

# The Great Exchange

*An Easter Message from Bishop John Bradosky*

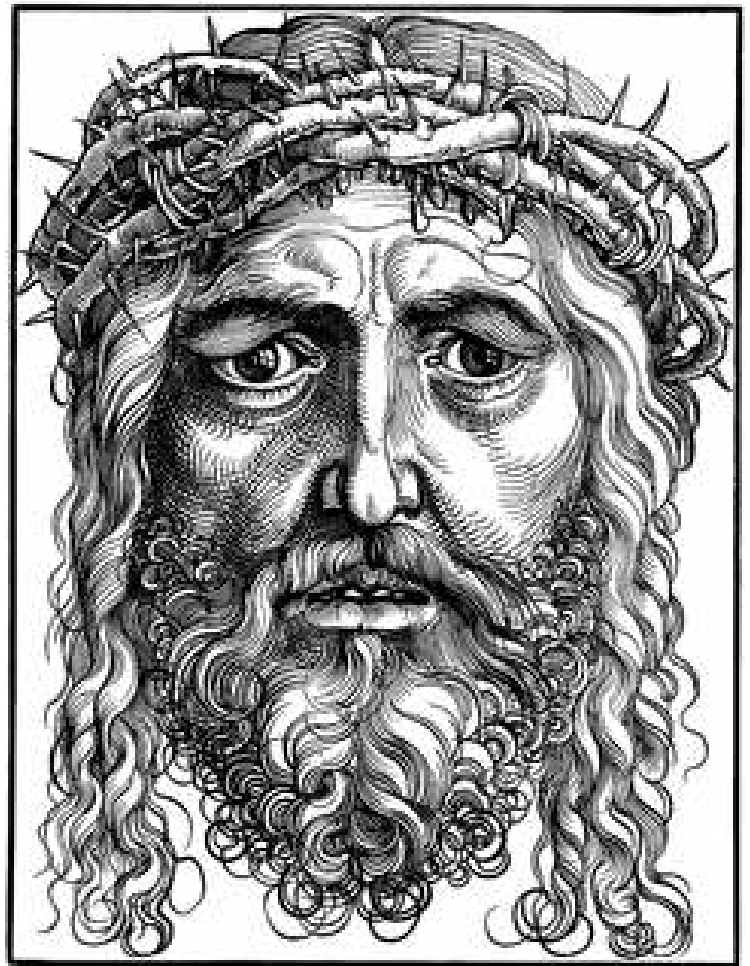
Dear Disciples of Jesus throughout the North American Lutheran Church:

Throughout this Season of Lent I have prayed for our Deans and the congregations of each of our Mission Districts. I am well aware of the many struggles and difficulties some have faced, but I am equally aware of the many joys and celebrations as well as the transformed lives as individuals have come to faith in Jesus Christ or continued to grow and mature in Christ. All those following Jesus and leading others realize that both the joys and sorrows are so interrelated that it is impossible to separate them. Life in Christ includes a constant flow of both. I share these reflections on the Easter Gospel as a way to encourage you during this Easter Triduum.

## The Great Exchange

I realize this sounds like a strange way to begin an Easter Message, but have you ever thought of what it would be like to be on “death row” on the last day of your life, waiting for the guards to lead you to the gallows, the electric chair or the room to receive a lethal injection? What would the emotional trauma be like waiting for someone to end your existence, your influence, your identity?

Have you ever known anyone on death row? In preparation for Holy Week and Easter, I have been preoccupied with the Passion narrative and the man on death row, awaiting execution, “Barabbas.” The Gospel writers tell us that Barabbas was a robber, a murderer, a revolutionary, an insurrectionist.



*Head of Christ, attributed to Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) or Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550).*

Perhaps he was a part of the Zealots trying to rid Jerusalem of the Roman occupation.

Barabbas was a notorious prisoner and we certainly share nothing in common with him, right?

***Continued on Page 2***

We may have a few parking tickets and perhaps have an occasional arrest for speeding, but we are not violent criminals. We may have committed an occasional misdemeanor but not robbery or insurrection. Comparatively speaking we are good people aren't we, not like Barabbas? Perhaps we could have been guilty of a felony but never intentionally, certainly not murder, nothing deserving death row. We don't consider ourselves to be like Barabbas at all!

Most people don't know anyone on death row. I can't say that. Few people know this about my family, but my first cousin, Johnny Foster, was a gang member in Pittsburgh, Pa. He had broken the law and been incarcerated for brief periods of time on several occasions. While recovering at his parents' home following a motorcycle accident that nearly ended his life, some friends from the gang brought him a fresh supply of drugs to assist him in his healing. When he called them for more drugs, they told him he would have to pay. Without funds, he took a long screwdriver and broke into the back door of a neighbor's home to rob her. The owner was a single mom, with one young daughter. They were both in the living room watching TV. He broke in, went upstairs and, as he was searching for her purse and wallet, the young mother heard his movements and went upstairs to confront him. Still high on the last of his drugs, startled by her presence, in a rage he stabbed her to death with the screwdriver. Moments after he left, her little daughter found the lifeless body of her mother. His trial was brief, and the verdict swift. His life would end in a prison cell.

Several decades later, I invited the brother of Scott Mink from Dayton, Ohio, to share their family's devastating struggle and grief. On Sept. 19, 2000, Scott, then 36, was living with his parents and using alcohol and crack cocaine when, as he told police, he "snapped." He killed his parents after they hid his car keys. The news of their parents' gruesome death reached their children and they gathered at the home of Scott's sister to make funeral plans for their parents when Scott called them. He admitted to his family that he had murdered his parents and then he turned himself in to the police, offering the same confession. His trial was brief and the judgment swift. He was convicted of first-degree

murder and sentenced to death by lethal injection. His case moved quickly through the review process because Scott asked to be executed for his crime. He told his family, "I have done something awful and I deserve to die. Only my death will bring my family's grief to an end and give them the chance to move forward with their lives."

We may not have committed the same crime but Barabbas reminds us that we have all sinned and broken God's commands, avoiding His will for our lives, rebelling against God's sovereignty, asserting our own selfish will, destroying our relationship with God and with our neighbor. The sum total of our sinful rebellion makes us just like Barabbas. We can try to justify ourselves or ask God to accept our relative righteousness by comparing our life to others, but no matter how we attempt to deny the truth, it does not change it. We are sinners deserving death. Only from that perspective will the full weight of the cross and the resurrection unleash its life-transforming power in our lives.

