

2014 NALC Mission Festival sets hearts on fire for Jesus

The 2014 NALC Mission Festival gathered Nov. 6-8 around the theme *Abida: Hearts on Fire*. The festival included worship, speakers, workshops and activities designed to stoke the fire of faith and discipleship in the 150 people who attended the annual festival at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church at Mill Run in Hilliard, Ohio.

The conference opened with a Communion service on Thursday evening. Bishop John Bradosky preached from Luke 24 on the story of Jesus' appearance to disciples on the Road to Emmaus following His Resurrection. "Hearts on Fire," the theme of the conference, was based on that text.

Prayer stations were created for the opening worship. Significant time was taken during the service for worshipers to visit various stations throughout the church which included ways to pray and experiences to lead the worshiper through a prayer experience.

Prayer stations ranged from "The Knots Prayer" and "M & M Prayer" to a "Wailing Wall" and "House of Balance." Opportunities for individual confession and absolution were also provided.

Dennis Blevins of The Navigators led a presentation on discipleship on Friday morning. He explained the discipleship process used by The Navigators. The process includes asking people to define their "current reality" and then determine their "intended future." They are then challenged to take specific "action steps" to move from their "current reality" to their "intended future."



Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, welcomes those at the NALC Mission Festival.

He introduced a Discipleship Wheel as a way to evaluate personal discipleship. The six spokes of the wheel form the basis of a Christian life: Word, Prayer, Fellowship, Witnessing, Serving, and Stewardship.

Continued from Page 1

Those in attendance were challenged to draw their own Discipleship Wheel and to discern areas where growth is needed.

Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, made three major presentations at the festival.

In his first presentation, "Missional Capacity Assessment," Pastor Buba highlighted 12 pillars of mission for congregations using the first two chapters of the book of Acts.

"The Church of Jesus Christ is gifted," he said. "The assurance of giftedness is the driver of mission."

Pastor Buba challenged listeners to discern what gifts they have and then to recall, reclaim, renew, and release them.

Planting new house churches was the focus of Pastor Buba's second presentation. Using Matthew 10, he highlighted 11 realities for starting churches.

Pastor Buba began by focusing on Jesus' promise that He will build His Church. "Jesus is the maker and owner of the Church," he said.

He also noted the difference between understanding Christianity as an institution or as a movement. "In the institutional model, economics drives mission. In the New Testament model, mission drives economics."

Those at the conference had an opportunity to experience worship as it is done in existing NALC house churches. Attendees were split among several churches with a focus on experiencing worship in a house church rather than discussing various models. Those from the same congregation were split among the various house churches so that they would have different experiences.

The conference focused on providing practical resources, tools and experiences that would help attendees in their local contexts. Small-group discussion time was built into all of the major presentations. Several workshops were offered during two workshop sessions.



Dennis Blevins of The Navigators led a presentation on discipleship.

A question-and-answer panel featuring six pastors answered general and specific questions on discipleship and mission starts.

In his final presentation on Saturday, Dr. Buba focused on missional hospitality using Matthew 22 as a basis for his talk. He encouraged congregations to move "from reactive welcoming to proactive inviting."

He said that churches need to define a "targeted missional territory" on a regular basis and remain focused on whom they are trying to reach.

Worship throughout the conference was led by Kevin Reynolds and Pastor David Keener of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga.

Video of all of the main sessions and workshops will be available on the NALC website.



Jenny Brockman of the NALC Missions Office provided key leadership for the festival.

2014 NALC Mission Festival



Worship throughout the Mission Festival was led by Pastor David Keener, left, and Kevin Reynolds of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga. Pastor Henry Graf of Fort Wayne, Ind., is on drums. Jenny Brockman played piano.



Members of the Mission Teams that organized the Mission Festival were introduced before the opening worship service.





Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, made three keynote addresses at the 2014 NALC Mission Festival.



One of several house church worship services experienced by those at the Mission Festival.



A variety of small-group workshops were offered at the Mission Festival.



Bishop John Bradosky presided at the opening service of Holy Communion.



A panel of pastors answered questions on discipleship and mission starts. Panel members were, from left, Pastor Gemechis Buba, Pastor Trina Petersen, Pastor Tom Hilpert, Pastor David Keener, Bishop John Bradosky, and Pastor Henry Graf. Pastor Eric Waters moderated the discussion.

2015 NALC Pastors Conference

'Jesus and the Bible: Authority in the Church'

"Jesus and the Bible: Authority in the Church" is the theme of the 2015 NALC Pastors Conference being held Tuesday through Thursday, Feb. 10-12, at the Crowne Plaza Orlando Universal in Orlando, Fla.

Dr. David Yeago will offer two keynote presentations on the conference theme.

