President and host for this round of meetings.

Both days began with morning devotions in the office chapel, after which participants provided updates from their churches and discussed in detail what a distinctively Lutheran understanding of and approach to mission work should include.

A progress report was provided on a planned book of new essays on Law and Gospel, including contributors from various Lutheran church bodies.

In addition, details for an upcoming second international "Confessional Lutheran Leadership Conference" — hosted by the LCMS — were shared. The event will take place in Wittenberg, Germany, in May 2015.

In addition to President Bugbee, LCC was represented by the Rev. Warren Hamp, Chairman of the LCC's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), and by Central District President Thomas Prachar.

NALC participants included the Rev. Dr. David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ecumenism and Ministry; the Rev. Mark Chavez, General Secretary; and the Rev. Phillip Gagnon, Dean of the NALC's Canada Mission District. NALC Bishop John Bradosky joined the group briefly at the close of the first day.

The LCMS was represented by the Rev. Larry Vogel, Associate Executive Secretary of their CTCR.



Participants in the inter-Lutheran meeting, from left, Pastor Philip Gagnon, Pastor Larry Vogel, Pastor Mark Chavez, President Robert Bugbee, Pastor David Wendel, Pastor Warren Hamp, and President Thomas Prachar.

"We'll meet again toward the end of this year to evaluate where we've been in the initial three years of dialogue and to decide on the way forward," said President Bugbee. "Though the participating churches have disagreements in some significant areas, there is a high level of trust and an ability both to talk and to listen despite these challenges. I do thank God for common convictions about the Holy Scripture as the written Word of God, and the urgency in proclaiming Christ, the Savior of sinners, as the primary mission of the Church."

"This year marks the third year of our LCC, LCMS, NALC consultation. We will be meeting Dec. 15-16 at Bishop Bradosky's home in Bradenton, Florida, and will be reviewing our conversations thus far and possibilities for further work," said Pastor Wendel.

"While acknowledging differences on significant issues, all participants have been blessed by the honesty, integrity and openness of our meetings that always focus on the truth of God's authoritative, unchanging Word and the need for a powerful witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior. We look forward to continuing and deepening these relationships," said Pastor Wendel.

2014 NALC Convocation

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

This year's North American Lutheran Church Convocation is going to be a wonderful event filled with opportunities for us to grow in our relationship with Christ and one another. I hope that you will be present for as much of the week as possible, including the Lutheran CORE Convocation, our Theological Conference and our Convocation.

If you are able to stay beyond our time together, I also hope you will take time to enjoy the historical sites along with the beauty and southern charm of the Charleston area. If you are unable to be with us, we hope you will take advantage of our video streaming over the internet. Details and a direct link will be available on our website.

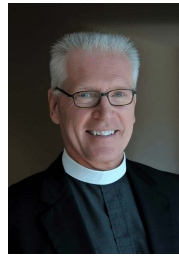
Our theme is "Standing With ... to Withstand." I encourage you to read the text we chose for our theme, Ephesians 6, putting on the full armor of God.

Christians are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ in many places throughout the world. Every day Christians are killed simply because they profess their faith in Jesus. During our time together you will hear from leaders of "The Voice of the Martyrs" describing the stories of those who face this harsh reality daily.

It would be easy to ignore their plight, but we are united with them in Christ. Their witness is more than a tragedy; it is a gift to us for our inspiration and encouragement. Acknowledging them forces us to ask, "What would we do if we were confronted with the choice between denying our faith or forfeiting our life?"

While the difficulties we face as Christians in North America seem minor by comparison, persecution is on the rise. It begins in subtle ways that are barely noticeable. Freedoms are subverted, our perspectives are deemed unacceptable, the rhetoric increases and violence soon follows.

Paul reminds us that we are in a battle. How prepared are we to engage? Is it possible to play it



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

safe and remain neutral? What does it mean for us to put on the full armor of God?

You will meet church leaders from several other countries who understand this battle and are fully engaged in the war for renewal and reformation in their nations. The struggle has been costly and exacted a huge toll on their lives. Yet they battle on, gaining encouragement from you, the people of the NALC, because they know you understand the battle and your struggles give them encouragement for theirs.

Jesus trained His disciples for just such a battle. Putting on the full armor of God is the same as putting on Christ. That is precisely what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. At our Convocation you will hear more about our singular focus on discipleship. Both pastors and laity will offer their witness of the difference this journey with Jesus has made in their lives. Our partnership with The Navigators continues to grow. We will offer several workshops during the Convocation so you can begin to pursue discipleship in your congregation immediately.

Those workshops include:

1. Overview of Developing a Disciple-making Culture.
2. The Devotional Life of a Leader — Developing a Passion for God.
3. What Does a Disciple Look Like — Creating a Clear Picture of a Disciple.

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4. Sharing Your Faith — Developing a Passion for the Gospel of the Kingdom.

5. How to Disciple a Person — Life2Life.

We have designed the format so that everyone can experience at least two of those workshops. Leaders from our congregations should plan in advance to ensure that their delegates can bring back information and inspiration from as many workshops as possible.

Of course, you will hear updates about our seminary — the North American Lutheran Seminary — our mission teams, our missionaries, our ecumenical partners, ministry partners, our staff,



and other important elements of our life together. There is still time to register and join us.

I look forward to greeting you personally, thankful for your partnership in this ministry we share.

It is good to be with you following Christ Jesus.

Executive Council meets in South Dakota

The NALC Executive Council met July 8-9 at Terra Sancta Retreat Center in Rapid City, S.D.

Before and after the event, some council members and NALC staff were able to visit attractions in the Black Hills area including Mount Rushmore National Memorial and the Chapel in the Hills, a replica of the 800-year-old Borgund Stave Church in Norway.