Perhaps Pilate was trying to gage Jesus' lack of popularity or perhaps he was trying to lessen his own responsibility for Jesus' death. As a sign of goodwill Pilate was willing to release a prisoner condemned to die. The people would decide. Would they choose Barabbas, the man whose name means "son of the Father?" (Some ancient texts of Matthew's Gospel even refer to him as Jesus Barabbas.) He tried to free God's people with political insurrection and taking the lives of others.

Or would they choose Jesus, the true Son of the Father, who was reconciling the world to the Father by giving his own life? The people shouted for the freedom of Barabbas and the death of Jesus! This was the first manifestation of the "Great Exchange" that was about to unfold. The one who deserved to die was set free and the righteous one was condemned to die in his place. Jesus was to die for the sins of Barabbas.

Both physically and spiritually we are all on death row. From the moment we are born we are headed toward death. No matter how "good" we attempt to be, our life is filled with sin and rebellion. It is an inescapable reality for every person. Death is the huge equalizer — rich or poor, powerful or

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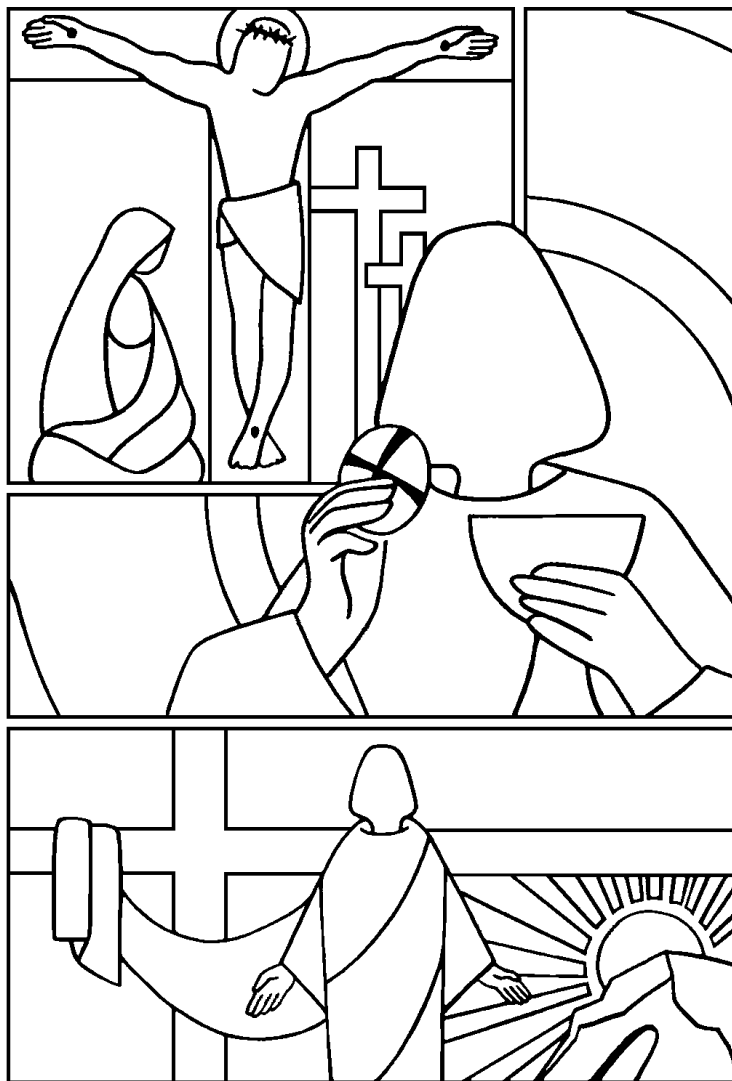
powerless, popular or unknown, intelligent or incompetent, skilled or unskilled — the same end awaits everyone. Denial, anger, avoidance or even declaring that life is pointless and without meaning doesn't change reality. It does not alter the truth.

What is imprisoning you today? What is it in your life that is causing you to live in fear? Is it your past sin? Do you live in fear that someone may discover the truth about your past? Is it a present struggle in your relationship with family, your marriage, your finances, your health, your career? Is it your future that is causing you to feel imprisoned? Perhaps you are trying to figure out the next chapter in your life and fear making a decision. How do you know if it is the right decision about school, career, retirement? If any of that pertains to you then you are in good company because that is where the disciples were on that first Easter morning.

After Jesus' agonizing death on the cross and His burial, the disciples were imprisoned by their fear, their grief and their overwhelming sense of loss. They were hiding in fear that they would share the same fate as the one they had spent the last three years following. They felt powerless and hopeless. That's why they went in the cover of darkness to the tomb, to finish the job of giving Jesus a proper burial. They were afraid of their past involvement with Jesus, concerned about their security in the present and feeling hopeless about their future.

The Easter story begins with Jesus in the tomb, imprisoned by death. Mary arrives at the tomb, imprisoned by her grief. Most of the disciples stay away from the tomb, imprisoned by their fear. This is the context for the Easter proclamation: "Jesus is alive! He lives!" The Resurrection unleashes the life-transforming power of His redemptive love.

The stone is rolled away and the body is gone. Jesus is alive and on the move. Mary is so imprisoned by her grief that she can't celebrate the Resurrection. She is mourning the fact that some grave robbers have carried away the body of Jesus. She doesn't even recognize Jesus when he asks, "Why are you crying?" Then He speaks her name, "Mary." The door of the prison flies open and her grief is transformed to joy. She goes to the disciples and gives them the news that frees them from the



prison of their fears, Jesus is alive and appeared to her and would soon appear to them!

The Great Exchange began with the cross. Jesus died the death we deserved to die. It was our sin that was nailed to the cross. Jesus took our place.

Paul writes, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Peter writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). A few verses later we read, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18).

**Continued on Page 4**

During Holy Week we remember the prophetic words of Isaiah regarding the crucifixion: “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

The Cross of Christ assures us that the price for our sin has been paid in full. We are freed from the prison of sin and its devastating power over us. Our forgiveness is complete; our redemption and salvation is secure. This grace through faith in Jesus Christ justifies us. He is the key that unlocks the door to all imprisoned by past sin.