Dr. Yeago is professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics for the North American Lutheran Seminary and Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa.



David Yeago

The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen will lead two presentations on preaching lectionary Scripture texts for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. These will be followed by preaching workshops where pastors are invited to deliver sermons on Scripture texts from Lent, Holy Week, and Easter and to receive feedback from presenters and colleagues.

Dr. Nestingen is professor emeritus in Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. He also teaches for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Workshop opportunities will be offered on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. Workshops include:

+ "The NALC Discipleship Emphasis and You" - Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Mark Chavez, General Secretary.

+ "Worship in the NALC" - the Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary, and Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics at Trinity School for Ministry.



James Nestingen

+ "Reigniting Passion for Mission in the NALC" - Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions.

Days will begin with Morning Prayer (Matins) and end with Compline (Prayer at the Close of the Day).

Thursday will feature a meeting of the NALC Ministerium, chaired by Bishop Bradosky, followed by a service of Holy Communion including the renewal of ordination vows and a blessing of oil for use in local congregations.

There will be free time each afternoon with the opportunity to schedule individual time with the bishop or other NALC executive staff.

Although the conference is offered for NALC pastors and seminary students, other NALC leaders and pastors and seminarians from other church bodies are also welcome. Spouses are welcome to attend, but must register to be included in meals.

Registration fee is \$50 for those who register by Nov. 30 and \$75 for those who register after that date. Registration includes breakfast and dinner on Wednesday; breakfast on Thursday. You may register online at www.thenalc.org.



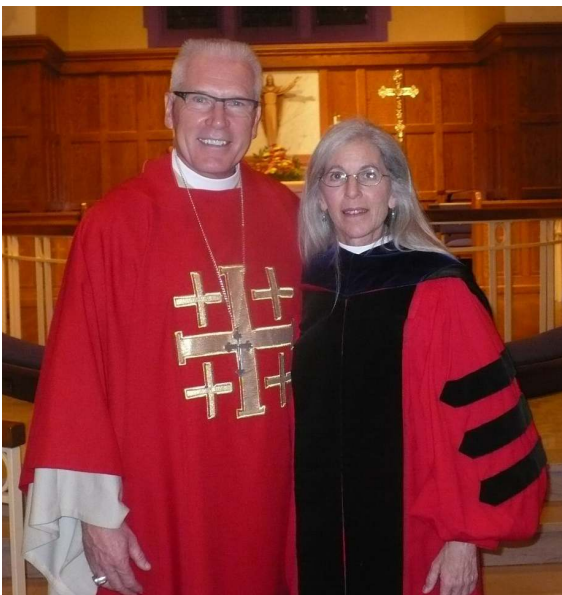
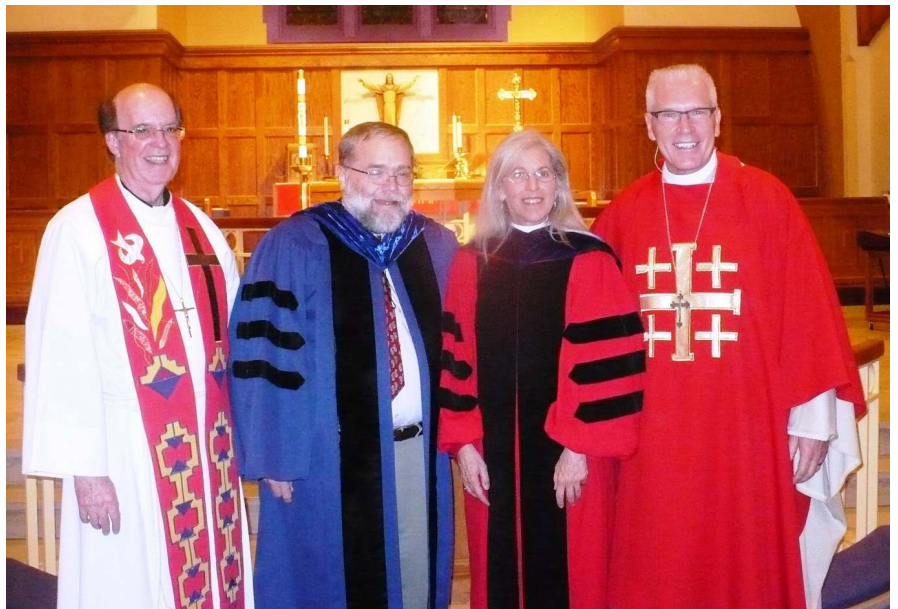
Amy Schiffrin

Seminary installation service

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin was installed as president of the North American Lutheran Seminary and Dr. David Yeago was installed as Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics for the NALS and Trinity School for Ministry during a Reformation Sunday evening service Oct. 26 at Zion Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Presiding at the installation were (center photo, from left) the Venerable Mark Stevenson, PhD, Academic Dean, Trinity School for Ministry; the Very Rev. Dr. Justyn Terry, Dean and President of TSM; NALC Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring from the NALS Board of Regents; and NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

The North American Lutheran Seminary is the seminary of the NALC. It includes the Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., and a House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.