Letter from Lutheran World Federation

Following is the text of the letter the Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, sent to the North American Lutheran Church regarding the NALC's application for membership in the LWF.



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Geneva, 7 May 2014

Dear Bishop Bradosky,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

I write to you in connection with the North American Lutheran Church's application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

Thanks to you and your NALC colleagues for your hospitality and clarifying discussions on 10 March 2014 when you received the Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Director of the Department for Theology and Public Witness, Rev. Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka, and the Director of the Department for Mission and Development, Dr. Carlos Bock. I am glad that they were able to visit the NALC and take up in direct dialogue your church's application for membership in the LWF, the concerns raised by the LWF Council, and as well the additional concerns that had come to the attention of the LWF Communion Office touching on the interactions between the LWF member churches in the USA and Canada and the NALC.

After careful reflection on the discussions that took place at the headquarters of the NALC in Hilliard, Ohio, there are three major concerns that still remain for me:

- The way that NALC continues to describe the LWF does not correspond to the way the LWF describes and understands itself, as outlined and expressed in the LWF Constitution, the Bylaws and the relevant sections of the LWF Strategy.

- Consequently, the ratification process of the application to the LWF by the congregations of the

NALC was not based on how the LWF describes and understands itself, but on how it had been interpreted to its congregations. This was despite repeated requests from the LWF Communion Office to rectify information that was provided to congregations of the NALC in view of their ratification of the proposed membership application to the LWF.

- There is a prevailing fundamental problem in the fact that while applying for membership into the LWF, NALC is not prepared to be in communion with all member churches, particularly those in the North American region. This does not correspond to the way LWF understands membership, which implies communion relations with all LWF member churches.

In view of these ongoing concerns, which have not been displaced after direct discussions with the leadership of the NALC, the LWF Communion Office will not for now pursue further discussions with NALC regarding its application for membership in the LWF. This means that the NALC membership application remains pending. As General Secretary of the LWF, my advice is to seek interaction and relations with the LWF member churches in North America as a necessary first step to be undertaken in view of the NALC's desire to become a member of the LWF.

Sincerely,

Rev. Martin Junge
General Secretary

North American Lutheran Church responds to Lutheran World Federation

Following is the text of the letter from NALC Bishop John Bradosky responding to the letter the Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, sent to the North American Lutheran Church regarding the NALC's application for membership in the LWF. The NALC Executive Council asked Bishop Bradosky to send this letter to address procedural issues outlined in the LWF letter.

July 11, 2014

The Rev. Martin Junge
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear General Secretary Junge;

This letter is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of May 7, 2014, in response to our application for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation. At this time, it raises several questions.

1. Although our application is not being approved, you state that it is "pending." Does that indicate there will be further action, or that you will be waiting further response from us? Does "pending" mean that you intend further action, or does it indicate our application is not approved and the process is at an end?
2. Our understanding from the start has been that at some point, a recommendation would be made to the LWF Membership Committee, who would decide whether or not to bring our application to the LWF Council. Instead, it appears you have made the decision not to approve our application, circumventing the Membership Committee and Council.
3. You indicate we have not sufficiently answered your questions regarding our self-understanding of "altar and pulpit fellowship" and full communion. We have provided statements on these issues,

have responded at length to any and all questions in this regard, and engaged in extended discussion with our LWF visitors to the NALC in March, 2014. We are unaware that there are unanswered questions, but stand ready to clarify further.

4. You indicate that we have not clarified to our members and congregations the LWF's self-understanding as "communion" rather than "fellowship." We have made every effort to clarify these to the NALC as a whole, and have indicated that to you. Our members have read the LWF constitution, debated these issues and are well-informed regarding LWF as "communion." They voted in convocation to affirm the constitutional understandings, and two-thirds of our congregations ratified these actions.

5. In your letter, you recommend we seek "interaction and relations with LWF member churches in North America as a necessary first step to be undertaken in light of the NALC's desire to become a member of the Lutheran World Federation." This has never been presented to us as "a necessary first step to be undertaken" in light of our desire to become a member of the LWF.

6. If the issue standing in the way of our membership application is our self-understanding of "altar and pulpit fellowship" and "full communion," what would be the intention of such interaction and relations with LWF member churches in North America?

We remain committed to ecumenical relationships and endeavors, and to our common work of witness and service as Lutherans, concerned for the salvation of the world, through faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior.

We await your response, and appreciate your consideration of our questions.

In Christ's service,

The Rev. John F. Bradosky, Bishop

Mission leaders meet for summit

While the South might not seem as the most likely destination in the summer heat, June 25-26, the NALC's Mission Summit was graciously hosted by Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga.

The NALC's national mission teams gathered together for their annual meeting. This year the Renewal, New Starts, and International Mission Teams gathered together under the banner of worship, Bible study, and prayer to create a vision and set goals for the upcoming year and to dream about the future.

There was time to join together in fellowship and the wonderful southern hospitality provided by Pastor Dave Keener, Kevin Reynolds and the people of Christ the King.

Pastor Dennis Blevins led the first two conference sessions. More than just information on what The Navigators are about, Pastor Blevins was able to provide a common language and to help keep the focus on the heart of mission work — discipleship. With all of the great wisdom and insight that comes from years of being rooted deeply in Scripture, he brought a joy and enthusiasm that helped ensure that the time spent together was grounded in the Word.

Casting the visions for the next year and the focus of the various NALC mission teams, Pastor Gemechis Buba continued by presenting a starting place based out of the book of Habakkuk. Not many people would consider the complaining prophet as the place to set a positive vision for the upcoming years, but Pastor Buba clearly laid out why it was an excellent starting point.

