

Convocation reflects on martyrdom

The 2015 NALC Convocation focused on the reality of Christians suffering for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. Those at the Convocation heard stories that were both heartbreaking and inspiring about Christians being killed today because of their faith in Christ.

The Convocation heard keynote addresses from Pastor Bassam Abdallah, Robert Spencer and Margaret Khamoo. They highlighted the struggles Christians are facing at the hands of Muslims and explained the nature of the Islamic faith and why it is a threat to Christians.

About 600 people attended the Convocation held Aug. 12-14 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

Given the threat that Islamic radicals pose to Christians in many parts of the world, NALC leaders thought that learning more about that threat would add to the NALC's focus on Christian martyrdom.

Robert Spencer, an expert in understanding Islamic jihad, delivered a keynote address for the NALC Convocation, explaining the Islamic view of Christians by using texts from the Koran.

Spencer is the director of Jihad Watch (online at www.jihadwatch.org), a program of the David Horowitz Freedom Center. He is the author of 14 books, including two *New York Times* bestsellers, *The Truth About Muhammad* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*.



Robert Spencer helped those at the 2015 NALC Convocation to understand the nature of Islam and why some Muslims feel called to persecute Christians.

"We see practically every day horrific news stories about the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Islamic world. And I thought that today it would be useful, in order to help you to understand why this is all happening, to take you through the Islamic view of Christians and Christianity as per the Islamic holy book, the Koran," he said.

Spencer noted that there are "some very serious theological disagreements between Islam and ...

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About 600 people attended the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14.

centuries, the people who are doing that believe they are carrying out a divine responsibility — something that will bring them blessings from God,” Spencer said.

“You may recall that Jesus Himself said, in the Gospel of John, ‘The time will come when men will kill you and think they are offering service to God’ (John 16:2). That time is upon us now,” Spencer said. “That is happening every day in Iraq, in Syria and elsewhere.”

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Christianity.” However, he explained that for Muslim believers much more than religious differences is involved.

“When you have theological disagreements then they take on a very different character when combined with the Islamic view that the Muslims are the executors of the will of Allah. And this is a very important point,” he said.

“In the Scriptures we hear, ‘Vengeance is mine,’ says the Lord, ‘I will repay.’ And Christians are not to take revenge, not to avenge themselves in any way, according to the Scriptures. In the Koran, you have exactly the opposite teaching. As a matter of fact, you have the explicit obligation given to Muslims to be the executors of God’s wrath on earth.”

Spencer explained that Muslims believe that unbelievers will be punished in this world as well in the world to come. “And how will God punish the unbelievers in this world? By means of the Muslims.”

“So this creates, you see, an obligation for a pious and knowledgeable Muslim ... a feeling that he has a responsibility before God to fight against those who have rejected the faith,” he said.

“So when we see this persecution in the Middle East, when we see the Islamic State, or ISIS as it’s popularly known, waging war against the Christians, driving them out of lands that they have lived in for

There have been times when Christians have lived under Islamic rule in relative peace. Islamic law permits Christians to live in an Islamic society if they agree to pay a tax, called the “*jizya*,” and to live as second-class citizens in “submission” to Muslims. “All of this is designed to remind the Christians that they have rebelled against the true God and that they have strayed from the right path and that they are suffering in this world as well as the next because of their rejection of Muhammad and the Koran and Islam. But once you’re in those boundaries — once you have accepted the subjugated status, this second class status, and you know your life hangs on the whims of the overlords and you accept the denial of basic rights that the *dhimma* entails — then you can live.”

Spencer also said that the Koran teaches Muslims to look at the ruins of other civilizations to see how those civilizations fell because they did not believe in Allah. “There’s another divine responsibility that the Muslims have: to create ruins — to destroy — because that in itself shows the power of Allah,” he said.

“The Islamic State has very often said that it’s coming down to the end. It considers that it is preparing for the twilight battle, the last struggle between good and evil. And they see themselves as the good. ... They see all this in those terms. And I believe that they have a point in that. And we need to see that in those terms as well.”

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“This is a challenge to the Church and to Christians — each individual Christian — such as has never been seen before or at least has not been seen since the very early Roman persecutions. We are called upon now to understand exactly what’s at stake and to know that the stakes are indeed very high. This group and groups like it are going to keep coming no matter what, and they’re going to keep advancing because they have an imperative to rule the world, by their own statements. They’re going to keep advancing until they’re stopped.”

He said stopping radical Islam will be a military struggle, but “it’s also a spiritual battle. A spiritual battle requires spiritual weapons. It requires not only prayer and fasting ... but also something that I think is very much lacking in the West today and that we have a responsibility to try to restore and that is: an understanding of and appreciation for what Judeo-Christian Western civilization has brought to the world.”

Spencer said that Western societies need to teach the Christian origins of the basic values of our societies including the freedom of speech, the equality and dignity of all people, and the equal rights of people before the law.

“It does matter what you believe. It does matter the content of the assumptions that you bring to the world. And the beliefs that come from the Koran are beliefs that lead to hatred and violence and oppression. Does this mean that every Muslim — every believer in the Koran — is hateful and violent and oppressive? Of course not. ... If the Koran teaches something, it doesn’t necessarily mean that any individual Muslim has any knowledge of it or interest in it. But that doesn’t mean it’s not there.”

Spencer said we need to understand that Islamic violence against Christians around the world “is something that is based very deeply ... on Koranic imperatives. And, as such, it’s not going to go away as long as there are believers in the Koran.”

“What can change it, of course, is the power of the truth insofar as we ourselves have the courage to stand upon that truth without the slightest compromise and without the slightest demur and without the slightest hesitation in the face of what

MARTYR

LIFE-GIVING WITNESS

ACTS 26:16-18

are certain to be, in the coming days and months and years, increasingly virulent and even violent challenges.

“The good news is that we know how it ends up. We know that we will win. We know that life always triumphs over death. We know that life will never be entirely extinguished,” Spencer said. “There are hard times ahead. And, of course, we have abundant warnings about that and abundant advice about how to deal with it in the Christian Scriptures. That ultimately is where we can find the answers to this tremendous challenge. And it is indeed a tremendous challenge. We have the best of all fighters on our side in the Lord. But we have to be willing to stand for Him no matter what, as He stands for us,” Spencer concluded.

Bassam Abdallah

The Rev. Dr. Bassam Abdallah, pastor of First United Lutheran Church in Hammond, Ind., led a Bible study for the Convocation and offered reflections based on Acts 26. He pointed to the words of Jesus to Paul (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.”

“The past few years, the Church and all the faith-filled Christians have been standing up — firm in Jesus Christ. They did not and they will not yield to the evil forces of the world,” he said.

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He noted the 21 Christians slaughtered in Libya in February. “Do you know what they were saying as they were beheaded by the evil men who were beheading them?” he asked. “My Lord Jesus’ were their final words.”

“From 1915 until the year 2015 — a hundred year period — there were more martyrs crowned than in the preceding 1,900 years of church history. Over 3 million Christians have been slaughtered — have been martyred over the past 100 years because they say, ‘Lord Jesus.’”

“Stand up, Christians, and tell the story of your sisters and brothers suffering for their faith. Do not be intimidated by the devil and his forces in the world. ... If we do not speak up on their behalf, please tell me who could and who should?”

“The wounds of the Church are as deep as history has ever seen. Jesus has become a threat to many. ... The number one enemy of ISIS is Jesus Christ.”

Pastor Abdallah told the often untold part of the story of the 21 Christians beheaded by ISIS in Libya. Only 20 of those killed were Coptic Christians. The 21st man was a Muslim from Chad. When he saw the immense faith of the others, he reportedly said, “Their God is my God,” knowing that he would be killed. The witness of the 20 Christians resulted in that man’s conversion to Christianity. “Twenty were sacrificed for that one to receive salvation.” Pastor Abdallah said.