Church supporting Ethiopian Synod

By Emily Guevara
Tyler Morning Telegraph

Almost everywhere Pastor Mark Braaten went in Ethiopia, he had followers. Maybe it was his light-colored skin that stood out in the African country or the fact that he came from the United States to this country.

Whatever the reason, the children seemed enthralled with the Tyler, Texas, pastor, and the adults expressed much appreciation for his time there. For Pastor Braaten, though, the appreciation went both ways.

"It's really a nice reciprocal relationship," he said. "In our country we have some finances and we have teaching opportunities we can share with the Ethiopians. Their church is exploding with growth. They cannot keep up with the growth. ... They can't keep up with buildings. They have something like one pastor for every 30,000 members, and so when I was there I was clear, 'I am here to teach you. I'm also a student. Tell me how to do evangelism and outreach because you folks obviously know how to do something we don't.'"



Pastor Mark Braaten and Pastor Meseret Lemma surrounded by children of the West Gibe Synod in Gimbichu, Ethiopia.

Pastor Braaten, senior pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Tyler, spent two weeks in Ethiopia last month.

During his time there, he conducted seminars about the Biblical book of Revelation for pastors and church leaders in two cities, Gimbichu and Dessie.

In addition to the full-day seminars, he preached about Revelation on two Sundays at a church in each city. The response, he said, was incredible.

"No one is teaching Revelation over there," said Braaten, who studied the book extensively while earning a doctorate. "They said they haven't had a Revelation scholar for 20 years."

He said Revelation is God's word of grace and deliverance found in the cross. Revelation shows that God will deliver His creation and destroy the destroyers of the Earth.

"Primarily it's a book of hope and promise," he said. "And to help people see that is great fun."

Continued on Page 8



Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Tyler, Texas is helping to renovate this church in the West Gibe Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.



Pastor Mark Braaten receiving gifts of an Ethiopian robe and butter from church members after worship in Gimbichu.

Continued from Page 7

Beyond teaching and preaching, though, Pastor Braaten got to see two buildings, a church and a Bible school, where funds from his congregation are helping pay for renovation work. The funds are providing for three other churches, but washed out roads prevented him from visiting those.

The partnership between Our Saviour's and the West Gibe Synod in Ethiopia came about after some challenging times for the Tyler church.

In 2009, the Our Saviour's congregation decided to move locations. The church bought property on Old Jacksonville Road and put the Kinsey Drive property on the market.

The plan was to have a capital campaign to pay for the land purchase and use proceeds from the existing property's sale to fund construction of the new building.

However, the Kinsey Drive property didn't sell, and after three years on the market and a couple of lower-than-needed bids, the congregation voted to stay put.

The sale of the Old Jacksonville Road property proved beneficial for the church because the value had increased.

Church members decided to use some of the proceeds to remodel the existing Kinsey Drive campus and give a portion of the proceeds to another church. That's when they were connected to the West Gibe Synod in Ethiopia.



Downtown Gimbichu, the headquarters of the West Gibe Synod in Ethiopia.



Children's Sunday School in Dessie, Ethiopia.

Pastor Gemechis Buba of the North American Lutheran Church said the synod is the newest Ethiopian synod in the Lutheran church and it was in need of partners.

It is experiencing rapid growth in terms of people joining the faith and it can't keep up in terms of facilities, according to information provided by Pastor Braaten.

The funding from Our Saviour's will help with the renovation of the one Bible school

Continued on Page 9

Continued from Page 8

and four churches. According to Pastor Braaten, the synod begins building when they have money and stops when they run out, which leaves unfinished projects.

The money from Our Saviour's will enable them to finish the projects by doing such things as adding a floor to the school and walls to a church.

"God did call us to build a new church," Pastor Braaten said. "We just got the location wrong. We thought it was gonna be here in Texas. It ends up it's in Ethiopia."

Church member Carol Lattier said she is thrilled about the partnership.

"To me, that's what we should be doing as Christians — we should be reaching out to people in need, both in our country and overseas," she said.

The partnership between Our Saviour's and the West Gibe Synod is part of a larger movement in the North American Lutheran Church.

Pastor Buba, who is Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, said the organization has a mission approach of pairing one North American church with one international partner.

The purpose of the partnerships is to allow churches in different parts of the world to learn from each other.