So many of the people's cries and Habakkuk's complaints are familiar to us today — wondering why God doesn't answer our prayers, the injustice that we see each day, why the Word of God seems to be paralyzed, all of the bad things that happen to good people, where the leaders have gone, why



Pastor Dennis Blevins of The Navigators makes a presentation to the NALC's Mission Summit.

people are leaving churches, and why our "religion" is getting seemingly weaker. Just as God told Habakkuk, Pastor Buba shared with us — "it's not going to get any better." As Habakkuk says, we can be experts in complaining, in gathering statistics and data to show that it isn't getting better. However, in Chapter 2, God breaks in, answering with a deafening roar and the compassion of a loving Father. He says to not focus on the dark side but to have a vision clearly written down so that you can run the race well. After all, it is not a sprint but a marathon. (Put another way by the poet Jack Gilbert: "To make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the devil.") The greatest problem for unbelievers is not knowing Jesus. The challenge for believers is to keep focused on Jesus. From Chapter 3 onward, we see a different Habakkuk, whose focus moved from self to God. There was no longer an emphasis on enemies or trouble; instead Habakkuk lifted his eyes to God.

The teams addressed individual concerns specific to their areas of ministry by discussing different ideas to do a more effective job of resourcing, communicating and training as well as sharing about the national prayer network that meets each

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Thursday. They also brainstormed ideas about possible staffing in the future.

The individual teams came together as a whole to address a very specific part of the vision for 2015. One of the main goals for 2015 is for each Mission District to establish a missions team to work in conjunction with the Mission District's dean and council as a grassroots movement, driving mission forward at the local level. The NALC is not just Mission-Driven, it is Congregationally-Focused, and our national teams will serve as a resource and empower the 24 local Mission Districts to do this work.

The ideal is to have a local missions team made up of people who have a passion for the five different areas that the NALC focuses on: Great Commission Society, renewal, multi-national, new starts, and international. This will hold the team in balance and empower fundraising for mission work, thereby enabling the local Mission District to focus on the DNA of discipleship in renewing and transforming congregations, to support the multi-national congregations in the local Mission District, to seek new starts and determine the best place to plant new congregations and house churches, and to seek out international missionaries, as well as helping congregations partner in the work of global missions.

The teams began putting together an abundance of resources to share with Mission Districts and their deans, equipping them to come alongside those in their area and support them in the work that God is calling them and empowering them to do.



Pastor Dennis Blevins of The Navigators and Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions.



Lynn Kickingbird of Peace Lutheran Church in Edmond, Okla., addresses the NALC Missions Summit. Pastor David Keener of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga., looks on.

The NALC's International Mission Festival will be held Nov. 6-8 in Hilliard, Ohio. The primary purpose will be to train and equip our 24 local mission teams together with their Mission District deans. More information about the Mission Festival is available online at: www.thenalc.org. We are encouraging each Mission District to identify at least five individuals to send as a team to this training event and celebration.

As the mission summit concluded in a beautiful time of worship, all of the participants realized that this was only the next chapter in the adventure to which God has called us — to be His hands and feet in the world, proclaiming the good news that God has drawn near to His people, that the Cross means victory over sin and death, and the Resurrection is what draws our focus in saying that God is making all things new.

New mission resources are available

An abundance of videos, audio files, and teaching documents have been added to the NALC's website. Information about how to start a house church, teachings from church planters' conferences, the core DNA of discipleship in mission work, devotions and so much more is now available at: thenalc.org/mission-resources.

2014 NALC Mission Festival

Abida - Hearts on Fire

“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” — Luke 24:32

In the days following the death of Jesus, Luke paints a sad but beautiful picture of the disciples’ story in Chapter 24 of his Gospel account. Gone were the excitement and joy that were once overwhelming.

It appeared there were no more miracles to behold. The crowds dispersed, disappointed. They had held out hope that perhaps God had not forgotten them after all. Perhaps now was the time that the Messiah would come, and all of the tears would be wiped away — that God would right all the wrongs, and their coming out and going in would be protected both now and forevermore. Instead, Jesus’ body had disappeared and there was a foolish tale being told by a grieving woman that He was alive. They would not mistakenly get their hopes up again.

How quickly they had forgotten Jesus’ words: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going” (John 14:1-4). The words of Jesus that echoed across the centuries, as He took this common toast from His own culture, from an engagement celebration that a man would lovingly say to his soon-to-be wife as he left her to prepare their new home. How quickly they forgot that Jesus had told them that He was the way, the truth, and the life. And so, the disciples began a journey home down the long road to Emmaus, their hopes and dreams dashed, until a man encountered them who had apparently been lost to all the events that had just happened at Passover. But there was something different about this man as He began with Moses’ words and starting from the beginning, truly explained who the Messiah was. This Word of

God burned so deeply in their hearts as they finally recognized the risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and they were gifted with the Holy Spirit, driven out into the world to proclaim the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus — the freedom and hope that we now have. No longer were their hearts troubled or afraid because they knew the place that had been prepared for them — to be in relationship with God now and for eternity.

It is this that drives the 2014 Mission Festival, for discipleship and mission are intimately linked. Bishop John Bradosky, Pastor Dennis Blevins, and Pastor Gemechis Buba will be presenting keynote presentations throughout the festival on this year’s theme from Luke 24: “Abida – Hearts on Fire.” The goal is to provide hands-on training for discipleship and mission through keynote presentations, panel Q & A, worship opportunities, resource exhibits, and small group experiences.