Pastor Abdallah, a Palestinian and native of Jerusalem who still bears on his own body the wounds of Muslim hatred for Christians, challenged listeners to share the love that Christ has for Muslim people. He also reported a hopeful statistic that millions of Muslims are converting to Christianity every year.

“We need to reach the heart of God in prayer and supplications, not only on behalf of those who are being tortured from our families, those who are being displaced and killed. But we need to pray for those who are torturing them, displacing them, and killing them. ... We need to lift our voices to heaven, bringing to the altar of God those who cheer the agony of our family of faith. God has sent them, and



Pastor Bassam Abdallah, pastor of First United Lutheran Church of Hammond, Ind., led a Bible study and provided reflections on the suffering of Christians and the call for Christians to have the love of Christ for those who persecute us.

God is sending us to the evils of the world that by the power of the Holy Spirit they will turn from darkness to light and have their sins forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ,” he said.

“We continue to have a problem on our hands. The Church is wounded, but the Church will never die. Christians are hurting, but Christians will never surrender to the forces of the devil in the world.

“And even though sheiks and imams throughout the Muslim world continue to preach hatred, we preach the love of Jesus Christ to all people. And even though Islamic television and radio stations indoctrinate people, teaching them violence taken right from the Koran and from the Hadith, the speeches of the prophet, we continue to preach forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ. And even though thousands of sermons are preached every Friday against Christians and Christianity, against the infidels and the United States, we preach that we are all God’s children for whom Jesus died and

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was resurrected. And even though the Islamic schools continue to produce generations of teachers and students who believe in jihad, fighting, killing, and suicide bombing and torturing and slaughtering infidels, we follow the command of our Lord and search for His lost sheep and, when we find them, we bring them home, we feed them, we embrace them, and we accompany them,” said Pastor Abdallah.

“I know first hand the pain of being Christian in an intolerant and evil world. I know good and well what the plans of Satan in many parts of the world are. I have heard and I continue to hear the cries of my Christian family in many parts of the world. We cannot and we should not give up on the power of the Lord to (change) these men and women. We have to bring them to the foot of the cross of Jesus with penitent hearts and contrite minds believing that Jesus is their Lord also and the blood of the saints are eternally joyful in the presence of God.”

Margaret Khamoo

Margaret Khamoo of Chicago delivered a keynote address about the persecution of Assyrian Christians. She told heartbreaking stories of Assyrian Christians in Iraq.

Khamoo is a first-generation American whose parents were born in Baghdad, Iraq. She is president of the Chicago Chapter of the Assyrian Aid Society of America, which was formed in 1991 after the first Iraq war to aid the internally displaced Christians in Iraq. She is also involved in the Assyrian American National Federation — formed in 1933 following an Assyrian genocide that took place in Iraq — that fights for Assyrian rights and protection in Iraq and the Iraqi Christian Relief Council — established in 2007 in response to church bombings in Baghdad to educate Christians about the plight of Christians in the Middle East.

Assyrians have a history of over 6,000 years. They are natives of ancient Mesopotamia. Their language is based on ancient Aramaic. They were among the first people to accept Christ. They have publicly worshiped Christ in that area in spite of persecution by Muslims for nearly 2,000 years — until they were forced underground in 2014.



Margaret Khamoo told heartbreaking stories of the persecution of Assyrian Christians in Iraq.

“Assyrians are driven by their faith. ... All they have is their church,” she said. “But the church is within. They can destroy our churches. They can destroy our homes. They can take down our crosses. But these people and their faith have not wavered. They remain strong in their faith,” she said.

“And their faith is in the West as well. We’re Christian. We have brothers and sisters all over the world ... and their hope is in all of us — that we will come to their rescue, that we will lobby for them to stay alive,” Khamoo said.

“Iraqi Christian persecution hasn’t ended. Everything that happened 100 and 200 years ago is systematically happening all over again,” she said. “It’s an annihilation of Christians.”

There has been major persecution of Assyrian Christians — including genocide — about every 45 years since the rise of Islam.

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“Lots of stories — lots of persecution against Christians — that are happening every day aren’t being broadcast,” she said. “There’s so much more that is happening every day.”

“It’s all about religious cleansing. Our faith is a threat. And for as long as we are there, (Muslims) will not be happy. For as long as our churches are there, they will not be content. Their goal is to wipe you out at all cost,” Khamoo said.

“Assyrians are always on the run. Christians are always on the run. And they’re still on the run. It’s still not stable,” she said.

“ISIS is everywhere. And this is happening under the watchful eyes of the world, right? We all have heard the stories about Syria and Iraq. But where’s the intervention? What are the tools? What can we do?”

What Christians in the West can do to help:

1. Pray.
2. Provide urgent and direct humanitarian aid.
3. Provide international protection for Assyrians and other Christians.
4. Establish local protection units like police.

“What do (Assyrian Christians) want? They want to go home. They’re tired of running. They want peace,” she said. “The slaughter is ongoing. It happened then; it’s happening now. Children died then; and children are dying now.

“All we have is each other. This is a Christian issue. These are our Christian brothers and sisters dying because they are Christians. If we can’t help, I don’t know who can,” Khamoo said.

Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology

“Martyrdom and the Sufferings of the Righteous” was the theme of the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology, the annual theological conference which precedes the Convocation. Six speakers explored the theme from different theological perspectives.

Two of the speakers told stories of recent persecution of Christians.

Raymond Ibrahim, a widely published author, public speaker, and Middle East and Islam specialist, spoke on the “Muslim Persecution of Christians: Past and Present.”

Ibrahim produces a monthly report on the Muslim persecution of Christians which is available on his website: www.raymondibrahim.com. His books include *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam’s New War on Christians* and *The Al Qaeda Reader*.

“More Christians are being persecuted and killed in horrific ways than have ever been,” he said. “It’s mostly happening in the Islamic world, or, more particularly, where Muslims are present.”

“This is not just ISIS. This is happening all over the Islamic world by average Muslims, by Muslim governments, by Muslim regimes, by terrorists, by the Muslim mobs or the Arab street,” Ibrahim said.

“What we’re discussing here is a centuries-old, continent-wide attack on Christianity by Islam. And it’s based on doctrine,” he said.

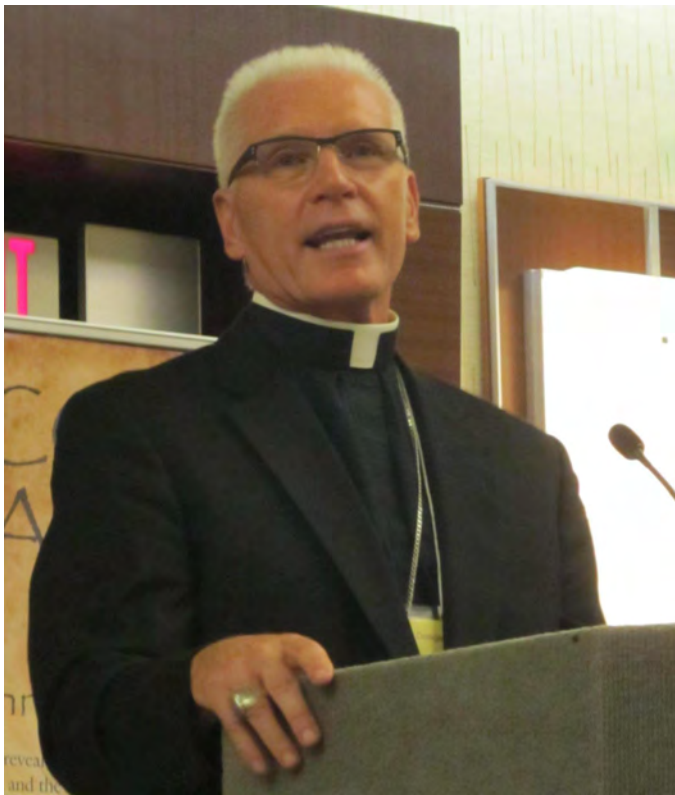
“There is not a moderate Islam and a radical Islam. There are moderate Muslims and radical Muslims. But because there isn’t a moderate Islam, the moderate Muslims really have no theological leg to stand on, but they do exist. ... If you go by the traditional Islamic jurisprudence and how you derive reasoning and rulings and fatwas, the ISIS version actually wins,” he said.