Pastor Buba, who traveled to Ethiopia after Pastor Braaten returned, said he heard positive reports about the Tyler



Pastor Mark Braaten and the Rev. Beyene Kbro, president of the West Gibe Synod of the Mekane Yesus Church.

pastor's visit. At least three regions invited him to come teach and preach in their areas.

Pastor Buba says that shows how spiritually hungry people are and how effective Pastor Braaten's message was. "They really loved him," he said.

Pastor Braaten said he wants to see how his church can continue the relationship into the future.

"They are just excited and joyful, and for us to share in that is wonderful," he said.

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Children's Choir in Jawdra, Ethiopia. Our Saviour's is assisting in building a Bible School next to this church.

Disaster Response to provide Christmas gifts for children affected by disasters

Nearly 600 children lost everything due to disasters in 2014.

NALC Disaster Response hopes to provide Christmas gifts for some of those children as a way to share the love of Christ with them.

NALC Disaster Response is providing Christmas gifts for children (ages 1-18) affected by flooding in Michigan and Ohio and by tornados in Arkansas, Mississippi and Nebraska.

Cash donations toward the gifts may be given online at www.thenalc.org or sent to: NALC Disaster Response; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112-2202.

Please note on your check that your gift is for the Christmas gift project, and be sure to send your gift by Dec. 22.

Bulletin inserts to promote the project are available online at www.thenalc.org.

NALC Network launches as web tool

The North American Lutheran Church has launched the NALC Network as a new communication tool for NALC members and congregations.

The NALC Network provides a unique mix of tools to allow the church to grow and thrive in today's digital age. It is inclusive of everyone, regardless of technical ability or age group.

It is hoped that the NALC Network will be a place to connect with others looking for creative worship ideas, to share prayer requests, discuss theological and practical issues, connect with local and domestic missions, and to see real time updates from NALC missionaries.

For those who have used social networking websites such as Facebook, the NALC Network Community will be a very easy tool to use. The NALC Network Community will function similarly to Facebook, but with more security to facilitate the work of the NALC and its congregations.

"One of the great advantages of the NALC Network is its high level of security as well as the fact that we have created some short videos explaining how to use the NALC Network for those who feel a little more technologically challenged," explained Jenny Brockman of the NALC Missions Office, who was involved in the design of the network.

Go to www.nalcnetwork.com to join the NALC Network or for more information. Video training for using the network is available online.

Please complete disaster survey

NALC pastors and congregations are reminded to complete a recent survey about their disaster experience, readiness, disaster response expertise, and other helpful information.

The survey will assist the NALC Disaster Response Services task force in providing leadership in disaster response. The information will help the task force plan disaster response training for NALC congregations, as well as to ensure that our response capabilities are adequate and logistically able to meet local needs.

The survey requests were sent by e-mail. You may request a new link to the survey by contacting the NALC Administrative Office at 888-551-7254 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org.

Mission District Deans meet

Deans representing the 24 regional Mission Districts of the North American Lutheran Church met Nov. 5-6 in Columbus, Ohio.

The meeting is an opportunity for NALC leaders to hear updates on ministry throughout the NALC. It is also an opportunity for the Deans to provide input on various matters.

The Deans discussed the role of Deans and the size of Mission Districts. They also offered input into a proposal regarding pay and benefits for pastors.

The Deans also received training on the NALC Network, an communication tool for NALC congregations and members.

Among other items discussed by the Deans were a proposal for missions and mission pastors, interim ministry, the call process, mission teams, and the NALC's relationship with Lutheran CORE.



Four Mission Districts elected new deans this fall. They are, from left, Pastor Alden Towberman, Mid-Northeast Mission District; Pastor Lisette Colón Olivo, Sonshine Mission District of Florida; Pastor C. Luke Seamon, Atlantic Mission District; and Pastor Marshall Hahn, Iowa Mission District.



Bishop John Bradosky addressed the Deans on the NALC's Vision and Strategy for Discipleship.



Those at the NALC Deans Meeting posed for a group photo.

The Importance of Restating the Obvious — Dwelling on the Apparent

Dear Friends,

As we celebrate the close of the church year on Christ the King Sunday, I encourage you to focus on the sovereignty of Christ. It seems so obvious and apparent that it can be easily missed and overlooked in our preaching and teaching. Yet I believe everything hinges on it. My encouragement is to include Matthew 28:18 in our articulation of the Great Commission: *“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”*

Authority is often despised in our culture. This makes it all the more difficult to proclaim this truth. Attempting to gain acceptance or popularity with the culture by avoiding this truth only creates a vacuum that causes an even greater separation from Christ. To that end I offer an excerpt from a sermon I preached on the Great Commission. I pray that it offers you some encouragement for the close of this year and direction for the new church year.

The Importance of Restating the Obvious — Dwelling on the Apparent

Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” — Matthew 28:18-20

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The authority of Jesus is located in His divinity. Jesus is God. He is the Christ. He is the Savior. No one has the authority He has.