A variety of workshops will also provide time for smaller group discussion, resources, and interaction with individuals who are passionately living out their calling: “Pastor as Disciple-maker” (Bishop John Bradosky); “First Century Disciples in the 21st Century” (Pastor Henry Graf); “Worship as a Means of Renewal” (Kevin Reynolds); “Why a House Church is a Real Church” (Pastor Tom Hilpert); “Renewing the Church through Senior Ministry” (Pastor Brad Hales); “Multiplication and Planting a Church” (Pastor Gemechis Buba), “Global Missions and the Church” (NALC missionaries).

Upper Arlington Lutheran Church (UALC) in Hilliard, Ohio, will host this conference, which begins at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 6 and continues through noon on Saturday, Nov. 8. For more information about the conference, a full list of workshops, local hotel listings, or to register online (beginning on July 24), please visit: <http://thenalc.org/mission-festival-2014> or contact Jenny Brockman in the NALC missions office at 614-777-5709 or jbrockman@thenalc.org.

Ohio house church members discover new ways of being a church together

By Fred Seling

Resurrection Lutheran Church of Wooster, Ohio, is an NALC house church that has been meeting together in one form or another since November of 2009. We left our former congregation over concerns about the direction of the ELCA and our local congregation. We left independent of each other, but God had a plan we were not aware of and He brought us together.

We began meeting at a house on Sunday evenings soon after our departure. Initially, like others who left their former congregations, it was a time of mourning and loss, a time to support each other, and a time to question what God was calling us to do next. Many of us had served in leadership roles in the congregation. We were church council members and leaders, Sunday school leaders and teachers, building committee members, etc. We also left a congregational format with which we were familiar and comfortable. We did not know that house churches existed or that they were Biblically based.

We met Sunday evenings so each family could visit area congregations Sunday mornings. We initially thought we were called to gather with a new congregation. Our Sunday evening gatherings generally began with a discussion of the various churches we attended and their services and sermons. This was followed by a topical Bible study, a time of prayer, and a time of fellowship. It was a time of healing and growth for each of us, but we called ourselves “the Lutheran nomads.”

After some time, we came to the conclusion that we needed to either join other congregations or find something else. We wanted to move on, but we had not found a local congregation we felt comfortable joining or, if we were comfortable with the



Members of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Wooster, Ohio, gather for worship.

congregation, we felt it was too far away for us to actively participate in the life of the congregation.

We contacted a pastor from our general area that was listed on the WordAlone Chaplain Corps, and this pastor and his wife came to one of our Sunday evening gatherings. They listened to our story and promised to see what they might do to help us. The pastor contacted WordAlone, and they passed our information on to a group called Life Together Churches (LTC) (www.lifetogetherchurches.com).

After some correspondence and phone calls between our group and two people from the LTC staff, we invited them to visit and provide us with a study about “house or cell churches.” We had no concept of what this would be like. We had been calling ourselves a house church for lack of a better name, but now they would come and give us specific information about the New Testament church and how they worshiped as described in Acts 2:42: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.”

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Two LTC representatives came to our house and led worship, study, and fellowship. They explained that they were just beginning this outreach for people like us, but they were convinced that this was a different way of doing church that could reach others with the Gospel message who would not normally step foot in a traditional church building. They had both started house churches themselves. We were a little different from the usual group because we were larger than the ideal sized group and we were all active Christians.

Many groups have many members who are not already believers. We agreed to be the first group to use their 15-week house church startup program. We had several concerns which were mostly centered on the fact that we would be a church without a local pastor. Our Bible study had told us that the early church did not have pastors and Jesus' promise that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). We also were concerned about our ability to lead worship and stay Biblically-focused and not stray without pastoral leadership. The LTC staff helped us avoid this problem by providing sermon notes for our use and holding weekly conference calls to guide and encourage us. We decided to step out in faith and give it a try.



A table in a member's home serves as an altar.



Members of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Wooster, Ohio, gather for a church picnic.

We agreed to hold worship at our house on Sunday mornings, and we held our first service Sept. 12, 2010. We worked through the 15-week program, and we have been meeting each week as a house church ever since.

Many people have questioned what we are doing and are concerned that we are not a "real church." However, we feel called to this lifestyle. It has become more about discipleship and less about membership. It is Biblically-based, but even though we were familiar with the Bible we never really focused on how the New Testament church met and grew. We studied how Paul gathered a group of people who often met in houses. He would work with them for a time, and then he would move on to another location, leaving the groups alone for long periods of time before contacting them again. His contacts are recorded in his letters to the various congregations.

People wonder what our worship services are like. How can you have a service without a pastor, an organ, a building, etc.? Three of us take turns planning and leading our worship services. Our worship is sometimes from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* or *With One Voice*, a Sola Publishing service, or a recorded video worship led by one of the LTC pastors that is projected on a wall. We use a computer with speakers and several different websites (smallchurchmusic.com and spotify.com) for worship music. We use a computer projector to project our video worship services. The

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worship planning resources on the Sola website (solapublishing.org) have been very helpful.

Our Sunday mornings normally begin with a time of sharing and a discussion of concerns and joys to be shared in prayer during the worship time. Following this we have a 30-40 minute time of worship, we break for coffee and fellowship, and then 30-40 minutes of what we call our sermon notes. We use an audio recording of a sermon previously prepared by one of the LTC pastors. We listen to the recording and also read a printed version. Then we discuss the material and what struck us about the passage, discuss how God is speaking through the sermon to us directly, and how we apply the material in our life right now. Each member takes turns facilitating the sermon notes. We have used sermon series that have worked through Galatians and First and Second Samuel. We are now working our way through Matthew. We have also had topical studies on prayer and understanding the Bible. This type of study forces us to work more deeply in the Word. It is now difficult for many of us to listen to a sermon without wanting to raise questions and discuss the text and application of the text.