Lensa Gudina, Managing Director of the Gudina Tumsa Foundation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, told the stories of her parents, the Rev. Gudina Tumsa and Tsehay Tolessa. Her father was killed in 1979 and her mother was imprisoned and tortured by the Communist Derg which ruled Ethiopia 1971-1994.

Video Recordings

Video recordings of the speakers and all of the sessions of the 2015 NALC Convocation and the Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology are available online at thenalc.org/2015-event-videos.

Reports and other documents from the 2015 NALC Convocation are available on the NALC website at thenalc.org/2015convocationrecap.



John Bradosky reelected as bishop

Bishop John Bradosky was elected to a second four-year term as Bishop of the North American Lutheran Church by the 2015 NALC Convocation.

Also nominated for Bishop was Pastor James Lehmann of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Flatville (Thomasboro), Ill. Bishop Bradosky received 321 of the 386 votes cast.

Responding to the announcement of his election, Bishop Bradosky said, "I'm so grateful for the honor that you've bestowed on me in the past. And I get the chance to continue to nurture and develop these relationships for the next four years also serving as your bishop. It is my privilege and my hope that I can also be a blessing to you and your congregations as we continue to serve Christ together and to lift up His name, to give expression to the truth and wonder of His Word. Thank you so much for this opportunity. God bless you."

Bishop John Bradosky addresses the 2015 NALC Convocation following the announcement that he had been reelected as bishop.

Three elected to Executive Council

Two lay people and a pastor were elected to serve on the NALC Executive Council, the NALC's board of directors, by the 2015 NALC Convocation.

Rosemary Johnson of Hope Lutheran Church in Ladysmith, Wis., and Pastor Carl Rasmussen of First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Ill., were elected to four-year terms on the Executive Council.

Brian Sutton of St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Statesville, N.C., was elected to a two-year term to fill a vacancy on the Executive Council.

Carolyn Nestingen of Roseville, Minn., and Pastor Marty Ramey of Dallas, N.C., were elected to the Court of Adjudication. The Court decides questions regarding interpretation of the NALC's governing documents and handles disciplinary matters in the church.

Five members of the 2016 Nominating Committee recommended by the Executive Council were confirmed by the Convocation.



Rosemary Johnson



Carl Rasmussen



Brian Sutton



Carolyn Nestingen



Marty Ramey



Ryan Schwarz, NALC treasurer, presents the budgets to the 2015 NALC Convocation.

2016 NALC budgets are approved

The 2015 NALC Convocation approved an operating budget of nearly \$2 million.

Budgets were also approved for two of the NALC's designated funds: \$170,000 for the Great Commission Fund and \$625,860 for the Theological Education Fund (which includes the North American Lutheran Seminary).

It is estimated that 5-8 percent of congregational offerings will be necessary to meet the operating budget. The NALC Constitution asks the Executive Council to report an estimate of the percentage of congregational income required to fund the annual budget.

The NALC encourages congregations to support domestic and international ministries directly in addition to their support for the NALC and its designated funds.

Convocation approves constitutional amendments reflecting change in NALC relationship to Lutheran CORE

The 2015 NALC Convocation approved several amendments to the NALC Constitution. The proposed constitutional amendments are all related to a change in the relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

The proposed amendments now go to NALC congregations for ratification. The amendments will go into effect if a two-thirds majority of the NALC congregations voting by the Feb. 14 deadline approve the amendments.

The amendments remove references to Lutheran CORE in constitutional language about the Commission on Theology and Doctrine. The commission had been a joint commission for the NALC and Lutheran CORE.

The "Vision and Plan" for Lutheran CORE and the NALC, as announced in 2010, was for Lutheran CORE to continue as "an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies" and for a close ongoing relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC. The NALC was to continue as a member of Lutheran CORE.

Lutheran CORE leaders have decided it is now necessary for them to focus on providing "shelter" and "voice" for confessing Lutherans remaining in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. That focus requires an end to the formal relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

The details of the proposed amendments are available online at thenalc.org/2015-convocation.



2015 NALC Convocation



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary, reported on the work of the seminary.



A variety of workshops were offered at the Convocation.



Many ministries were featured in the display area.



This altar banner was handmade for the 2015 Convocation by Judy Knoll of Hope Lutheran Church in Cedar Hill, Texas, based on the theme Scripture. Her pastor reports that she has custom designed paraments, banners, and other works of art and that she would be open to projects for other congregations. You may contact Judy at retiredgrammy927@gmail.com.



Worship Team from All Saints Lutheran Church in Arlington, Texas, led music for the opening worship service.



Steve Bell, a Christian singer-songwriter from Winnipeg, Manitoba, performed and led music throughout the Convocation and performed a special concert on Thursday night.



Bishop Bradosky installed those who were elected to leadership positions in the NALC and Women of the NALC.

Worship





Pastor Dan Selbo of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in San Jose, Calif., served as Chaplain for the Convocation.



Bishop Bradosky presided at the closing service of Holy Communion.

2015 NALC Convocation



Bishop Bradosky led Bishop Spring in a renewal of his ordination vows. Bishop Spring celebrates the 50th anniversary of his ordination this year.



Bishop Paull Spring preached for the closing worship service.



Revive Band from Peace Lutheran Church in Edmond, Okla., led music for the closing service of Holy Communion.

Mission-Driven event opens Convocation

A Mission Intensive event began the 2015 NALC Convocation. Wednesday afternoon and evening, Aug. 12, were spent focusing on what it means for the NALC to be a Mission-Driven church.

In addition to inspiring speakers including Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Gemechis Buba, those in attendance focused on developing road maps for mission for their congregations and Mission Districts.

Pastor Dan Selbo of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, Calif., opened the Convocation by explaining the purpose of the Mission Intensive. Preaching on Mark 1:14-20 — the calling of the first disciples — he said, "It's about finding new ways to tell the same old story. It's about finding new ways to fish for those for whom our Lord Jesus died."

He noted statistics showing the decline of church attendance in North America. "We are surrounded by a mission field that's becoming more of a challenge all the time. And one that's telling us to think and rethink ... what we're about."

Pastor Selbo, who served as chaplain for the Convocation, told a story about a lesson God taught him while he was fishing. "He (God) said, 'There are two ways to fish. The one is relaxing. The other takes work. The one is hit-and-miss. The other is what I've called you to do.' And He said, 'I don't want you relaxing any longer — sitting back and waiting on the shore for the fish to come to you. I want you to change it up and start going out to where you can find them.' And, guess what? He wasn't talking about fish — but about people. He wasn't speaking only to me as a pastor and the congregation I serve, but, I believe, to everyone in this room and all of our churches."

Pastor Selbo said a lot of congregations are still waiting for people to come to them rather than working to reach others.

"It's the job of the pastors to pastor the church. It's our job together to do the fishing. It's the job of the pastors to feed the fish when they come. It's our job to go out together to find the fish and bring them in," he said.



Pastor Dan Selbo of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, Calif., opened the NALC Convocation by calling on the church "to find new ways to fish."

"It's a new day, my friends. It's a new culture, a new world in which we live. We need to find new ways to fish. We might even need to find new bait," Pastor Selbo concluded.

Where are We Going?

Bishop John Bradosky then addressed the question, "Where are we going, and what does it mean to be a 'Mission-Driven Church'?"