John 14:6: Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Colossians 2:10: “And you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” This authority comes from the Father.

John 3:35: “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.”

John 10:18: (Jesus is talking about his crucifixion and death) “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

We know that there are many who questioned Jesus’ authority: the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees. The people from His own hometown questioned His authority. Many would-be followers questioned His authority — and today it is no different. We don’t have to be obedient if we separate Jesus from His identity and the authority He holds. Many fail to take seriously the Great Commission for that very reason.

Jesus has authority over nature: Even the winds and the seas obey Him. Remember Him walking on the water or condemning the fig tree that withers?

Jesus has authority over sin: He forgives and heals the paralytic. The woman pours the precious nard over his feet and bathes them with her tears.

Luke 7:44-50: “Then turning toward the woman Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my

Continued on Page 13

feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven — for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ And He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this, who even forgives sins?’ And He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”

Jesus has authority over illness. He heals both men and women who have endured their illnesses for years. He heals the lepers and countless others. He has authority over evil and the unclean spirits that oppress and seek to destroy others.

Jesus has authority over death. He calls Lazarus out of the tomb. He stops the funeral procession in Nain and restores a son to his mother.

Jesus claims this authority in His own teaching. You will remember His teaching in **Luke 4:18**: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

Think with me of the “I am” sayings in the book of John. “I am the bread of life.” “I am the water of life.” “I am the light of the world.” In the context of training His disciples, Jesus delegates His authority to them.

Matthew 10:1: “And He called to Him His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”

Matthew 10:8: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.”

So His disciples heal, cast out demons, teach with authority, forgive sins, make judgments and lead people to faith, confer the Holy Spirit on others, baptize, etc. What they saw Jesus doing, they did in His name.

Because the disciples were faithful in using that authority, they were persecuted, thrown in prison, beaten, and ultimately killed for their faith in Jesus. Utilizing His power puts us at odds with the world. It is the power in His authority that causes others to resist, rebel and exterminate Christians — even and especially today.

The witness of Scripture is that Jesus is seated in that position today of all authority and power.

Colossians 1:16–17: “For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

Philippians 2:9–11: “Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Why spend so much time reminding ourselves of His authority? It is the easy to miss the obvious, and the obvious has implications for what we do with His commands.

There are really two commands in the Great Commission. The first is “Go.” It is not to stay right where we are as if we have arrived, but we are to go. Discipleship is a journey with Jesus. We cannot get there by staying where we are. If you are a disciple of Jesus are you ever done learning and growing? What gets us into trouble is when we think we have reached the destination, when growth is no longer necessary.

Mission is about going to where there are people in need. It is not about simply waiting for them to come to us. In Huntington Beach, I remember seeing a lifeguard suddenly jump to his feet in his tower. He notified other lifeguards in nearby towers. He jumped down, grabbed a buoy and rushed out into the water. With great determination he swam through the pounding waves toward a man in desperate need of help. As the lifeguards performed CPR, the ambulance arrived, and the

Continued on Page 14

crowds gathered. The man's limp and lifeless body came to life again as he was revived. The same scene was repeated several times that day for the undertow was unusually strong. Several days later I was running along the bike path near the beach and came to the main offices and staging center for the lifeguards. Wanting to know a little more about their work and to offer a positive comment to the leaders about what I observed, I entered their office. A prominently placed sign caught my attention: "If in doubt, go!"

Perhaps such a sign should not only be on our doors as we leave, but on our hearts as well. Every believer who walks out of our doors should observe the multitudes and remember the command of Jesus to "Go."

We are always going somewhere. We go in many different directions and encounter lots of people but do we go with the intent of fulfilling this command of Jesus? Our staying in the same place puts arrogance where there should be humility. Our going must be with the intent of fulfilling this mission.

The second command is to "make disciples." Some think we are already doing it and have always been doing it, and we don't need any help. Others say, "Great idea but how do we do it? We don't have a clue." If you desire to engage in your own evaluation, ask yourself how many people you have disciplined. Not, how many people did you invite to worship or a church program, but with how many people have you shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ and stayed with them until they have grown in their faith to the point of maturity so that they could disciple others?

If you want to get down to basics, just ask how many people in your congregation could share the Gospel with a friend if they had the chance. Could you? We can put together great worship, excellent fellowship and generate a multitude of programs, but making disciples, growing and maturing people in the faith has not been on our radar for a long time.

We know how to baptize. We know the Name of the Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We understand the creeds and the nature of this



Bishop John Bradosky preaches at the opening worship service of the 2014 NALC Mission Festival.

covenant of identity and adoption into the Body of Christ, the Church. I am not sure we do enough preparation to equip parents to disciple their children, but we understand the importance of Baptism.