We gather an offering weekly, and, because we have no overhead cost, we distribute 100 percent of all funds received to various ministries and groups. The last Sunday of each month we decide as a group where we will direct our gifts from the month. We are able to provide support for international ministries, national ministries and local ministries. We serve several area ministries with our gifts of time and prayer. We were able to provide prayer and financial support to one family who had a family member receiving critical care in an out-of-town hospital.

We meet at one house weekly for nine months each year and then we rotate to each other's houses during the summer months. Each host provides space and chairs for the group, an altar table or area, helps with the computer connections, and provides coffee and maybe small refreshments for our time of fellowship. We carry our hymnals and Communion ware from one house to another. Nothing fancy or complicated is required.

Another key component of our group is the regular support we receive from the pastors of the LTC and



Members of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Wooster, Ohio, gather for worship.

leaders of other LTC house churches. We participate in conference calls with them and other house church leaders on a regular basis. We discuss our joys and concerns and support each other during this conference call. We always end the call with a time of prayer, and it has been some of the most powerful prayer time I have been a part of. This connection helps us to be aware that we are not in this alone, but it also serves to make sure we are not straying from the call of Christ. It helps to speak with others going through the same thing and with pastors who have led similar groups.

There are many references to this type of worship community in the New Testament, but we often overlook them. God ministers to us, and we also minister to each other. When there are needs in the group we support each other, we share our joys with each other, and we make hospital calls for each other. We are very grateful that God has led us in this direction, that He has blessed us on our way, and that He provided the courage for us to take the leap of faith to venture out into the unknown of house churches. We do not know exactly where He is leading us, but we have the assurance that wherever it is, He will be with us along the journey. This all reminds us that we are His church; we do not go to church. We all agree that it has been a time of great growth for our faith and our relationship with Jesus.

Please feel free to contact Jenny Brockman in the NALC missions office — jbrockman@thenalc.org or 614-777-5709 — with questions about house churches. We would encourage others to venture into this type of community and would also be happy to help answer any questions.



Olive Aneno shared her story as a child sponsored through Compassion International.



June 26-29

Cleveland, Ohio

IMPACT

National Youth Event



Brian Wallace



Youth packaged food for the hungry.



Peder Eide



Tiffany Thompson



Youth met in small groups with youth from other congregations.



Wes Halula



Echelon

Servant Leadership in the Church

Lessons on Leadership from the Military

As I am writing this during the Fourth of July holiday, I am mindful of the fact that I was blessed to serve as pastor to a great number of military folks (and their families), during my 25 years as pastor of Saint Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Between those who were teaching at the U.S. Air Force Academy, those who were stationed at Peterson Air Force Base, Cheyenne Mountain Air Station, Fort Carson, and all the related military installations in and around Colorado Springs, our congregation was full of those who were serving or had served in various branches of the U.S. and Canadian military.

Working alongside these folks in congregational ministry, I came to have a deep respect for their sacrifice and that of their families. At the same time, I realized that our military service men, women and families are some of the best members we have in our congregations. They are responsible, diligent, faithful, and always ready to help.

They are also people who understand leadership and what it takes to be a leader who earns the respect of others. Military personnel also understand the danger inherent in a lack of leadership. What soldiers cannot abide is a lack of leadership on the battlefield — that's when lives are put at greater risk!

From my perspective, the military is one of the few places where true leadership is still respected, taught and modeled.

Given the current state of affairs in many congregations, we might do well in the Church to consider leadership lessons from the military.

In too many congregations, pastors do not seem well-prepared to be effective leaders. When there is a lack of pastoral leadership, lay congregational officers then feel compelled to assert themselves



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

as strong leaders, sometimes pushing personal agendas. What arises, then, is conflict — between pastor and congregational leaders, as well as between leaders and members of the congregation. The conflict usually manifests itself as a power struggle that can end in loss of pastor, loss of members, and a negative congregational climate that can only be described as a “death spiral.”

Last month we discussed the reality that much congregational decline is due to the lack of being centered on God's Word. That, together with a lack of leadership, can sound the death knell for any congregation.

What can be learned from our military about leadership? I have just finished the book, *Service: A Navy Seal at War* by Marcus Luttrell. This author also wrote the book, *Lone Survivor*, now a feature film about Operation Redwing in Afghanistan. As the title makes clear, the book is really about *service*, or I would add, *servant leadership*. He writes in the preface, “Really, this is a book for all who serve. ... There are a lot of things in life that matter. But nothing matters as much as who or what you decide to serve” (Luttrell, page xiii).

Congregational leaders, pastors and laity alike, would do well to remember Whom we serve. Jesus Christ, alone, is Lord of the Church, and our local congregation is not ours to do with as we please. To be a servant leader means first and foremost to

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serve the Head of the Body, our Savior Jesus Christ, who Himself came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (*Matthew 20:28*). Many power struggles and conflicts would be alleviated if all would understand themselves as serving together under the headship of Christ, seeking His will above our own preferences, desires and agenda.

A second lesson we can learn is the spirit of sacrifice that makes the team better as a whole. Luttrell states, "A leader should always be ready to ask anyone under him: Are you preparing yourself to make the team better? Are you acting to make the team's record and reputation stronger? Are you staying in good shape in both body and mind — for the greater good? You don't get people to follow you by demanding it with your words. You do it by commanding it with your example." He quotes a sign posted at the chow hall at the camp in Afghanistan, "If Every Seal Were Like Me, How Good Would the Teams Be?" (*page 172*).

It is unfortunate that in many congregations, the rule is every person for themselves! Clergy and lay leaders slip into survival-mode, striving to get by, not to excell and lead by example. It would seem a good motto for everyday leadership in the church would be: "If Every Member of our Congregation Were Like Me, How Good Would our Congregation Be?" Every congregational member can strengthen and support the ministry of the congregation by doing everything possible to make the congregational team, as a whole, better, more faithful, more effective at our ministry and mission.