The bishop told the story of a time when he was lost while flying an airplane and found it difficult to admit that he was lost.

"People are searching for direction. If Christian faith is a journey, what is the direction? A pastor ought to know these things. God's people ought to know them. But what if we've lost our way?" he asked.

"I bear witness to a larger problem we have and that is our inability or our lack of readiness to admit

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that we may be lost. And the results can be catastrophic,” he said.

The bishop pointed out the difficulties of living in a “membership culture.”

“The problem is membership doesn’t go anywhere. It’s about having arrived — not a journey. And, what’s worse, it’s deadly for our congregations. Spiritual immaturity is often the result because, sensing that they have arrived, members are free to learn as little or as much as they desire; to be as involved or as active as they also desire; to come when it’s convenient; to attend as frequently or infrequently as they find helpful. The local congregation becomes a kind of spiritual pit stop. The individuals often learn how to meet their own needs but not necessarily how to know Jesus.”

“The Church was created by Jesus to direct people to Jesus — to help them become His Disciples, to grow spiritually to a mature faith and to become leaders who can equip others to do the same — that is, to make disciples,” he said.

“Growth is not the goal. It’s the result of faithfulness in doing precisely what Jesus called us to do and equipped his disciples to do.”

“Worship, I believe, propels us in the direction of discipleship. In worship we hear the truth of the Gospel read and proclaimed. We experience His presence in Word and Sacrament. In worship we have the best opportunity to hear Christ’s call, ‘Come and follow me.’ ... The danger is when we begin to believe that the entire mission of the Church is fulfilled for a brief period of time on Sunday morning or Saturday evening,” he said.

Bishop Bradosky said that discipleship has three key elements: 1. Knowing Christ and the Faith that is ours through Him; 2. Living the Faith; and 3. Being in accountable relationships to encourage one another to live out the faith.

“It is Jesus’ plan to make disciples who are capable of making more disciples. The learning curve is simply this: you can only make disciples if you are disciples,” he said.



Bishop John Bradosky focused on what it means for the NALC to be a Mission-Driven church by emphasizing discipleship during his address for the Convocation Mission Intensive.

“In the North American Lutheran Church, let us be clear regarding the path, the map, and the destination. Discipleship begins and ends in Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. The path is the way — Christ. The map is the truth — His holy Word. And the destination is the life that begins now and is eternal. To that end we press on,” Bishop Bradosky said.

Who is Driving?

Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, delivered the keynote address on the theme “Who is Driving?” He lifted up a vision for “mission drivers” as people who are “awakening, equipping, and mobilizing individuals for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.”

He focused on the need for three types of “mission drivers:” individuals, congregations, and Mission

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Districts. The hope is to have Mission Teams in congregations and Mission Districts throughout the NALC.

Pastor Buba highlighted the fundamental characteristics of “mission drivers,” using Luke 24 as a basis. He said “mission drivers” are:

1. Driven by the Word of God.
2. Ready to suffer.
3. Believe in resurrection — the miraculous. “They never give up.”
4. Preach repentance *and* forgiveness. “Just preach the Word of God. The Word will do the job.”
5. Vision for local and global mission. “Your global mission is as strong as your local mission. ... Our local congregations must be strengthened in order for us to have a global vision.”
6. Clearly defined identity as witnesses.
7. Wait, pray and receive the power of the Holy Spirit.
8. Go, dwell and act in the mission field.

Pastor Buba also described five fundamental practices and actions for Mission Teams:

1. Practice the works of mission — Go, teach, preach, and heal.
2. Perceive, analyze and define reality. “Get out of the routine.”
3. Promote opportunities.
4. Pray, pray, pray.
5. Prepare and mobilize people for mission.

Joys of the Journey

Pastor Scott Ness of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio, shared his experience using technology and cell phone applications in ministry. He talked about reading



The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, delivered the keynote message for the Mission Intensive. He provided guidance for creating mission teams in congregations and Mission Districts.

Scripture with others using cell phones and challenged listeners to use technology as a tool.

Pastor Ness highlighted “Drops from the Well,” a new cell phone text ministry of the NALC, which will send a Scripture verse to group members once a week. The hope is that members will reflect on that verse throughout the week. You can learn more about “Drops from the Well” and how to participate at thenalc.org/drops-from-the-well.

“What would it look like if we, as the North American Lutheran Church, all were reflecting on the same verse of Scripture every night? What would that do for us if every night, across our nation and the nations that we serve, we gathered at the same time and we prayed through the Word of God for one another that we might dine on the Bread of Life whose name is Jesus?” Pastor Ness asked.

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Pastor Didi Panzo, an NALC missionary, told of the joys of his work in Ecuador and the importance of partnership relationships with NALC congregations in his work. He told the stories of visits from NALC congregations and the difference the members had made to the people in Ecuador.

"I know your work is not in vain. When you're supporting a missionary, you're supporting the work of Jesus. When you're siding a mission or a church mission, you're siding with Jesus. And that is a joy, and that strengthens us to continue to be in the field," Pastor Panzo said.

Pastor Panzo and his wife, Serafina, are now going to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as missionaries. You can learn more about supporting the Panzos' work and the work of other NALC global workers at thenalc.org/global-workers.

Faith Webbing

Gary Pecuch, Director of Youth Ministry at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio, told of an exciting new partnership between the NALC and FaithWebbing.com, the ministry of Gary and his wife, Laurie.

He used the story of David and Goliath as an illustration of the importance of equipping young people with faith skills. "The Lord God chose David because David had a heart for God and David had a skill in his bag that the Lord God wanted him to use.

"I want our young people to be just like David. I want them to have a heart for God, and I want them to have skills in their bag — skills that they have practiced over and over and over and over again so that they are in that bag so that they can pull those out and use them when the Lord God Almighty places and positions them in the right place and the right time for His glory," he said. He explained that their congregation has over 40 faith skills that they try to instill in young people.

"The definition for us of youth ministry is 'youth doing ministry.' ... Family ministry is 'families doing ministry.' Our personal mission statement is to train and equip God's people with the necessary faith skills to live out their personal calling in life," he said.



Pastor Didi Panzo, an NALC missionary, told of the joys of his work in Ecuador and his new calling to work in the Congo. He described the importance of the partnership relationships with NALC congregations in his work.

All of the congregations represented at the NALC Convocation were given copies of his two books: *Faith Webbing: Wrapping Children and Youth in a Web of Faith* and *What's In Your Bag?: Outcome-Based Youth Ministry*.

The partnership between FaithWebbing.com and the NALC will provide free resources to all congregations including ministry consulting, ministry resources, as well as tools, forms, and webinars.

For more information on how your congregation can benefit from this partnership, please join the Faith Webbing group on the NALC Network and visit faithwebbing.com (also see article on Page 31).

Roadblocks or Detours?

A panel of mission leaders shared perspectives and resources to help congregations see that "roadblocks" to mission may be "detours" — opportunities to see and do new things.

Pastor Trina Petersen of A New Thing Christian Church, an NALC congregation in Lithonia, Ga., discussed the need for congregational vision for mission.

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"If you're going on a road trip a destination is an important thing to have," she said. "We need to be mindful to have that destination very clear. In the church or in church language that is called 'vision.'"

"You have to make sure that the vision that you are operating with is the vision for now," she said. "We are a people of God, and we are called to operate on 'now faith.' ... The faith that I need now to accomplish the vision God that has given to us."

Pastor Brad Hales of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va., talked about revitalizing churches.

"The church can be renewed. The church can be revived. And that's what God is calling us to do in His Word," he said. He challenged congregations to focus on discipleship, to confront the darkness, to be out in their communities, and to try new things.

"We don't have to take a declining church, do we? We don't have to wallow around and say, 'This is how the church is; this is how it's going to be. We have to live with it.' No, with power and passion from the Holy Spirit, we can say, 'The Spirit's going to turn this around. We're going to be different,'" he said. "The church is not going down on my watch because we have Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit."