The Cross brings us forgiveness and Easter brings us new life! That is the second part of the “Great Exchange.” Through faith in Jesus He brings us into the kingdom of heaven, a world without fear. Jesus taught his disciples not to fear death. He didn’t! “Have no fear of those who can kill the body. They cannot destroy the soul” (*Matthew 10:28*). “Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (*2 Timothy 1:10*).

Dallas Willard writes, “All who enter into His life through faith in Him have entered into a life that is eternal. He proclaimed that we were so loved by God that He would not allow us to cease to exist. God treasures us and delights in us.” Jesus told His disciples that He had gone to prepare a place for them. In fact, Jesus told His disciples that they would never see or taste death (*John 8:51-52*). On another occasion, Jesus simply said, “Everyone living and believing in me will never die” (*John 11:26*).

Jesus came to show us how to begin now to live that eternal life. The process of discipleship is learning from Jesus how to live a life that is eternal, to learn to live the kind of life He lived. Our future in that kingdom is one of being more at home there than we are here. It is one of ruling and reigning with Jesus, being in His presence, experiencing the fullness of His love, truth and His intended order for life that brings peace.

Even the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” reminds us of eternal life, “when we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.”

We are going to be around a long time! Learning to live that eternal life now means not having to rush through this life as though we have to cram in as much as possible for fear we will miss the best that life can offer. The best that life can offer is Jesus, and Easter proclaims that life in Jesus is eternal. Life in Christ helps us to experience life without overwhelming fear, a life that is abundant in meaning, purpose and direction.

Take time to value your relationship with Jesus and the people he has given you to love and care for. The good news of Easter is the best news we can ever hear. It is the greatest news we could ever proclaim. We are forgiven, freed from our past and alive in Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave His life for me.”*

I have often wondered what happened to Barabbas. The Scriptures don’t give us the rest of the story. But I do know what happened to my cousin, Johnny Foster, and the family of Scott Mink.

Johnny Foster came to faith in Jesus Christ through a prison ministry. He wrote letters of apology to every family member. He began his own ministry of leading others to Jesus and discipling them. He did not file an appeal or ever seek to have his conviction overturned. He had forgiveness in Christ, new life in Christ, and peace in Christ. His ministry was in the prison. He even created several videos to help convince youth of the dangers of using drugs and the results that destroyed his life. Johnny Foster died in a federal penitentiary. The chaplain told the family that in the last moments of his life he reached out with his arms to embrace Jesus and his last words were, “I am free at last.” Then the chaplain added, “Truth is, he has been free since he came to Jesus years ago, and his ministry in the prison has set many others free as he led them to Jesus.”

Because of this Great Exchange that is ours in Christ Jesus, Scott Mink’s family was able to forgive him and spend time with him in prison during those final years leading up to his execution. All the other family members were reconciled except his brother

**Continued on Page 5**

Bill. He refused to forgive him for killing their parents and depriving Bill's children of their grandparents. Scott was in prison, but Bill was imprisoned by his own anger, frustration and hurt.

On the Sunday before Scott's execution the family gathered to decide if they were going to be present to witness his death. Bill was still unsure if he ever wanted to see his brother again. He had been reading the Bible and praying for direction when the words to a song cut through his emotions and the Lord spoke a word he needed to hear. That song was *Untitled Hymn* by Chris Rice:

*Weak and wounded sinner,  
Lost and left to die,  
O, raise your head for love is passing by;  
Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!  
Come to Jesus and live!*

*Now your burden's lifted  
And carried far away;  
And precious blood has washed away the stain;  
So sing to Jesus! Sing to Jesus!  
Sing to Jesus and live!*

*And like a new born baby,  
Don't be afraid to crawl;  
And remember when you walk sometimes we fall;  
So fall on Jesus! Fall on Jesus!  
Fall on Jesus and live!*

*Sometimes the way is lonely  
And steep and filled with pain,  
So if your sky is dark and pours the rain;  
Then cry to Jesus! Cry to Jesus!  
Cry to Jesus and live!*

*Oh, and when the love spills over  
And music fills the night,  
And when you can't contain your joy inside;  
Then dance for Jesus! Dance for Jesus!  
Dance for Jesus and live!*

*And with your final heartbeat  
Kiss the world goodbye,  
Then go in peace, and laugh on glory's side  
And fly to Jesus! Fly to Jesus!  
Fly to Jesus and live!*

*Fly to Jesus! Fly to Jesus!  
Fly to Jesus and live!*

In the midst of this song, Bill realized that the grace of Jesus Christ was bigger than Scott's sin — even the sin of murder. He realized that the sin of his lack of forgiveness was just as great as his brother's sin and that in God's economy they were both on death row in need of the Great Exchange, forgiveness and new life in Jesus. Bill knew what he had to do.

On the eve of his brother's death he was reconciled with his brother and shared Communion with him as a family of faith. They talked openly about his baptism and Christ's promise of His grace, His forgiveness and the assurance of His constant presence. Scott assured his family of his repentance and the peace that was his in Christ now and for eternity. He told his family that they would walk down the hallway and that on the other side of the room where they would give him the lethal injection, Christ was waiting and so were his parents. Bill decided to stay and witness his brother's final breath. He said that Scott walked in and was very calm. "He was assisted up on the table, and he looked out at us, gave us a thumbs up and mouthed the words, 'I love you, Bro.' I looked back and said out loud, 'I love you too. Go with Jesus.' He laid his head back, went to sleep and after a few more breaths his breathing stopped."

The power of the Great Exchange changes everything — the cross of Jesus Christ, the empty tomb and the assurance of Easter, forgiveness and new life in Christ.

The Scriptures do not give us any word about Barabbas' response. The question we are invited to answer is what difference are we willing to let this Easter reality make in our lives?

Easter is not just a word of hope at the end of your life. It is a word of direction for how to live your eternal life in Jesus right now. It is a word that sets you free to begin that journey today! He greets us today with the same message through Word and Sacrament. He is just as present today in this place as He was on that first Easter morning.

Christ is Risen!  
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!  
Amen.

# NALC Convocation is Aug. 12-14

Martyrdom and faithful witness will provide a common theme for the 2015 NALC Convocation and the theological conference that precedes it.

The “Lutheran Week” events will be held Aug. 11-14 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

“Martyr: Life-giving Witness” is the theme for the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14.

The Convocation will begin at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 12, with special Mission Intensive sessions including speakers and workshops to highlight the NALC’s commitment to its Mission-Driven core value and to equip congregations for mission.

Mission Districts will meet on Wednesday evening as a part of the Mission-Driven focus.