As with every aspect of life, when we are not moving forward, we are stagnating. It is not enough in the Body of Christ to maintain the status quo — maintaining leads to stagnation, and stagnation leads to decline. We are not called to be members of Christ's Body, the Church, to maintain, stagnate and decline. We are called to be living, active members of the Body of Christ, abiding in Him and He in us, to bear much fruit (*John 15:4*)! That is the opposite of stagnation and decline.

Finally, a lesson we can learn from those in military service is selflessness. In the final chapter of his book, Luttrell states, "Service is selflessness — the

opposite of the lifestyle we see so much of in America today. The things that entertain us don't often lift us up, or show us as the people we can rise up to become." He cites as role models those who live out the idea expressed in John 15:13: "For greater love has no man than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends" (*page 367*). An apt summary is "In other words, it's not about us. I don't think you'll find a better expression of the true nature of service than that" (*page 229*).

In short, it is my hope and prayer that in the NALC, we strive for servant leadership. Let us be selfless servants under the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us work together for the good of the whole, for the glory of God the Father. Let us not be satisfied with power politics in our congregations, or conflicts that wear us down and harm our witness to a hurting and hungry world. Let us humble ourselves, leading by example as those who are called not to be served, but to serve. The mission of Jesus Christ deserves nothing less of us, as servant leaders in His Church.

Holy Land tour update

Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, will host the pilgrimage to the Holy Land Nov. 13-22. Bishop John Bradosky was to host the tour, but due to family circumstances, Bishop Bradosky has asked Pastor Wendel and his wife, Susan, to lead the tour. Pastor Wendel has 33 years of experience ministry as a Lutheran pastor, serving congregations in Hobbs, N.M., and Colorado Springs, Colo. Susan has been a teacher, business-woman and CEO of a Christian gift catalog.

"While we are sorry that Bishop Bradosky will not be able to lead the tour, we are happy to step in so that John and Kristi will be available to their family this fall. Having never been to the Holy Land, we are excited about traveling together with others who desire to walk where Jesus walked, lived, died, and was raised to new life! I hope that some of our friends will join us with new friends, on this tour of a lifetime," Pastor Wendel said.

Aug. 5 is the last day to register for the trip. To request a flyer and itinerary, contact Pam Charas at 937-434-0993 or mcharas@earthlink.net or Jerusalem Tours at 888-373-8687 or visit their website at: www.jerusalem tours.com.

March for Marriage

By Pastor Dennis R. Di Mauro

“This [march] is about loving truth and loving what is best for men, women, and children.”

These were the words of former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, a featured speaker at the second annual March for Marriage held on Thursday, June 19, on the west lawn of the United States Capitol.

Sponsored by the National Organization for Marriage, the *Washington Times*, and other pro-family groups, the event attracted thousands of demonstrators (including a large contingent of Hispanics) to stand up for the sanctity of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Marchers were provided with signs declaring, “Every Child Deserves a Mom and a Dad,” in both English and Spanish.

Other speakers included former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, Kansas Congressman Tim Huelskamp, and Catholic Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco. In addition, a greeting was offered by Ludovine de la Rochere, co-founder and president of the French pro-family organization, *La Manif Pour Tous*, a group that has organized huge rallies in support of traditional marriage in that nation.

Quoting from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Gov. Huckabee likened the struggle for traditional marriage to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. He reiterated Dr. King’s belief that it is every American’s responsibility to disobey unjust laws. Citing the Book of Daniel, Huckabee urged marchers to imitate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by refusing to “bend [their] knees to Nebuchadnezzar: not now, not in the future, not ever.” Huckabee also chided activist judges who have recently overturned numerous state laws which had protected traditional marriage.

A powerful pastoral voice at the rally was that of Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. Earlier in the



Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at the March for Marriage in Washington, D.C.

week Archbishop Cordileone was urged by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to reverse his decision to attend the march, an event she described as “venom masquerading as virtue.” Responding to the criticism the archbishop declared, “Yes, it is easy to become resentful when you are relentlessly and unfairly painted as a bigot and are punished for publicly standing by the basic truth of marriage as a foundational societal good; it is tempting to respond in kind. Don’t. ... We must not allow the angry rhetoric to coopt us into a culture of hate. Yes, we must show love toward all of these and more. Love is the answer. But love in the truth. The truth is that every child comes from a mother and a father, and to deliberately deprive a

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child of knowing and being loved by his or her mother and father is an outright injustice.”

A common theme in many speeches was the similarity between the defense of traditional marriage and the protection of the unborn. Had an unwillingness to stand up for truth by our Christian leaders in 1960s and 1970s led to today’s tragic reality of 1.1 million abortions performed every year? And would a similar complacency by Christian leaders today result in legal gay marriage in all 50 states?

After the rally, marchers filed up Capitol Hill along Constitution Avenue and around the capitol to the U.S. Supreme Court, where they met with only a handful of counter-demonstrators.

The event was overwhelmingly Christian in tone, and was also a strong acknowledgement of the power of Jesus Christ in people’s lives. God was lifted up by many religious leaders, including Pastor (and New York Senator) Ruben Diaz, and by musical groups including Alex Holt & Free Worship.

Above all, the march was a powerful response to the rhetoric of gay rights activists. It demonstrated



Pastor Dennis Di Mauro poses with some Jewish participants in the March for Marriage in Washington.

a unified sanctity of marriage movement motivated not by hate or prejudice as has been alleged, but rather by the power of Jesus’ love and dedicated to preserving what is best for the family and for the nation: God’s holy institution of marriage.