Pastor Brad Hales of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va., talked about revitalizing congregations.



Pastor Trina Petersen of A New Thing Christian Church in Lithonia, Ga., talked about the importance of vision in congregations.

Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, talked about addressing conflict in congregations. He stressed the importance of dealing with conflict and difficulties openly.

"The first thing that one has to do is simply communicate with one another other about the issues related to conflict," he said.

He suggested that congregations and individuals see conflict as an opportunity. "Most congregations, that actually deal positively with conflict and openly with the issues that they have to deal with, end up feeling, 'we have never grown so much as we have when we began to deal with the conflict,'" Pastor Wendel said.

Ryan Schwarz, NALC treasurer, discussed aligning congregational finances with mission. He highlighted four areas regarding finances: realistic budgeting, zero-based budgeting, reviewing endowments, and aligning our priorities for benevolence around mission.

Schwarz noted the NALC's benevolence model of forming direct relationships with both domestic

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congregations and ministries and international missionaries and ministries.

He also provided a two-page resource that can assist congregations as they evaluate their finances and seek to align their finances with their mission.

Pastor Dave Keener of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga. discussed the problem of “evangeliphobia” — an unnatural fear of the words *evangelism* and *evangelist*.

“We separated evangelism and discipleship,” he said. “We need to put discipleship and evangelism back together.”

Pastor Jody Becker of Bethany Lutheran Church, Catawba, Wis., and Bethel Lutheran Church, Hawkins, Wis., focused on the issue of clergy burnout and the need for “holistic faith” and self-care.

“Jesus models ministry in a way that is about rest,” she said. “Jesus takes care of His ‘self’ so that He can leave an example for those around Him.”



Pastor Jody Becker of Bethany Lutheran Church, Catawba, Wis., and Bethel Lutheran Church, Hawkins, Wis., focused on “holistic faith” and self-care.



Pastor Dave Keener of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga., talked about putting discipleship and evangelism back together.

“Sabbath, sabbatical, self-care — if it’s not centered with Christ, it’s nothing more than a nap,” Pastor Becker said. “If we aren’t connecting everything in our lives — and I mean everything — then we aren’t living into the faith that God meant us to have.”

“If we forget to take care of ourselves in a faithful way, we turn away from the very first call that we received from God — the call to life. Each moment, each breath, is precious, and we should be honored to share in that. It is why Paul writes, ‘Glorify God in your body,’” she said.

Developing a Road Map

Pastors and congregational representatives were given a time to work through a process of reviewing their congregation’s strengths, weaknesses and threats and then to discern opportunities for mission.

Mission Districts gathered in the evening and went through a similar process to discern opportunities for mission.

The booklet from the Mission Intensive is available online at thenalc.org/2015convocationrecap.

Videos of the Mission Intensive presentations are available online at thenalc.org/2015-event-videos.

Ecumenical guests

Ecumenical guests addressed the 2015 NALC Convocation.

Among them were the Rev. Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, a Full Communion partner church of the NALC.

Other church bodies bringing greetings to the Convocation were the Anglican Church in North America, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Representatives of other church bodies and international church organizations were also introduced.



The Rev. Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus, addresses the 2015 NALC Convocation.



*Pastor Larry Vogel
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*



*Pastor David Eibel
Lutheran Congregations
in Mission for Christ*



*Bishop Ray Sutton
Anglican Church in North America*

Honoring Bishop Paull Spring for 50 years of faithful ministry

Bishop Paull Spring, bishop emeritus of the North American Lutheran Church, was honored at the 2015 NALC Convocation on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his ordination.

Over \$13,500 was received in gifts to the North American Lutheran Seminary in thanksgiving for Bishop Spring's ministry and in honor of his ordination anniversary. Gifts to the seminary were encouraged as a way of honoring Bishop Spring's 50 years of faithful ministry.

Bishop Spring has been involved in the North American Lutheran Church and the North American Lutheran Seminary from the beginning. He served as the first bishop of the NALC and the first chair of the NALS Board of Regents.



Bishop Paull Spring shows the bishop's cross given to him by the NALC during celebrations of the 50th anniversary of his ordination at the 2015 NALC Convocation.



Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor David Wendel read letters from former ELCA bishops and other church leaders honoring Bishop Paull Spring during celebrations of Bishop Spring's 50 years of faithful ministry at the 2015 NALC Convocation.

Bishop Spring also preached for the closing worship service of the Convocation and renewed his ordination vows during the service.

Bishop Spring served as a parish pastor and for 14 years as bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

He was a leader in efforts to uphold Biblical and Confessional teaching and truth in the ELCA. He served as the chair of Solid Rock Lutherans and Lutheran CORE during the struggles to maintain Biblical and traditional Christian teaching in the ELCA regarding marriage and sexual ethics. He was a key leader in the work to establish the North American Lutheran Church. He was elected provisional bishop of the NALC in 2010 and guided the church through its first year.

Words of thanks from Bishop Spring

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Words cannot adequately express the gratitude I feel in my heart for your gracious recognition of my 50 years as a pastor in Christ's church.

The comments that were made at our Convocation, the gifts, and the funds that many of you raised in my honor for our seminary — all of these were deeply moving to me. Equally moving were the gracious words that many of you shared with me on a personal level.

As I indicated at the Convocation, there's a sense in which the North American Lutheran Church is my congregation, and it has been my privilege and honor to serve you as your pastor.

To be sure, the years I served as chair of Solid Rock Lutherans and then in Lutheran CORE were not easy ones for me. The same could be said for the preparation for our gathering in Fishers, Ind., and for the first year of our life as the North American Lutheran Church. They were demanding and challenging years for me and for many of you as well.



Bishop Paull Spring addresses the NALC Convocation at the evening celebration honoring his 50 years of ministry.



Barbara and Bishop Paull Spring at the 2015 NALC Convocation as he was honored for 50 years of faithful ministry.

What sustained me during those years was the conviction that we were all together under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. We were doing God's work and were seeking to follow the Word and will of God.

I am deeply grateful for the quiet and steady support I received from my wife, Barbara, who always was by my side with her words of compassion and encouragement.

And, last but not least, I was also sustained by the prayers and support that I consistently experienced from you, the North American Lutheran Church, my congregation. For me and for you, the sure promise of God in Psalm 30 rings true, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning." It is now "morning" for us in the North American Lutheran Church. Thanks be to God!

Thank you, therefore, for being my congregation, and thank you for the call you extended to me to be your pastor. May God's Spirit continue to guide and lead us all in the life and ministry of the Gospel.

In Christ,

Paull E. Spring

Anniversaries recognized at Convocation

Ordination Anniversaries

70 years

The Rev. Albert L. Hock
The Rev. Arnold E. Schlueter

60 years

The Rev. Dr. James A. Harrison
The Rev. J. Weldon Smith

55 years

The Rev. Leland Bottjen
The Rev. James E. Hanson
The Rev. John P. Kline
The Rev. Neal E. Snider
The Rev. E. Dean Windhorn

50 years

The Rev. Edwin R. Fidler
The Rev. Dr. Benjamin A. Johnson
The Rev. Victor C. Langford III
The Rev. Lawrence Lystig
The Rev. Henry Schulte Jr.
The Rev. Paull E. Spring

45 years

The Rev. Paul Arnold
The Rev. David Baese
The Rev. Dr. Eugene Grimm
The Rev. Bruce G. Lundberg
The Rev. Paul G. Reiff
The Rev. Raymond C. Scheck
The Rev. Alden Towberman
The Rev. Ronald Warren

40 years

The Rev. Joseph M. Freeman
The Rev. Daniel Hart
The Rev. William S. Ketchie
The Rev. Dennis A. Meyer
The Rev. Randal L. Ouimette
The Rev. Thomas A. Phillips
The Rev. Michael Tamorria
The Rev. W. Paul Weeg