Even though we place a high priority on education, we must confess that we are not doing very well in this second step in this process, teaching others to obey all that Jesus commanded us. How many people in your congregation are involved in Bible Study or Sunday School? We have lowered expectations to make people believe they can get all they need on Sunday morning. As long as they show up for worship and are generous with their offerings we will survive, but often at the expense of this mission.

We have been so caught up in meeting the "felt needs" of people we have forgotten the mission

Continued on Page 15

Jesus has given us. Individual needs can replace Christ as the center of our worship. We engage in many ministries but seldom develop the relational depth that provides us with the opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus.

If we devote the time and energy to focus on the Scripture, we trust that Jesus both reveals Himself and instructs us. We do not need to invent or reinvent the method for discipleship. Jesus has given us the record in the Scriptures of how He trained and equipped the first disciples. That is our guide. There is a plan and a process that we need to consider. We can't do it without the Word or the obedient commitment to follow Him.

The Great Commission begins and ends with two inseparable truths. Christ has all power and authority and is truly present. As the followers of Jesus we never walk alone. He will be with us. He is with us now and will remain with us to the close of this age. His presence is the power we rely on. In this Great Commission we also find our sacramental understanding and priority. Baptism is clearly commanded. The nature of Holy Communion is nothing less than His real presence. Jesus is really present in with and through the bread and wine. Following the Resurrection Jesus kept saying to His disciples, "Do not fear, fear not." The way will not be easy and we must learn to rely on Him.

The nature and rule of Christ the King is in His Death and Resurrection. The nature of our faith in Him is not an insurance policy or a guarantee that everything will be easy and work out perfectly for us

in this life. It is the assurance that this life will not only include the Cross, but an empty tomb as well, the assurance of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus came to proclaim.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul describes the Christian life with these words: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me."

We are called not just to believe in Jesus, but to believe Jesus, to trust in His powerful promise of eternal life now. Believing Jesus and the promises contained in His Word, we are freed to live a life obediently following Him as one of His disciples. Trusting in Him and obediently following Him are the best ways to proclaim Christ the King, sovereign and truly present.

May the Lord add His blessing to the church year past and all this new year holds in Him.

With you following Christ the King,

Bishop John Bradosky

Bishop to host tour

NALC Bishop John Bradosky will host a trip to the Biblical and classical sites of Greece and Turkey Oct. 20-30, 2015.

The 11-day tour will follow the journeys of St. Paul and includes a three-day cruise. There is an optional three-day extension to Italy.

Contact Pam Charas at mcharas@earthlink.net or 937-434-0993 for a flyer and registration form.

Ratification process

The 2014 NALC Convocation approved an amendment to the NALC constitution which would allow more flexibility in scheduling the annual NALC Convocation.

For it to go into effect, the amendment must be ratified by a two-thirds majority of NALC congregations voting in the ratification process.

Congregations are encouraged to consider the decision at their next congregational meeting or to schedule a special meeting for this purpose. The deadline for congregations to vote on ratification is Jan. 25, 2015.

Congregations were sent information about the ratification process. The information is also available online at www.thenalc.org (under the 2014 Convocation tab).

Please send your pastor to the 2015 NALC Pastors Conference

This month, while I would like to talk about the first annual NALC Pastors Conference Feb. 10-12, 2015, I am addressing this communication to all congregational leaders and members. My message to you: please, please, please — send your pastor to the Pastors Conference!

One of the regular laments heard by Lutheran pastors in the last few generations was the lack of a true ministerium (a body of ministers which meets regularly for learning, study, prayer, support). In many ways, Lutheran pastors felt they were on their own, without encouragement or mutual accountability.

Some became “lone rangers,” never leaving their own congregations or participating with other clergy in the larger church. Many went hungry spiritually, neglecting to read and study the Word of God, to pray and to feed their devotional lives. Some pastors became unhealthy spiritually, mentally and emotionally as they had no strong collegial relationships with whom to share, discuss and deal with issues and problems. It is clear that when pastors are unhealthy in these ways, they are not well-grounded and well-prepared to faithfully serve in a congregation.

The NALC is now committed to drawing our pastors together to strengthen the sense of “ministerium” for the sake of our clergy, congregations and the NALC as a whole. Last year, through the gift of a generous anonymous NALC donor, we were able to offer an NALC preaching conference. The response was so positive that the decision was made to offer an annual Pastors Conference with financial support approved at the 2014 NALC Convocation.

We are committed to offering a quality, varied conference for our pastors because we know it will not only help our pastors and their families, but also their congregations!

How will such a Pastors Conference help the local congregation?