Convocation business sessions on Aug. 13-14 will include speakers on the theme as well as church business including the election of bishop and members of the Executive Council and Court of

Adjudication. The Convocation is expected to conclude by 5 p.m. Friday.

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering will take place Aug. 11-12 under the theme, “A Gathering of Witnesses.” The women will meet 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday and 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday. Tuesday supper and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the registration fee.

“Martyrdom and the Sufferings of the Righteous” is the theme for the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology Aug. 11-12. The theological conference begins at 1 p.m. Tuesday and concludes at noon on Wednesday.

A special room rate has been negotiated at the hotel. The rate is good for reservations made by July 21. Reservations may be made through a link on the NALC website or by calling 888-421-1442.

Watch the NALC website for more information. Online registration will be available soon.

## Nominations being received for Bishop, Executive Council, Court of Adjudication

Nominations are now being received for positions to be elected at the 2015 NALC Convocation. The Convocation will elect the bishop, three members of the NALC Executive Council (two lay people and one pastor) and two members of the Court of Adjudication.

Under the NALC Constitution, congregations are empowered to submit nominations for all positions to be elected at Convocation. The nominees for Bishop will be all those pastors nominated by a congregation or a Convocation delegate and willing to serve. The Nominating Committee will select and propose a slate of nominees for the Executive Council and Court of Adjudication and will also consider nominations from individual members of the NALC for those positions.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position are available on the NALC website.

Please submit nominations by May 1. This will enable the committee to meet the constitutional deadline to make biographical information available to NALC members. To submit a nomination, please complete the Nomination Form available on the NALC website (under the 2015 Convocation tab) and return it to the Nominating Committee.

Nominees will be asked to complete the Nominee Biographical Form, which then will be made available online.

Questions may be addressed to the Nominating Committee at [nominations@thenalc.org](mailto:nominations@thenalc.org).



# ‘Martyrdom and the Suffering of the Righteous’ is theme of lectures

“Martyrdom and the Sufferings of the Righteous” is the theme for the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology Aug. 11-12 at the Hyatt Regency in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. The annual theological conference is held prior to the NALC Convocation.

Speakers for the conference include:

+ Dr. Michael DeJonge, Associate Professor in Religious Studies at the University of Southern Florida. His primary teaching area is the history of Christian thought, especially from the Reformation forward. He earned his Ph.D. in Religion from Emory University. His current research focuses on the 20th-century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He is the author of *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* and co-editor of *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (co-edited with Clifford Green; Fortress, 2013)



*Michael DeJonge*

+ Lensa Gudina, Managing Director of the Gudina Tumsa Foundation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She is the daughter of the late Rev. Gudina Tumsa. Tumsa was a theologian and General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. He was abducted and killed by communist Derg soldiers in 1979. Between 1975 and 1987, the Derg executed and imprisoned tens of thousands of its opponents without trial. Pastor Tumsa has been called the “Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Africa.”



*Lensa Gudina*



*Paul Hinlicky*

+ Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky is Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College. He has published more than seventy articles and many books. He holds a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary. He taught theology for six years at Jan Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He is the former editor of *Lutheran Forum* and *Pro Ecclesia* theological journals.



*Judy Stack-Nelson*



*Hans Wiersma*

+ Dr. Judy Stack-Nelson holds a Ph.D. in New Testament from Princeton Theological Seminary and has taught at a number of colleges in Minnesota including St. Olaf College and Augsburg College and has also taught online courses

for those preparing for ministry through St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and Fuller Seminary.

+ Dr. Hans Wiersma is associate professor of religion at Augsburg College. He is a graduate of the University of California and has M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from Luther Seminary.

One additional speaker has yet to be confirmed.

Watch the NALC website for more information on the theological conference and Convocation. Online registration will be available soon.

# Tell Your Discipleship Story!

Although the 2015 “Lutheran Week” events (Benne-Braaten Theological Conference, Mission Intensive and NALC Convocation) may be far from your thoughts as we are in the midst of the Great and Holy Week, plans are well underway. Registration should be available soon. Agenda and hotel information are already posted on the NALC website, [www.thenalc.org](http://www.thenalc.org). The theme for the convocation is “Martyr: Life-Giving Witness,” based on Acts 26:16-18:

*“But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”*

Based on suggestions after last year’s Lutheran Week in Charleston, S.C., and in light of changes to the structure, goals and leadership of Lutheran CORE, every event of the 2015 week has been reshaped and refocused to make our week together even more inspiring, enlightening and renewing!

Please plan now to have representatives present for the annual theological conference Aug. 11-12, the new Mission Intensive for all pastors and congregations Wednesday afternoon and evening, Aug. 12, which is included as part of the NALC Convocation that continues Thursday-Friday, Aug. 13-14.

This year’s Convocation will include a special dinner Thursday evening where ecumenical and inter-Lutheran guests will be recognized and significant anniversaries will be noted, all within an enjoyable evening in Texas!

A special aspect of this year’s Convocation will be the recognition of Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring’s 50th anniversary of ordination vows and a celebration of his life and service to the Church, marked by renewal of ordination vows during the closing Holy Communion service. He will serve as



## *Ministry Matters*

### **Pastor David Wendel**

Assistant to the Bishop  
for Ministry and Ecumenism

preacher at that service. Bishop Spring will certainly be remembered as a key figure in the renewal and reform of Lutheranism in our day and it is fitting that he be honored as we gather in Convocation!

The reason for this article, however, is to issue an invitation to all pastors and congregations to submit a three-minute “Discipleship Moment” video that might be shared at the Convocation!

Some of the highlights of last year’s Convocation were the several times when folks shared about how they and their congregations were being renewed by growing discipleship-making cultures in their churches — taking seriously our Lord’s commission to “Go therefore and make disciples.” It was clear after last year’s Convocation that we need to hear more and more stories from our own NALC folks about the impact this is having in our life together.

This year, rather than choosing several pastors or laypersons to share their experiences with discipleship and disciple-making, we are inviting anyone and everyone who has a story to share to create a video. Several of the most impactful videos will be shared during the Convocation, while others will be posted online. This will allow for a greater sharing of discipleship stories, while also assuring that each “Discipleship Moment” is no longer than three minutes, helping to keep us on target with the agenda!