35 years

The Rev. Hugh W. Brewer
The Rev. Mark Jamison
The Rev. John Kulczycki
The Rev. Dr. Craig L. Loving
The Rev. David Mann
The Rev. Carl Nielsen
The Rev. Allan A. Oman
The Rev. Mark Q. Rowland
The Rev. William A. Rush III
The Rev. Steven J. Wadle
The Rev. Thomas H. Walker

30 years

The Rev. Mark A. Billow
The Rev. Lawrence A. Gember
The Rev. Steven G. Gilbertson
The Rev. Marshall E. Hahn
The Rev. Dr. Mary B. Havens
The Rev. W. Stephen Johnson
The Rev. David Keener
The Rev. Alan K. Knoke
The Rev. Douglas B. Lindsay
The Rev. Paul Lintern
The Rev. Todd P. Peterson
The Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen
The Rev. Elizabeth J. Toler
The Rev. Dr. William E. White
The Rev. David K. Woodby

25 years

The Rev. Cathy A. Ammlung
The Rev. Thomas J. Beam
The Rev. Gerald M. Berggren
The Rev. Mariola Z. Bergquist
The Rev. Thomas L. Christenson
The Rev. Steven E. King
The Rev. Janice A. Unger
The Rev. Stanley Simonik

20 years

The Rev. Thomas J. Anderson
The Rev. Debra L. Domeier
The Rev. Douglas V. Hedman
The Rev. Dr. Daniel T. Lioy
The Rev. Alfredo R. Luna
The Rev. Rimón R. Said
The Rev. Kevin L. Scott
The Rev. Diana L. Seaman
The Rev. John Sutton
The Rev. Edward L. Thomas
The Rev. Pamela L. Wells

Congregational Anniversaries

100 years

Grace Lutheran Church
Springfield, Ohio
Established - 1915

125 years

Peace Lutheran Church
Caroline, Wis.
Established - 1890

150 years

Zion Lutheran Church
Chicora, Pa.
Established - 1865

175 years

Miller's Lutheran Church
Hickory, N.C.
Established - 1840

225 years

Bethel Lutheran Church
Lincolnton, N.C.
Established - 1790

275 years

Zoar Lutheran Church
Lebanon, Pa.
Established - 1740



Martyr – Life-Giving Witness

Bishop Bradosky's sermon for the opening worship of the NALC Convocation

“And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering 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, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” — Acts 26:16-18

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

Since our Convocation last year, thousands of Christians have been martyred for their faith through targeted acts of terrorism. These attacks have nothing to do with war, combat or insurgency. These are Christians targeted because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Thousands more have been displaced, lost all material possessions and financial resources, and are now refugees. Countless others have been wounded, tortured, raped, and sold as slaves. The persecution of Christians continues to escalate worldwide.

During Holy Week this year Pope Francis offered these comments, “Our brothers and our sisters ... are persecuted, exiled, slain, beheaded, solely for being Christian.” The pope said that there have been more martyrs for Christianity in recent years than in the early centuries of the faith. He added, “I hope that the international community doesn’t stand mute and inert before such unacceptable crimes, which constitute a worrisome erosion of the most elementary human rights. I truly hope that the international community doesn’t look the other way.” He decried the world’s complicit silence and, for the sake of justice, so must we.

These horrifying realities have caused Christians to live in fear. Some conclude that in order to be politically correct we must say nothing. Others have become consumed with hatred, longing for retribution. Feeling so powerless, others search for some compromise, live in denial, or try to avoid being identified as a Christian.

Yet the Scripture and witness of the Church through the ages provides us with a far more appropriate response. Let us begin by remembering Jesus’ words about what we should expect as those committed to following Him. From the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, in the Sermon on the Mount, He says, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). In John 15, Jesus says, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ... If they persecuted me they will persecute you also” (John 15:18, 20).

Following Pentecost Jesus’ words become reality for the disciples who face resistance, persecution and hatred. They are thrown into prison, beaten, and threatened. Stephen, the first martyr, is stoned to death. The Church is persecuted and scattered. Throughout their epistles to the churches Peter and Paul write about facing and dealing with persecution. When we consider what is happening in the world today we should not be shocked or surprised that it compromises our conviction or our witness. The witness of Scripture reminds us that persecution is to be expected for all those who profess Jesus Christ as Lord. The question is, how do we respond?

Let us consider Paul’s example in Acts 26. The high priest has brought charges against Paul. He is a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world and a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. After pleading his case with Felix, Paul remains in prison for two years. After Felix is gone, Festus rules and offers to send Paul back to Jerusalem. Paul knows this would be certain death. He says, “If I am guilty of anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die.” Instead of returning to Jerusalem, Paul appeals to Caesar.

A few days later King Herod Agrippa and Queen Bernice arrive and Agrippa wants to hear Paul defend himself in person. Paul has to stand before a person whose great-grandfather had tried to kill

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Jesus as a baby and slaughtered many innocent children — a man whose grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded and whose father martyred the first apostle, James. The people of Caesarea and Jerusalem want Paul put to death. So Paul is brought in to make his defense.

The first thing Paul does is to speak positively about King Agrippa. He shows both respect and admiration. He affirms Agrippa's wisdom and understanding. He asks only for patience in listening to him.

Second, Paul says he is happy to present his case not because he is trying to protect himself but because it is an opportunity to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to kings and rulers. This is exactly what Jesus called him to do at his conversion, to bear Jesus' name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. With his life on the line, his greater concern is proclaiming Christ.

Third, Paul makes it clear what his past has been. He was a part of the group now accusing him. He was a Pharisee among Pharisees. Paul shows the connection of the Gospel of Jesus to the promises of God in sending the Messiah who died and now lives. Why should you think it incredible that God can raise the dead? Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God promises. The real issue is not Paul; it is Jesus.

Fourth, Paul begins to talk about the difference Jesus has made in his life. He talks about the person he was. There was a time when he too was convinced that he needed to do everything he could to oppose the name of Jesus and all who believed in Him. He had the authority of the chief priests to put Christians in prison, to have them put to death. He tried to force them to renounce their faith in Jesus. He was obsessed with persecuting the Christians; he was hunting them down in foreign cities. His diligence in his own faith was his motivation for destroying those who believed in Jesus. Perhaps you could call Paul the first terrorist opposing Christians. Paul does not present himself to be perfect and without fault. He presents himself as one in need of the very grace he experienced and is about to proclaim. He is humble and transparent, not arrogant or defensive.

Fifth, Paul tells those listening to him all the details of his conversion experience. While Paul shares his



Bishop John Bradosky preaches at the opening worship service of the 2015 NALC Convocation.

encounter with Jesus in several other places in the New Testament, this presentation is the most detailed account. He is on the road to Damascus when a light from heaven shines on him and the other travelers with him. It is a light bright enough to knock them to the ground. From the light there is a voice, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Notice that if you persecute Christ's followers you are persecuting Christ. Those who believe in Him are one with Him in His body, the Church. Paul asks, "Who are you Lord?" Jesus reveals Himself to Paul. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!" Then Jesus commissions Paul with these instructions: "Get up and stand on your feet." He was being sent so he had to be ready to go. Like the other apostles who heard Jesus' invitation to come and follow Him, this challenge cannot be received by standing still. Obedience to Jesus requires action.

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Paul is about to receive a new purpose for his life. This moment forces us to ask the question, “For what purpose are we living?” Jesus makes it clear to Paul. “You are to be my servant and a witness of what you have seen and what you will see of me!” The message does not serve you. You serve the message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, how easy it is to get that twisted and reversed! We don’t try to create experiences or content, we simply witness to what we have seen and heard. We pass on what we have first received — Jesus Christ!