Pastor Dennis R. Di Mauro is the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va.

DVD study on Lutheran teaching featuring Jim Nestingen is available

A DVD study led by the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, a popular Lutheran theologian, is now available from the NALC offices.

This 12-part DVD on Lutheran theology as explained in the Lutheran Confessions and Martin Luther’s Small Catechism is an excellent resource for adult studies.

The DVD series, with individual sessions of 35-60 minutes each, was produced by St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and funded, in part, by a grant from the North American Lutheran Church.

Dr. Nestingen, an NALC pastor, taught church history and the Lutheran Confessions at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., for many years.

You may order the DVDs by contacting the NALC Administrative office at nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org or 888-551-7254.

The set of DVDs is \$100 (plus postage).



James Nestingen

Grace Lutheran Church, Menno, S.D. celebrates 125th anniversary

By Pastor Thomas E. Jacobson

Pentecost Sunday is significant for every congregation, as we call to mind the beginning of the Christian Church in general with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But for Grace Lutheran Church of Menno, S.D., Pentecost Sunday of 2014 took on special meaning. On that day, they celebrated 125 years as a congregation and 100 years specifically as Grace Lutheran Church.

In 1889, German-Russian settlers in southeastern South Dakota formed a congregation in the town of Menno named *Ev. Luth. Friedensgemeinde* (Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church), which was connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio.

In 1914, a dispute about which liturgy was proper for the congregation to use led to a division, with the congregation voting to leave the Ohio Synod and join the Iowa Synod. It is possible that the division had to do with the Ohio Synod's acceptance of the Common Service of 1888, which



Members and friends of Grace Lutheran Church in Menno, S.D., gather for worship as a part of the congregation's 125th anniversary celebration. (Photos by Erik Kaufmann, Hutchinson Herald)

the majority of the congregation considered "not truly Lutheran." However, a number of families still desired to remain with the Ohio Synod, and they established Grace Lutheran Church in the same year. Peace Lutheran Church closed in 1945, but Grace Lutheran Church in Menno remains a strong congregation with much vitality to this day.

Grace Lutheran's newly remodeled sanctuary was packed that morning, and the guest for that weekend as well as the preacher on Sunday morning was Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary.

The congregation is currently served by Pastor Theresa Jacobson. While she was recovering from the birth of their daughter, Helena, her husband, Pastor Thomas Jacobson, also an NALC pastor and current Ph.D. student in church history, temporarily filled her place and led worship that Sunday morning.



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Those at the anniversary celebration review historical displays.

the Eastern South Dakota Mission District of the NALC, was read, which encouraged those gathered to remember the past with gratitude but also to focus on their next 125 years of living in God's grace.

Pastor Thomas Jacobson is on study leave while completing his Ph.D. in church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., with an emphasis on Scandinavian-American Lutheran history. His wife, Theresa, serves Grace and Our Savior's Lutheran Churches of Menno, S.D.

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Adding to the joy of that morning, Pastor Chavez presided at the baptism of Helena Rakel Jacobson, reminding the congregation that the Christian Church, which began so long ago at Pentecost, continues to grow as God reaches out to them with the Means of Grace.

Grace Lutheran currently has about 300 members on its roll and has strong participation in worship and other congregational activities. The large number of younger families at Grace contributes to its vitality. The amount of musical talent in the congregation is also remarkable, as any participant in the June 8 worship service would note.

Grace is a charter member of the NALC, having joined in 2011, and also holds membership in Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ. Prior to this, they were members of the ELCA, The American Lutheran Church (TALC), the "old" American Lutheran Church (ALC, of German background), and the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio.

During the afternoon program, which included a catered meal in the local school gymnasium as well as greetings from former pastors and other NALC and LCMC congregations in eastern South Dakota, a note from Pastor Randy Eisenbeisz, the dean of



Taking a look at the worship debate

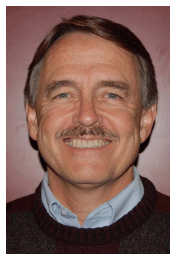
The Lutheran CORE newsletter editor, Carter Askren, emailed me a two-page article by David Murrow. The subject was congregational singing. In this article, Murrow shared his perception that there has been a general decline in the percentage of men who participate in congregational singing.

I was printing out a single copy of this article, hitting the *print* button on my office computer to engage the copier down the hallway. I could hear the article start to print but quickly noticed that the copier wasn't completing the print job. It just kept running. Assuming that I was getting unneeded multiple copies of this article, I jogged down the hallway to the copier. By the time the copier responded to my frantic attempt to cancel the print order, I had 107 pages of blog posts in response to this two-page article! I started skimming over the content of the posts and realized I had a fascinating, cross-denominational sample of the so-called worship wars. These pastors, worship leaders and musicians had very different views regarding what constituted the best and worst in worship music.

So over the next few days I spent time reading and reflecting on these blog posts. The focus of Murrow's article was quite specific: Weak congregational singing, especially among men.

The blog posts were much broader in focus and scope and quickly evolved into a debate between the relative merits of traditional and contemporary worship music. Included were well thought out, constructive views on what constituted appropriate worship music, and suggestions for facilitating congregational singing.