Contact person on the NALC staff for our “Discipleship Moments” videos is Jenny Brockman, [jbrockman@thenalc.org](mailto:jbrockman@thenalc.org), 614-777-5709. She can answer specific questions and provide assistance.

***Continued on Page 9***



# Amy Schifrin in California

On March 13, the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary, preached a message focusing on the Lord's Prayer to the student body of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Calif., at their Friday chapel service.

Taking up its petitions one by one, Dr. Schifrin showed how this simple prayer encompasses the hope, joy, and promise of Christian faith.

Afterward, accompanied by her son, Hans Tolpingrud, a second-year student at the seminary, Dr. Schifrin shared the vision and strengths of the NALS with several faculty, staff, and students at a lunch hosted by Ben Patterson, Westmont's campus pastor.

Dr. Schifrin and Hans spent the weekend in Santa Barbara, spending time with parishioners of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation



*The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary, leading worship at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Calif.*

that meets on the Westmont campus and is composed mainly of college students.

On Sunday, March 15, she presided and preached at Prince of Peace, and later that evening she and Hans participated in a Vespers service with members of the church.

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## ***Continued from Page 8***

Here are several things to keep in mind:

- + Save the video file as a .mp4 file.
- + Make sure there are 10 seconds of blank space at the beginning and ending of the video.
- + Some editing and formatting may be done once we receive the video.
- + Please make sure you have permission from those videoed to share their face publicly.
- + As much as possible, use targeted microphones rather than microphones on iPads, etc.
- + Avoid as much "background noise" as possible.

Please submit videos no later than May 31 to Jenny Brockman. Help us tell the story of the Great Commission in our congregations and lives!

## **Conference in Minnesota**

The Lake Superior Fellowship Group of LCMC-NALC will sponsor a seminar on conflict management on Saturday, April 18, at New Life Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minn. Organizers hope to help church leaders build and maintain a healthy church culture. Attendees will learn practical skills that help people learn to disagree without being disagreeable.

For more information contact Pastor Paul Mattson at pauljm@immanuelcrosby.org or 218-546-6010.



# NALC welcomes pastors in Puerto Rico

Last December, Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Eddy Perez, NALC Dean for the Caribbean and Hispanic Ministries, visited *Iglesia Luterana Resurreccion* and its school, in Carolina, Puerto Rico.

Their agenda included interviewing two pastors who were applying for certification in the North American Lutheran Church, as well as meeting Pedro Melendez, who is starting the NALC candidacy process.

As they spent time with Pastor Alfredo Casta and the leaders of



*Pastor Rafael Velez and Pastor Jose Israel Sanchez are formally received as NALC pastors during worship at Iglesia Luterana Resurreccion in Carolina, Puerto Rico.*



*Iglesia Luterana Resurreccion in Carolina, Puerto Rico*



*Resurreccion*, they visited Bayamon, where a new NALC mission church will be started by the congregation.

On Sunday, Dec. 21, Bishop Bradosky preached and celebrated Holy Communion at *Resurreccion*. A highlight of the service was the reception of Pastor Rafael Velez and Pastor Jose Israel Sanchez as NALC pastors. Pastors and leaders of the churches in the area attended the service.

*Iglesia Luterana Resurreccion* is well known in Puerto Rico for its commitment and faithfulness to the Word of God.

# NALC Mission Festival is Nov. 5-7

*"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 28:19-20

The NALC's 2015 Mission Festival brings together Mission-Driven leaders for inspirational and motivating speakers, nuts and bolts practical training for discipleship and mission, and breakout sessions led by experts in their fields — grounded in Bible study, worship and prayer.

"Mission Possible" will be held Nov. 5-7 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio, with the main theme focusing on the relationship between discipleship and mission.

The NALC's annual Mission Festival is a training resource for Mission Districts and congregations. This event is designed and planned to maximize the training of our missional leaders.

For additional information, including the theme, schedule, and discounted hotel information,



please visit the website: [www.thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015](http://www.thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015).

Early-bird registration opens June 1 at \$75 per person. Regular registration begins Sept. 1 at \$100 per person.

For questions or more information, please contact Jenny at: [jbrockman@thenalc.org](mailto:jbrockman@thenalc.org) or 614-777-5709.

In 2016, the Mission Festival will move to the week that the NALC Convocation and theological conference are held.

## Discipleship Moments - A new discipleship resource

"Discipleship Moment" videos from Bishop John Bradosky and other executive staff members will be published regularly to the NALC's website.

These short videos can be used before worship on Sunday mornings, as an introduction to Sunday school or Bible study times, or for personal use.

Reflections on what the word *discipleship* really means, the vision for the NALC, and what it means to be "Mission-Driven" are just a few of the many topics you will hear about. Personal stories from local congregations, international missions and personal ministry experiences will also be featured.

Visit the NALC's website to access these resources: [www.thenalc.org/discipleship-moment](http://www.thenalc.org/discipleship-moment).

As the NALC strives to be Christ Centered, Mission Driven, Traditionally Grounded and Congregationally Focused, we hope and pray these resources will be excellent and helpful tools.

### Bishop to host tour

NALC Bishop John Bradosky will host a trip to the Biblical and classical sites of Greece and Turkey Oct. 21-31. The 11-day tour will follow the journeys of St. Paul and includes a three-day cruise. There is an optional extension to Rome.

Contact Pam Charas at [mcharas@earthlink.net](mailto:mcharas@earthlink.net) or 937-434-0993 for a flyer and registration form.



# NALC receives grant from the Thrivent Financial Foundation

*Funding recognizes 500th anniversary of the Reformation*

The North American Lutheran Church was recently awarded a \$22,500 grant from the Thrivent Financial Foundation. The grant, part of the foundation's Reformation Anniversary Grant Program, will be used to support an NALC initiative to recognize the home as the first school of faith and to celebrate the contributions of Martin and Katie Luther in understanding family as a Christian vocation.



*Martin and Katie Luther with their family (painting by Gustav Spangenberg 1828-1891).*

"As we near the historic 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we are delighted to assist the NALC with this initiative," said Laurie Wilkinson, director of Church Relations for Thrivent Financial. "We are committed to helping create strong, healthy communities where our members live, work and worship."

"*Holy Families!*" is the working title of the initiative which will unfold during late 2015 through 2017, the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

"Martin Luther's life as a spouse, father and faithful leader of the Church provide us with a legacy worth sharing during this Reformation Anniversary," The Rev. John Bradosky, NALC Bishop, said in acknowledging the Thrivent Foundation's grant. "The understanding of these roles as vocations — ways we serve Christ and His Church, ways we bless and encourage others in our community — deserve our best effort in providing the Holy Families

initiative. Thrivent's support is deeply appreciated by the entire North American Lutheran Church."

The Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch, a retired pastor from Nebraska, is leading the initiative's development. She noted that initial plans include a website, interactive resources and networking, print resources and an educational travel opportunity coinciding with Reformation Year celebrations in Germany. Pastor Braasch can be reached at [cbraasch@thenalc.org](mailto:cbraasch@thenalc.org) — please include the words *Holy Families! Initiative* in the subject line.

Watch for further details about this initiative during the annual NALC Convocation, Aug. 12-14 in Dallas, and after that on the [NALCNetwork.com](http://NALCNetwork.com).

The Thrivent Foundation's Reformation Anniversary Grant Program supports missional outreach and

***Continued on Page 13***

service programs as well as activities that recognize and celebrate the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Between now and year-end 2017, some \$2.25 million will be provided to eight separate national Lutheran churches bodies through the grant program.

The Reformation is deemed by many historians to have begun on Oct. 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses (topics intended for scholarly debate) to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This action eventually led to the formation of the Protestant churches.

Thrivent is a fraternal benefit society founded in 1902 as a mutual aid organization by and for Lutherans. In 2013, Thrivent members voted to extend the organization's common bond (membership) to other Christians as well, helping them to be wise with money and to live generously.

The Thrivent Financial Foundation is a private foundation funded by Thrivent Financial. As a 501(c)(3) organization with its own board of trustees, the foundation is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, religious, scientific, literary and educational purposes and makes grants and gifts to 501(c)(3) exempt organizations. The foundation does not provide grants to individuals. To learn more about the foundation and its grant programs, visit: [www.thriventfoundation.com](http://www.thriventfoundation.com).

Thrivent Financial is a financial services organization that helps Christians be wise with money and live generously. As a membership organization, it offers member-owners a broad range of products, services and guidance from financial representatives nationwide. For more than a century it has helped members make wise money choices that reflect their values while providing them opportunities to demonstrate their generosity where they live, work and worship. For more information, visit [www.thrivent.com](http://www.thrivent.com).

## **Thrivent Action Teams help people work together to make a difference**

A new program from Thrivent Financial will provide resources for Thrivent members to work together with others to make a difference in the lives of others.

Thrivent Action Teams are an opportunity for Thrivent members to receive \$250 in seed money to involve others in working together on a common project. The seed money is to be used to purchase project supplies or promotional materials to make the project a success.

The projects can be educational, fund-raising, or work projects. The Thrivent website suggests a wide variety of possibilities including educational projects like an identity-theft or college planning workshops and work projects like community gardening, quilting, or organizing a food drive.

Thrivent Action Teams were introduced in a limited area over the last two years. The new program is now available throughout the United States.

At one NALC congregation in the trial area, a Thrivent member used the \$250 in seed money to purchase the items needed for Lutheran World Relief Personal Care Kits and then involved congregational members in working together to compile the kits. Another used the funds for LWR School Kits.

The congregation had members put together Action Teams for food pantries and women's shelters and to paint the church. One project involved church youth in purchasing Christmas gifts for needy children. A Boy Scout organized an Action Team as a part of his Eagle Scout Project at the church.

Projects must be approved by Thrivent and reported after they are completed. Each Thrivent member is eligible to lead two Thrivent Action Teams per calendar year.

You can learn more about Thrivent Action Teams and apply online at [thrivent.com/actionteam](http://thrivent.com/actionteam).



# Stay Faithful, Be Fruitful

**By Pastor Gemechis Buba**

*Assistant to the Bishop for Missions*

It is my joy and privilege to bring greetings to you, our NALC family and friends, from your brothers and sisters in India through Christ Jesus our Lord!

A delegation from the NALC traveled to various parts of India for 10 days to officially inaugurate the NALC's partnership with UEM-India Transformed in February. We were blessed to be able to visit several schools, the *Talitha Cumi* women's ministry, and UEM offices.

The focal point of this trip was the training conference "Stay Faithful, Be Fruitful." Nearly 200 evangelists, pastors, and other ministry workers gathered together for worship, teaching, and Bible study. This primarily featured the teaching of Bishop John Bradosky, Pastor Gemechis Buba, and Pastor Daryl Olson.

There is story after story of the incredible and mighty deeds that God is doing among his children. In a place filled with darkness and persecution, there is a bright light that is shining as these children of God risk their lives each and every day to proclaim the Gospel.

The other main purpose of this journey was to visit our NALC Global Workers that are sent by World Mission Prayer League (WMPL). We pray that you will understand that their safety is of the utmost



***Bishop John Bradosky preaching in India. Translator is Neeraj Ekka, an NALC Global Worker.***

importance, so there are stories that we cannot share here. But we encourage you to learn more about them by visiting WMPL's website, [wmpl.org](http://wmpl.org).

We believe that a picture is worth a thousand words and wish that these pictures would tell the story of the work being done in India, as well as our time there. As our friends at India Transformed share:

"One-sixth of the world lives in India. Over the last six decades, India has made enormous progress in industrial growth, economic development, science and technology. It is poised to be a superpower in the 21st century ... yet India is falling behind in the human development index. The education scenario is alarmingly dismal at the grassroots level with only



***Bishop Bradosky speaking at UEM-India Transformed School.***

***Continued on Page 15***





*Children participate in welcome presentation at UEM-India Transformed school.*

### ***Continued from Page 14***

30 percent able to read and write. Eleven million street children scavenge for food in the garbage. Many do not go home in the evenings, either from fear of alcoholic fathers or because they have no homes to go to. They survive by petty thievery or get pulled into drug cartels. Countless women are abandoned by their husbands and must turn to begging. Millions of lives are spent fighting to survive."

Please continue to lift up our brothers and sisters in prayer. What these global workers and colleagues at UEM face every day, makes life in Ethiopia seem like a picnic in comparison. God has placed India directly on my heart and has caused a deep love to grow for them.

There are many different ways that you can partner with this work and grow in relationship directly.