Jesus promises Paul that from now on He would be his protection from both Jew and Gentile, but he can’t avoid them or live in fear of them. He had to go to them. Jesus was sending him out to be with them. It is clear that Jesus is concerned about the condition and the future of those to whom He is sending Paul. Paul’s purpose in being with them is to open their eyes. Paul’s own encounter with Jesus made him aware of how blind he was in opposing Jesus. Paul now saw his life and purpose with new eyes, a revelation of the one who is the way, the truth and the life. He is to reach others who are living like he once lived — their eyes closed to both the Father and the Son. The Gospel of Jesus Christ opens one’s eyes to the greater reality of the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus proclaimed. The Gospel of Jesus Christ provides a worldview that is not only different but in opposition to our cultural worldview.

Not only is Paul to present the Gospel of Jesus so their eyes are open to this worldview, but also to proclaim the Gospel in a way that turns their lives from darkness to light. This turning is repentance. It is not only a change in thinking, but also a change in behavior. His message must expose sin and the power of evil that so easily ensnares and destroys. His message must give the hope of the far greater power of God available in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the power of His life-giving love, His death and resurrection, there is forgiveness, justification and sanctification through faith in Jesus and the work of His Holy Spirit. Those who have not yet been reached with the Gospel will be brought into that intimate fellowship with Jesus in His body, the Church.

Faithful to that vision Paul encourages Festus, Agrippa and Bernice to let this same Jesus open their eyes to faith in Him. Paul is faithful to this

vision, command and mission of Christ. Even when they conclude he is a mad man, irrational, Paul reassures them that the Gospel is both true and reasonable when seen through the eyes of faith. It is only foolishness to those who are perishing, as Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians.

Luther writes, “It is the nature of bearing witness that it speaks of something which others do not see, know, or feel, but they must believe the witness who bears the testimony to it. Thus the Gospel, too, does not demand rational decision and agreement, but a faith that is above reason; otherwise this light may not be comprehended. ... The light of reason fights and rages against this light.” It is clear in Paul’s presentation that he is not concerned with defending himself but concerned with the light, the impact of the Gospel on those to whom he is witnessing.

Even as Paul is sent to those who are persecuting him and other Christians, so we are sent to those who are persecuting Christians throughout our world. We know that much of that persecution is coming from Muslims. The response of Christians covers the spectrum from acquiescence, to denial, to anger, hatred and profound fear. Like many, I agree that the killing, persecution, and dehumanizing acts of violence toward Christians must be stopped for the sake of justice and out of respect for the lives of those so persecuted.

But we cannot hate those whom God loves. Jesus Christ gave His life for their sake as well. They are precious in His sight. Muslim people are not the enemy. Mark Gabriel was a professor of Islam, an Imam, who became a Christian. In his book, *The Unfinished Battle, Islam and the Jews*, he writes that the problem is misplaced faith in Islam. We often fear the unknown — what we do not understand. If we are to reach Muslims with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must learn about their faith and understand why they believe and act in certain ways toward Christians and Jews. Gabriel believes it is their faith in Islam that creates the unhealthy attitudes and problems. He reminds us that Muslims are also the victims of Islam. They are suffering even more because of this misplaced trust. He writes, “Because of Islam they go through life trying to please Allah, but never know if they have succeeded. They lose their lives fighting for Allah, in hopes that this will get them into paradise. Because

of Islam they don't know how to forgive themselves or to forgive others."

I have read the Koran and at least a thousand Hadith, the sayings of Mohammed. I have read three other books about Islam, and I am convinced that we must be open to the truth and forgo those promoting political correctness as a solution. Paul's witness should remind us that those notorious for persecuting the Church have the opportunity to become the greatest evangelists for the Church! Paul's approach in this text from the book of Acts gives us great direction.

1. First, we must go. In a recent conversation, Gemechis reminded me, "Victory is going into the lion's den. Victory is going into the fiery furnace. It is not so much coming out but going in."
2. Second, we should go being assured of Jesus' presence and protection. (Eucharist)
3. Approach them with Christ's love, respect, understanding, and admiration as those also loved by Christ.
4. Permit them to know your need for Christ, not your self-righteousness.
5. Pass on what you have received as you share your witness. That your eyes were opened, the light of Christ was revealed, that you were set free from the power of Satan, sin and death. Your worldview is now one of the Kingdom of Heaven in which there is forgiveness, hope, new life now and life eternal through faith in Jesus Christ. Let them know that Jesus longs for them to enter that same intimate reality through faith in Him, to become his sanctified children. (Baptism)
6. Share the Gospel, not for the sake of defending yourself but for the sake of making an eternal impact on those you are sent to reach. This is no time to remain silent but a time for the Church to speak out and reach out.
7. Depend on the Holy Spirit as Paul did. St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes, "You must also know that the Holy Spirit empowers the martyrs to bear witness. A person cannot testify as a martyr for Christ's sake except through the Holy Spirit. If no man can say

'Jesus is Lord,' except in the Holy Spirit, will any man give his life for Jesus' sake except through the Holy Spirit?"

Let me close with another powerful witness that was shared with me when I was with our missionaries, the Ekka family in the northern part of India. At the seminary in Ranchi they are training evangelists who take the Gospel into the surrounding community where they face fierce opposition from Hindus and Muslims. They fully realize that in Islam, leading a Muslim to faith in Jesus could result in your torture and death. Yet in spite of the opposition, these faithful pastors, seminary students and evangelists are filled with joy and celebrate the privilege of following Jesus and leading others to do the same. They shared with us the story of one evangelist who was captured by the leaders of a Muslim village. He was bound and told that because he brought Christian faith to their village and was seeking to convert people to this faith, he would face death. They were going to behead him. (One thing I have noticed is that those who spend their life promoting fear and engaging in constant tactics to create terror in the lives of others also live in fear themselves.) Just before his execution he looked up at the leaders of the village and said he was willing to die for the sake of Jesus Christ. He was willing to give his life for the sake of sharing the Gospel. Then he said, "You can behead me but know this, for every drop of blood that comes from my neck, 100 Christians will follow me to this place!" At that moment, a great reversal took place. The one fearing for his life was seen as fearless and those seeking to inflict terror and death were themselves terrified! The leaders stopped the process, released him and told him never to return to their village. When asked about his response, he told others he had never thought about what he would say in such a circumstance. It was nothing less than the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 12:11, Jesus assures us of this. "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say!" Before evangelists go out into the uncertainty that awaits them in each new village where they share the Gospel of Jesus Christ they recount this story. They even have buttons made that simply state, "For every drop of blood a hundred Christians will follow." In the midst of darkness, the power and light of the Gospel still shines boldly in the life and witness of these followers of Jesus. So may it be in our lives as well.



Dr. Judy Stack-Nelson
*You Shall Be My Witnesses:
 The Witness Tradition in Acts, John and Paul*



Dr. Hans Wiersma
The First Martyrs of the Reformation



Dr. Paul Hinlicky
The Theology of the Martyrs

Carl E. Braaten- Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology



Over 300 people attended the Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology, the NALC's annual theological conference, held prior to the NALC Convocation.



Raymond Ibrahim
*Muslim Persecution of Christian Martyrs:
Past and Present*



Lensa Gudina
*Suffering and Martyrdom:
An Obligation or a Choice?
The Stories of Gudina Tumsa and Tsehay Tolessa*



Dr. Michael DeJonge
*A Martyr for What Cause?
Reconsidering 'Bonhoeffer and the Jews'*

‘Martyrdom and the Sufferings of the Righteous’



The speakers for the Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology engaged one another in discussion during a Speakers' Forum.

NALC hosts Global Confessional and Missional Lutherans Forum

“The Church today is called to bear faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the Word of God, responding to the Great Commission of our Lord (Matthew 28). While this has always been the chief mission of the Church, carrying out that mission is particularly difficult in today’s world. Lutheran communities currently face unique and varied challenges which impact and often impede mission and ministry.”