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Often, NALC call committees tell me they hope their new pastor will have “enthusiasm, energy and excitement for ministry.” I hear this as, “our last pastor was tired, burned-out and had no passion for ministry.” Being together with their bishop, executive staff and faithful colleagues can renew, restore and energize pastors for mission and ministry. Being engaged with other pastors for faithful Confessional Bible study, teaching, worship and prayer does indeed feed and nourish our pastors so that they return to the parish with new ideas, new energy, and a sense of support and encouragement. Sending your pastor to the NALC Pastors Conference is an investment in your congregation’s ministry, as well as an investment in your pastor’s life.

The difficulty? Often church councils and other leaders balk at the idea of supporting their pastor leaving the parish, yet again, for a larger church event. Lay leaders often have a very small, restrictive view of congregational ministry and fail to grasp that their pastor serves their local congregation, yes, but their pastor is also a part of the NALC ministerium.

NALC pastors may be called upon to serve as Mission District deans, to serve in various NALC or Mission District task forces, or to assist in supporting and encouraging other local congregations or missions. Similarly, there is an expectation that NALC pastors will participate in NALC gatherings and meetings.

Continued on Page 17

Continued from Page 16

The congregation and its leaders can assist by encouraging their pastor to attend, participate and serve the larger church, as well as the local congregation. Such an investment will pay dividends in the pastor's ministry, the congregation's life, and the health and vitality of the NALC as a whole.

What is being offered at the 2015 NALC Pastors Conference?

Dr. David Yeago will present two lectures on "Jesus, the Bible and Authority in the Church." This will get at both authority and accountability in the Body of Christ.

There will be presentations on preaching for Lent and Easter by Dr. Jim Nestingen, and opportunity for actual preaching feedback for pastors by Dr. Nestingen and Dr. Amy Schiffrin.

Pastors will have the chance to schedule a meeting with the bishop and his staff during the conference.

There will be the first ever meeting of the NALC ministerium, when pastors will be able to talk, share, and engage on important topics with Bishop Bradosky.

There will be opportunity for Holy Communion with our bishop preaching and leading pastors in a renewal of our vows of ordination.

There will also be time for conversation and consolation, recharging "batteries" before Ash Wednesday and the journey to Holy Week and Easter.

The conference will begin Tuesday morning, Feb. 10 at the Crowne Plaza Orlando Universal in Orlando, Fla. It will end on Thursday, Feb. 12 at noon.

Pastors are encouraged to bring their spouses, if they wish, so that spouses may benefit from the presentations, prayer and worship.

What can congregational leaders and members do?

Encourage your pastor to attend! Provide funds so that the pastor may attend. Make it clear that this is

not "vacation," but an essential part of the pastoral responsibility.

Often pastors are hesitant to request time and assistance to attend such an event, afraid that they might get a negative reaction. It is much more helpful for congregational officers and councils to lead the way, urging the pastor to make plans to attend this important conference, helping other lay leaders and members to appreciate the value and benefit of the pastor's participation. Cost, details, etc. may be found elsewhere in this NALC newsletter. A discounted registration fee is available for pastors who register before Dec. 1!

Please support and encourage your pastor and the NALC ministerium by making sure your pastor is present for this first annual conference!

Registration for the pastors conference is online at www.thenalc.org. Registration fee is \$50 for those who register by Nov. 30 and \$75 for those who register after that date. Registration includes breakfast and dinner on Wednesday; breakfast on Thursday.

Advent devotions by Pastor Wendel available online

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, an Advent devotional booklet for 2014, is now available on the NALC website.

The devotions, prepared by Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, are new this Advent. They are based on Year 1 of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* daily lectionary.

The devotional booklet is free and may be copied for use in the home, by families, in congregations, Bible study groups, etc.

If you have questions, feel free to contact Pastor Wendel at dwendel@thenalc.org.

When Christianity is perceived as discriminatory

The article in the September issue of *Christianity Today* was entitled “The Wrong Kind of Christian.” It was written by the Rev. Tish Harrison Warren, a priest in the Anglican Church in North America.

Tish and her husband were graduate students at Vanderbilt University when a new administration policy was put in place regarding religious groups on campus. Back in 2011-2012, Pastor Warren was a leader in the Graduate Christian Fellowship, a chapter of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

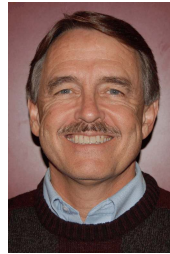
Tish Warren writes that she always considered herself to be the “acceptable kind” of evangelical Christian. “I’m not a fundamentalist. ... We avoid spiritual clichés and buzzwords. We value authenticity, study, racial reconciliation, and social and environmental justice.”

So Tish was surprised when she was informed that the Graduate Christian Fellowship was going to be “kicked off campus for being the wrong kind of Christians.” The only way her group could regain its status as a registered student organization was “to drop the requirement that student leaders affirm our doctrinal and purpose statement.”