*A group photo was taken at visit to Talitha Cumi women's ministry.*

I would invite you to seriously and prayerfully consider joining in this kingdom work by:

1. Visiting [www.indiatransformed.org](http://www.indiatransformed.org) or emailing Gwynne Gonnerman, Executive Director of India Transformed, at [ggonnerman@indiatransformed.org](mailto:ggonnerman@indiatransformed.org) for information on a VBS curriculum that is available for use in congregations, child sponsorship, training and educating pastors by sponsoring a student, partnering in partner in women's ministry, or for information about Pastor John Peters' visit to the United States.
2. Visiting [www.wmpl.org](http://www.wmpl.org) to learn how you can sponsor education and global workers in northern India.



*Pastor Gemechis Buba speaking at the "Stay Faithful, Be Fruitful" conference.*

3. Contacting Pastor Mike Malinsky ([mmalinsky73@gmail.com](mailto:mmalinsky73@gmail.com)) who is leading the next trip to India in conjunction with the NALC Oct. 4-14, 2015. This visit will feature a combination of sports camps, eyeglass clinics, medical exams for the students and fun time with the children's home kids, as well as working with UEM leadership.

# Lutheran CORE sharpens its focus

*Reorganization to provide 'shelter' and 'voice' for those in ELCA, ELCIC*

**By Pastor Steve Shipman**

Some day, a scholar will write a Ph.D. thesis on the intertwined history of Lutheran renewal movements in our time. Confessing Lutherans have discovered one another, formed alliances, and sometimes separated amicably to pursue more focused missions.

After the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, many people decided they could no longer in good conscience remain in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Lutheran CORE devoted time, energy, and resources to help these people form the North American Lutheran Church, and the NALC shared administrative staff and office space with Lutheran CORE. Over time, as the NALC has grown, the relative status of the two groups has been reversed.

The leadership of both organizations realizes that the time has come for Lutheran CORE to establish its own administrative office so that both organizations can focus more clearly on their specific missions. Also, as has been announced at the last several Lutheran CORE Convocations, the financial resources are no longer present for Lutheran CORE to engage in some of the ministries it helped to initiate.

The original document adopted in 2010, *A Vision and Plan for the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE, a community of confessing Lutherans*, envisioned this time. It said that "the guiding principles for staffing and structure will be to remain as lean as possible, allowing form to follow function." And it concluded, "The guidelines are provisional. ... The governing principles are intended to remain constant."

Lutheran CORE continues to stand for the truths expressed in the *Common Confession*, and holds to the shared values of Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded, and Congregationally-Focused.

As the *Vision and Plan* states in its introduction, "Lutheran CORE affirms the faithful call of



confessing Lutherans, some of whom will remain in the ELCA and ELCIC (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada) and some of whom are now called to different affiliations. We envision a reconfiguration that maintains the highest degree of ongoing unity and cooperation possible among those who leave and those who stay."

The key words for our mission as Lutheran CORE going forward are "shelter" and "voice." We intend to be a place where confessing Lutherans can find shelter, and we will speak out on behalf of those who hold to the faith in the *Common Confession*. Obviously those needing shelter and voice at this point are largely in the ELCA or ELCIC, but the prayers, financial support, and witness of sisters and brothers in NALC and LCMC are critically needed.

Lutheran CORE has established an office in Wausau, Wis. The staff of the New Brighton, Minn., office is working diligently to complete the transition process, along with Lutheran CORE treasurer Mike Bennett and our new volunteer bookkeeper, James Speckhard. Many records need to be separated and transferred so both organizations can move forward.

Because of financial constraints, it will no longer be realistically possible for Lutheran CORE to be a co-sponsor of the Braaten-Benne Lectures, nor will it be able at this point to hold an annual convocation.

The hope and plan had been, as announced at last year's convocation, to bring constitutional amendments to a convocation this year in Dallas that would change the structure of Lutheran CORE.

***Continued on Page 17***



As the Steering Committee realized the need to move more quickly, it called upon a clause in the corporate bylaws (which are superior to the Constitution) allowing it to replace the Constitution. Pastor Steve Shipman moved up his retirement date to give the new board the flexibility it needed. For the immediate future, the board will take over most of the duties that had been done by the director and the New Brighton office staff.

The new Lutheran CORE will have four officers (President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer) and three at-large members of its Board. Those who had been members of Lutheran CORE will now be called supporting members, and the voting membership will be the Board, as is the case with nearly all non-profit ministries such as Lutheran CORE and is considered a “best practice” of groups like Lutheran CORE.

Pastor Dennis Nelson of Arizona was chosen as president, Pastor Steven Gjerde of Wisconsin as vice-president, and Pastor Cathy Ammlung of Maryland will continue as secretary. Mr. Mike Bennett of Illinois will serve as treasurer during the

transition, to be replaced by Mr. Rob Kittel of Wisconsin. At-large members are Ms. Lynn Kickingbird of Oklahoma, Pastor Cori Johnson of Michigan, and Pastor Keith Forni of Illinois. Mr. James Speckhard will handle bookkeeping tasks.

The address for the new office is: Lutheran CORE, P.O. Box 1741, Wausau, WI 54402-1741. Mail addressed to New Brighton will, of course, be forwarded. The new phone number is 888-810-4180. The website and social media presence will remain the same.

Lutheran CORE looks forward to continuing to work with the North American Lutheran Church in advocating for our shared vision. We cherish our history and our partnership, and we believe that faithful, confessing Lutherans across denominational lines need one another. We need your continuing partnership as we seek to provide shelter and voice to confessing Lutherans facing challenging church and societal cultures.

***Pastor W. Stevens Shipman recently retired. He served nearly 40 years in parish ministry. He was secretary of Lutheran CORE from 2005 until 2012 when he became its director.***

## Martin Luther Reading Challenge

Christians around the world will observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Oct. 31, 1517 — the date that Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany — is often considered the beginning of the Reformation.

The Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, has launched the Luther Reading Challenge — a free online community where people can sign up to read and discuss Luther’s writings for free from now until October 2017. The website will feature various writings from Luther — starting with the 95 Theses and including his pastoral and spiritual writings, his Biblical commentaries, his Catechisms, his will, and his hymns.

“While it is impossible to avoid polemical or controversial elements, our focus is on Luther as a teacher and preacher of the Christian faith. Too often theology is taught with reference to enemies;

our hope is to present here a Luther for the whole church,” organizers explained.

To participate in the Luther Reading Challenge, simply visit the site: [lutherreadingchallenge.org](http://lutherreadingchallenge.org) and sign up for a free account. Each text begins with a brief introduction, explaining the context and the key points. Readers can add their comments and questions on the side of the page.