Leaders of Confessional churches and reform movements met Aug. 8-9 for the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum.

With these words, the “Dallas Proposal” describes the current situations Lutheran Christians are facing in the world today and proposes to establish an ongoing Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum. This proposal was the result of a gathering of 16 Lutheran leaders from around the world, responding to an invitation from the North American Lutheran Church.

The forum included leaders of reform movements within existing Lutheran church bodies, mission groups and societies, and Confessional Lutheran denominations.

The gathering took place Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 8-9, immediately preceding the NALC’s Lutheran Week at the Hyatt Regency Hotel at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. The timing allowed those who wished to also participate in the events of the week, including the Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology and the 2015 NALC Convocation.

Although the “Dallas Proposal” is at this time exactly that — a proposal — the draft states:

The purpose of the forum will include a) mutual support and encouragement; b) theological reflection on themes related to the Lutheran Confessions; and c) the development of strategies for congregational and pastoral renewal for the sake of mission and discipleship.

An important first step was to define and clarify the current existing global reality facing Biblical, Confessional Lutherans.

Such challenges include increasing secularization outside and inside the church; denial of the Law of God and an unwillingness to repent and live a new life in Christ according to God’s Word; persecution, oppression and martyrdom of Christians; over-institutionalization of the church; lack of commitment to the Great Commission; and an unwillingness to pass on the Apostolic Faith in church and home.

The proposal continues, however,

Continued on Page 29

These challenges need not lead to despair, can be an opportunity for greater faith, response and commitment. History indicates that the Church and every Christian can grow and thrive in times of persecution and difficulty. For “we rejoice in our sufferings,” knowing that suffering and challenge lead to endurance, character and hope which will not disappoint us! (Romans 5:3-5)



Participants in the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum pose for a group photo.

The participants, then, intend to create a forum of confessional, missional Lutheran communities “to share this hope that is in us, to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, to support one another in the Gospel, to meet the challenges we face and to further the church’s mission and ministry...”

A planning task force was formed and will make specific suggestions for taking next steps in organizing this forum, gaining support of the various Lutheran communities, and working toward the next gathering of this group, which will take place in conjunction with the 2016 NALC Lutheran Week, August 9-12 in Anaheim, CA.

Participants at the Dallas gathering were:

+ The Rev. Paul Borg, representing NALC and Lutheran CORE.

+ The Rev. John Bradosky, Bishop, NALC.

+ The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions.

+ The Rev. Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary.

+ The Rev. Brian Christensen, Evangelical Lutheran Network, Denmark.

+ The Rev. Martin Fromm, Representative of the International Christian Network to America and Vice-chair of the Church Coalition for the Bible and Confession.

+ The Rt. Rev. Roland Gustafsson, Presiding Bishop, Mission Province in Sweden.

+ The Rev. Scott Grorud, Faith Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, Minn., representing the Augustana District of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.

+ The Rev. Rolf Kjöde, Chair of Evangelical Lutheran Network, Norway.

+ The Rev. Isaya J. Mengele, Bishop, representing Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

+ The Rev. Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, General Secretary, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

+ The Rev. Heidi Punt, Christ United Lutheran Church, Granite Falls, N.C., representing NALC.

+ The Rev. Jarle Skullerud, Synod Chair of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway and representing Evangelical Lutheran Network.

+ The Rev. Andreas Späth, Chair of Church Coalition for the Bible and Confession, Vice-president of the International Christian Network.

+ The Rev. Paull Spring, Bishop Emeritus, NALC.

+ The Rev. Dr. David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism.

+ Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, St. Martin Lutheran Church, Maiden, N.C., representing NALC.

Great Commission is not an option

As our time in Dallas has concluded, we continue to meditate on Jesus' words in John 19:30: "It is finished." My brothers and sisters, we are not going to start anything; it's already done. The biggest problem for humanity has already been solved. The biggest mountain has already been climbed. The biggest debt has already been paid. The greatest enemy has already been defeated. The doors of heaven are open. The grave in Jerusalem is empty. The road before us is accompanied by God's promise to be with us and to send us the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" And so on that path we go.

As baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, living members of His body, our mission is to share the good news of His saving death and resurrection with those living in darkness, fear and godlessness, bringing the Kingdom — His risen presence — near, so that through God's Word and Holy Spirit they may become His followers, baptized into His Church, disciples with us in the Kingdom of God.

Mission is sharing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, bringing the kingdom near, making disciples, together following all that Jesus has commanded us.

The NALC Missions Office has a primary focus of mobilizing congregations, leaders, and mission districts for mission. In order to achieve this, systematic organization for mission is critically important. Therefore, the NALC Missions Office is pursuing a teamwork approach in order to mobilize the whole denomination by forming three categories of mission teams:

1. National Mission Teams (NMT).
2. District Mission Teams (DMT).
3. Congregational Mission Teams (CMT).

Training, equipping and resourcing these teams will help us awaken, mobilize, and equip our mission workers nationwide at every level. These mission teams will be advocates, ambassadors, leaders, and resource people for mission work in their own areas.

During our Mission Intensive at the Convocation in Dallas, we focused on what it means to be "Mission



Mission Driven

Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

Driven." There are five National Mission Teams at work currently, and at last year's Mission Festival we provided training for District Mission Teams. We began discussing Congregational Mission Teams in Dallas, and will continue that training at the Mission Festival this fall. As a Mission- Driven denomination, we need to focus on those who "drive" the mission forward. Whether NMTs, DMTs, or CMTs, all must focus on these four questions:

1. What is the vision of mission drivers?
2. Who are the mission drivers in the NALC?
3. What are the characteristics of mission drivers?
4. What are the fundamental practices and actions of mission drivers?

The Great Commission is not an option. Nor is it something you can rely on the international church to do. You cannot wait for your Mission District to do it for you. You must not wait for your Bishop to do it for you, or wait for your pastor to live into what Jesus has called you to do. *You* are the driver! Our vision is to awaken, equip, and mobilize individuals for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ!

We consider it our joy and privilege to assist in providing the needed resources so that you can live into this vision, and we continue this journey together. All of the resources from the 2015 NALC Convocation Mission Intensive are available online at www.thenalc.org, as well as registration for the Mission Festival this November in Hilliard, Ohio.

May we be called "Repairers of Broken Walls and those who Restore Streets with Dwellings" (Isaiah 58:12).

NALC partners with Faith Webbing for Youth and Family Ministry

The North American Lutheran Church has entered into an agreement with faithwebbing.com to provide children's, youth, and family ministry consultation for NALC congregations.

Faithwebbing.com is a youth and family ministry consultation service offered by Gary and Laurie Pecuch of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio. For more on Gary and Laurie visit faithwebbing.com.

What does this mean for our congregation?

The agreement between the NALC and faithwebbing.com will provide youth ministry consultation services to NALC churches at no direct cost to the congregation. The service will include access to faithwebbing.com (including the "members only" section), webinars, newsletters and more.

How do we get connected?

Start by creating an account at nalcnetwork.com and join the faithwebbing.com community group for updates. All are welcome to join the faithwebbing.com public group.

Next, faithwebbing.com will give opportunity for specific interaction with each interested congregation. Communication will take place primarily through what is called a "Faith Webbing Congregational Connector."

A Congregational Connector is someone that a pastor recommends be a main contact person between their church and faithwebbing.com.



Gary Pecuch, Director of Youth Ministry at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio, explains an exciting partnership between Faith Webbing and the NALC to the 2015 NALC Convocation. The new partnership will help to equip and enhance youth ministry in NALC congregations.

Pastors can take this next step by sending an email to faithwebbing@gmail.com with the name of the connector, the church and the connector's email address.



Faith Webbing

Wrapping God's People in a Web of Faith

Faithwebbing.com will take it from there. Much is on the horizon. Let's get our communications network set up.



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thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015

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