This decision by the university administration has recently received national press coverage. I first read about it last summer in the *New York Times*.

The implications of this kind of policy are significant. Note that the issue is not who can attend or participate in religious groups — but rather who can *lead* these groups. In other words, avowed atheists could not be denied leadership roles in a Christian group based solely on their lack of faith.

What triggered this new policy at Vanderbilt? It apparently went back to an incident where a Christian fraternity expelled several students for violating their behavioral policy. One of those students claimed he was ousted from the fraternity for being gay.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

“So what began as a concern about sexuality and pluralism quickly became a conversation about whether robustly religious communities would be allowed on campus,” Pastor Warren writes.

“Religious organizations were welcome as long as they were malleable; as long as their leaders didn’t need to profess anything in particular; as long as they could be governed by sheer democracy and adjust to popular mores or trends; as long as they didn’t prioritize theological stability. Creedal statements were allowed, but as an accessory, a historic document, or a suggested guideline. They could not have binding authority to shape or govern the teaching and practices of a campus religious community.

“At first I thought this was all a misunderstanding that could be sorted out between reasonable parties.” But as she met with administrators, she learned otherwise. “The word *discrimination* began to be used — a lot — specifically in regard to creedal requirements. It was lobbed like a grenade to end all argument. Administrators compared Christian students to 1960s segregationists.”

The vice chancellor told her, “Creedal discrimination is still discrimination.”

Pastor Warren writes, “The line between good and evil was drawn by two issues: creedal belief and sexual expression. If religious groups required set

Continued on Page 19

truths or limited sexual autonomy, they were bad — not just wrong but evil, narrow-minded, and too dangerous to be tolerated on campus.”

While writing this column, I recalled that the California State University system — comprising 23 campuses and 447,000 students — was considering the same policy as the one instituted at Vanderbilt. So I looked it up and discovered that the decision had been made in September. Specifically, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has now been denied the right to have any on-campus presence on California State University campuses. The reason given was that, by requiring student leaders to adhere to certain Christian beliefs, InterVarsity was “discriminatory.”

I realize that very few of you are involved in campus ministries. However, I believe this issue has implications for all of us — clergy and laity alike — as our congregations engage and minister to our culture. Just two of those implications:

First, there is an unfortunate and unjust trend where many Christian ministries are now judged as “discriminatory” and sectarian. I believe it is appropriate that participation in our faith communities be open, in the words of the Vanderbilt administration, to “all comers.” But to deny the right to set certain behavioral and doctrinal standards for those in leadership smacks of its own, *secular* form of discrimination.

And then to see this form of secular intolerance manifest itself in the context of the national debate regarding human sexuality is a cause for concern — especially for those of us who are part of the NALC, Lutheran CORE, LCMC, the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians, and Tish Warren’s church body, the Anglican Church in North America. There are currently a number of organizations and lobbying groups in our country that have decided sexuality should be our generation’s defining issue when it comes to judging whether a Christian group, congregation or denomination is tolerant or “discriminatory.”

Pastor Warren wrote this: “InterVarsity welcomes anyone as a member. But it asks key student leaders ... to affirm its doctrinal statement, which

outlines broad Christian orthodoxy and does not mention sexual conduct specifically. But the university saw belief statements themselves as suspect. Any belief — particularly those about the authority of Scripture or the church — could potentially constrain sexual activity or identity.”

Of course, it’s impossible to know how this issue will evolve and whether our congregations will someday be impacted. Yet something we *can* do is to keep our congregational leaders informed of what’s happening in the wider culture — not to alarm them, but so that we have, when necessary, well-thought-through policies and strategies in place.

Many of us are still “in recovery” after painful exits from previous church bodies; others are still trying to offer a faithful witness as part of heterodox church bodies. As a result, we might be avoiding any ongoing dialogue about these issues. That might be a mistake. One note of caution: I believe these topics are best addressed in groups and classes, not from the pulpit. You should have a setting where there can be questions and open dialogue when addressing this type of controversy.

The second implication regarding this cultural trend is that we must avoid any inclination to withdraw from our surrounding communities. We should not be unduly concerned about a secular, discriminatory backlash due to our emphasis on the authority of Scripture. We are called to be proactive and to engaged with nonbelievers — never shying away from our responsibility to live out and testify to the truth of the Gospel. The temptation is to withdraw into our more orthodox Christian “ghettos,” seeking comfort in the fellowship of only like-minded believers. Resist that urge.

+ + +

You may read more from Tish Harrison Warren at www.tishharrisonwarren.com. A link to her *Christianity Today* article, “The Wrong Kind of Christian” and some responses are available at that website.

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