Since 2009, the Institute has offered a two-week “Studying Luther in Wittenberg” program every November. “It has been an eye-opening and inspiring experience to see how the writings of a 16th-century reformer can still speak so powerfully to people half a millennium later — and not just in the old territory of Christendom but all around the world. More than once we have asked ourselves how to carry this amazing experience of careful reading of Luther’s theology in a global setting to a bigger audience,” organizers explained.

# What's non-negotiable in our presentation of the Gospel?

I turned 63 this last October. And as a Boomer I am part of a once youth-obsessed generation that is now struggling with aging and mortality.

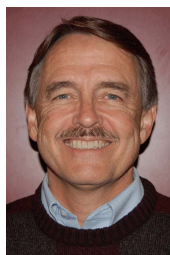
There are many challenges often associated with the aging process: reduced energy, health complications, and the demoralizing experience of watching yourself age as you look in the mirror each morning.

However, I'd like to think that age also grants us some wisdom; that the additional years have provided us with some insights and maturity that we lacked when we were young and relatively naive. I'd like to share some "wisdom" that is more personal, and then some reflections regarding Christian ministry.

On a personal note, I now realize how uncomplicated and blessed my life was until August of 2012. Up until then, I was basking in the joy that came from a great marriage, three adult sons I love dearly, the birth of my first grandchild, and my vocational life as a pastor.

But while family and ministry continue to be blessings, my life now has a cloud overshadowing it all: My granddaughter Mya's 2012 diagnosis of brain cancer. Mya is currently four years old and cancer-free. However, she has been through extensive chemotherapy and radiation treatments that only ended last March after her cancer had returned the previous October. So her parents and the rest of the extended family now live with the underlying, lingering fear that the every-three-month MRI will one day reveal that she has to face cancer for the third time.

So this is one very challenging aspect of aging: the odds increase that we are dealing with a life-threatening health crisis — whether our own or that of a loved one. There have been some blessings in this journey with Mya, including poignant moments with her where I can't imagine any grandparent loving a grandchild more than I love her. And the



## *In Pursuit of the Great Commission*

**Pastor Don Brandt**

intensity of that love, I know, is due in part to the vulnerability of her life and health. Absolutely no chance I could ever take Mya for granted.

Another blessing has been the incredible love and support I have received from my brothers and sisters in Christ. I have never before been on the receiving end of so much Christian compassion and love. And that support has been overwhelming in the best possible sense of that word. I have personally experienced the love, compassion and empathy that the Body of Christ at its best can offer.

But now (finally!) to any wisdom or insight I think I've gained when it comes to Christian ministry, now that I've reached the "ripe old age" of 63. It's one very specific observation I have regarding an increasing trend among some mainline denominations. My concern is over the growing prevalence of *universalism* among some pastors, denominational leaders, and seminary professors. This universalistic worldview might not be all that new, but it's definitely increasing.

My first concern, of course, is that universalism is a violation of both Biblical and historical Christian teaching. To discard the principle that eternal salvation is in and through Jesus Christ strikes me as a blatant heresy. (There, I've said it.)

And my second concern is how universalism renders the very concept of Christian evangelism

***Continued on Page 19***



# Non-negotiable

*Continued from Page 18*

“null and void.” That’s right: the very foundation of the ministry of the early Christian church becomes something that is no longer a part of our life and faith.

I fully understand how tempting a universalist theology can be. Our secular culture sees even the most tactful evangelism as spiritual abuse at its worst, or an expression of intolerance at best. And granted, Lutherans have traditionally been reluctant, perhaps even impaired, as evangelists. Our cultural, ethnic and theological backgrounds have rarely lent themselves to an emphasis on evangelism. Yet as awkward, or ill-equipped, or ineffective as we might be as evangelists, we need to identify universalism as a theological viewpoint in clear contradiction to Biblical teaching.

In a recent sermon I raised this concern. And I shared two distinctions on the topic. First, I emphasized that while we have no right to judge individuals in regards to the question of their eternal salvation, we nevertheless have the responsibility to witness to our faith. God alone can and should pass judgment. But like it or not, we *are* His witnesses when it comes to faithfully sharing the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The other point in my message was to make a distinction between what some individual members might personally believe on this topic and what their pastors need to preach. I shared my assumption that some members were probably “closet universalists.” I reassured them that this viewpoint didn’t mean they were no longer, in my view, Christians. We’re saved by grace, not our personal doctrinal and theological views. I also acknowledged that not everyone is gifted and/or motivated to verbally witness to non-Christians. And as a community of faith we need to witness not only in words, but through acts of compassion. But I tried to explain that, when it comes to the preaching of their pastors, this matter is non-negotiable.

Here’s the crux of the issue. At what point does accommodation to the changing views of our culture render our witness as something in clear violation of both historic and Biblical Christianity? When does the description of our church as “Christian” become an example of misrepresentation? In my view universalism qualifies as a clear violation of Biblical, orthodox Christian tradition and teaching. Our discomfort with or incompetence in evangelism is not an appropriate excuse for abandoning the Great Commission.

***Pastor Don Brandt serves Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore. You may contact him at [donb@oursaviorssalem.org](mailto:donb@oursaviorssalem.org).***

## Canadian youth gathering is May 15-18

The NALC Canadian Mission District will be hosting a Lutheran Youth Together Event (LYTE) Gathering May 15-18 at Goldeye Centre near Nordegg, Alberta. The Goldeye Centre provides many opportunities for outdoor activities.

This event is for youth who are in Grade 7-12. Young adults are also encouraged to attend as Leaders in Training and Example.

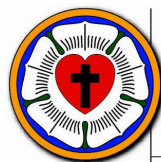
The theme of the event will be “Deeper” as participants will ponder deeply what it means to have our identity in Christ through our Baptism. NALC Bishop John Bradosky will be the keynote speaker.

Tangled Blue will lead worship. Aimee and Joel Pakan, the members of the group, are gifted worship leaders.

The mission component of the event is based on our theme on Baptism and water. Kevin Herr of Water Missions International will share their life-changing ministry of providing safe drinking water.

The cost of the four-day gathering is \$340 (until Feb. 15), which includes all meals, accommodations and programming.

For more information contact Shelly Ree at [luthyouth@xplornet.com](mailto:luthyouth@xplornet.com) or 780-674-2788.



# NALC

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