However, also included in this online debate were rants by Christian worship leaders and musicians with something of a chip on their shoulders. Comments sometimes devolved into sarcastic, harsh depictions of the worship music and style they were critiquing. In a few instances the bloggers traded personal insults as they engaged one another in passionate debate. In the occasional instances when a blogger would ask for a more "Christian" civil debate, this request would seemingly go unheeded, and the strident



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

comments would continue. The great majority of negative comments were critical of contemporary worship music. A sampling:

- + The characterization of contemporary Christian worship music as "7-11 songs" — the same seven words sung 11 times.
- + Multiple instances when comments were made criticizing "Jesus-is-my-boyfriend" song lyrics — referring to lyrics that could just as easily be used in a secular love song.
- + Comments about the frustration of having to learn new songs by rote, with only projected lyrics and no musical notes. This was referred to as "mystery music."
- + Complaints about worship bands playing music so loudly that worshipers cannot even hear *themselves* sing, let alone the worshipers around them. One commenter complained that some will quit singing not just because of the music's volume, but because the worship team's harmony and voices are better.
- + Multiple comments about church worship teams (presumably in very large churches) who are using theatrical "stage" lighting and even smoke! (Referred to as "Jesus haze.")
- + A comment regarding how most contemporary Christian songs are not even intended for worship, but rather for performance. A comment: "About 10-15 years ago, worship leaders stopped using songs that were written to be sung by the congregation and started using music that was written by and for

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some pop artist. The songs have too wide a vocal range; the rhythms are complex and change on every verse, and they tend to be oriented to how Christ intersects with the writer's existential angst. People just give up and watch."

Needless to say, this is a very sobering reminder of some of the potential pitfalls when it comes to contemporary worship!

Now for some of the less critical, more constructive comments regarding the selection and presentation of worship songs and hymns.

There is a need for *less* "new" music and more familiar songs and hymns. Too many worshipers are not singing because they simply don't know the melody. "We often would begin the service with a song that no one but the praise team knew. ... Folks would stand there, mostly mute with a few trying to sing along, but not really knowing the tune. Not pretty. ... When you then have another two or three songs in the set that no one knows, you have a song service that turns into a 'listen to the praise team sing' service."

When new music *is* introduced, it should be taught. This includes first singing it on successive Sundays, preferably after it has already been introduced by hearing the musicians "perform" it on a previous Sunday.

+ Using songs and hymns in a reasonable key is crucial. Too many contemporary Christian songs are written by male lead singers who are high tenors.

+ With new songs and hymns, worshipers should be provided with both lyrics *and* musical notes. Even though most Americans might learn music by rote, worshipers with musical backgrounds prefer to have notes, and they can help the rest of your people learn the new composition.

+ Christian songs originally written for performance, not worship, are often inappropriate. They can be inappropriate both lyrically and musically. Lyrics are sometimes personalized and might not have anything substantive to say about God or faith. The music might be inappropriate based on the complexity of the song or its singing range.

+ The bottom line in song/hymn selection and presentation is this: Appropriate worship songs and hymns are not primarily for performance. They need to be *participatory*. Another comment: "Church music — whatever the style — should make as its focus the participation of the people." And this comment: "God is the audience in church worship. To have music that the congregation cannot participate in deprives the worshiper of a meaningful dialogue with God."

Worship music is such an important issue for many congregations. And I continue to be amazed by how passionate — and sometimes angry — people become when engaging in this debate.

But here is a stark and unnerving challenge confronting many congregations when it comes to their long-term growth and vitality: Figuring out how to offer worship services that appeal to both traditionalists and non-traditionalists. The single most emotional flashpoint in this challenge is, not surprisingly, music preferences.

This challenge is especially complicated for congregations that are too small to offer more than one weekend service. A church in my community (not Lutheran) dropped one of their two Sunday-morning services. This decision was made due to declining attendance. Prior to this they offered one traditional and one contemporary service. The decision was to discontinue the traditional service and only offer contemporary worship. The result has been a 40 percent drop in total worship attendance within a year of this change.

If you are in a congregation that only has one service and you are trying to offer a worship that will be meaningful to both traditionalists and (often) younger, more "contemporary" worshipers, email me. I understand that developing one truly "blended" worship celebration for all your people can be an incredible challenge. However, I might be able to provide you with some insights and guidance.

If, on the other hand, your congregation is large enough to offer two or more weekend services, I encourage you to provide one service that is more traditional than contemporary, and one that is more

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contemporary than traditional. This strategy does not have to be implemented all at once; it can be done incrementally over time. I am convinced you will ultimately be reaching a greater number of people by doing this.

And I have three disclaimers for you to keep in mind:

+ Contemporary-music services can be very liturgical and utilize only the best in contemporary Christian music.

+ Contemporary services can (and should) also incorporate traditional hymns. These might include American classic hymns and traditional Gospel music.

+ Traditional services can incorporate *some* carefully-selected contemporary songs.

We all bring our own passions and prejudices to the worship debate. Try to keep your passions in perspective and ask the following question: Which songs and hymns will facilitate the enthusiastic participation of our people in congregational singing?

NALC Contact Information

NALC Ministry Office

3500 Mill Run Drive
Hilliard, OH 43026-7770
614-777-5709
bseifert@thenalc.org

NALC Administrative Office

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202
888-551-7254 or 651-633-6004
nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org

North American Luth. Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin
aschiffrin@thenals.org

Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky
jbradosky@thenalc.org

General Secretary

Pastor Mark Chavez
mchavez@thenalc.org

Missions

Pastor Gemechis Buba
gbuba@thenalc.org

Ministry & Ecumenism

Pastor David Wendel
dwendel@thenalc.org

New congregation finder available on NALC website

The congregation finder feature on the NALC's website has been redesigned.

The updated feature makes it possible to search for a congregation by name, postal code, city, state or province. Users may also search by using a map.

You may click on a congregation's location for more information including an option to e-mail the congregation or to link to the congregation's website.

The congregation finder had to be removed from the NALC website for a few weeks due to a hacking event.

You may access the congregation finder at www.thenalc.org.

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3500 Mill Run Drive
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Phone: 614-777-5709

www.thenalc.org

Pastor David J. Baer, editor
news@thenalc.org

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