

Robert Spencer, jihad expert, to speak at NALC Convocation

Robert Spencer, an expert in understanding Islamic jihad, will be a featured speaker for the 2015 NALC Convocation.

“Martyr: Life-giving Witness” is the theme for the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. Given the threat that some Islamic radicals pose to Christians in many parts of the world, NALC leaders thought that an expert on the subject would add to the NALC’s focus on Christian martyrdom during Lutheran week.

Spencer is the director of Jihad Watch, a program of the David Horowitz Freedom Center. He holds a master’s degree from the University of North Carolina and has been studying Islamic theology, law, and history in depth since 1980.

Spencer is the author of 13 books, including two New York Times bestsellers, *The Truth About Muhammad* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*. His latest book is *Arab Winter Comes to America: The Truth About the War We’re In*. His next book, *The Complete Infidel’s Guide to ISIS*, will be released Aug. 24.

Spencer has led seminars on Islam and jihad for the United States Central Command, the U.S. Army, the FBI, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the U.S. intelligence community. He has also spoken at numerous colleges and universities.

Spencer is the Vice President of the American Freedom Defense Initiative and a weekly columnist for PJ Media and FrontPage Magazine. In addition



Robert Spencer, an expert in understanding Islamic jihad, will speak at the 2015 NALC Convocation.

to his books, he has written many hundreds of articles about jihad and Islamic terrorism.

Along with his current weekly columns, for nearly 10 years Spencer wrote the weekly Jihad Watch column at Human Events. He has completed a weekly Qur’an commentary at Jihad Watch, “Blogging the Qur’an,” which has been translated into several other languages.

He has served as a contributing writer to Steven Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism. His articles on Islam and other topics have appeared in numerous newspapers and journals. He has also appeared on many television and radio programs.

NALC Convocation is Aug. 12-14

Martyrdom and faithful witness will provide a common theme for the 2015 NALC Convocation and the Women of the NALC Annual Gathering and the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology that precede 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 focus on the reality of Christians suffering for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel today, and the fact that this testimony serves as a “life-giving witness,” causing others to have their eyes opened, turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

The Convocation will begin at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 12, with special Mission Intensive sessions including speakers 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

MARTYR LIFE-GIVING WITNESS ACTS 26:16-18

business including voting on proposed constitutional amendments and election of bishop and members of the Executive Council and Court of Adjudication. There will also be reports and updates about the life and ministry of the NALC and the North American Lutheran Seminary, as well as displays featuring NALC missions and ministries. Workshops on a variety of topics will be offered on Friday.

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

The \$225 Convocation registration fee includes six meals: dinner on Wednesday and Thursday; and breakfast and lunch on Thursday and 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 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday. Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$75 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 with lunch on Wednesday. Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$150 registration fee.

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.

You may register online for the Convocation and other Lutheran week events at www.thenalc.org.



The Hyatt Regency Dallas-Fort Worth Airport will host the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14.

Eight nominated for Executive Council

Four pastors and four lay people have been nominated to serve on the NALC Executive Council.

The NALC Convocation will elect three members of the NALC Executive Council (two lay people and one pastor).



John Elling



Rosemary Johnson



Stephen Lord

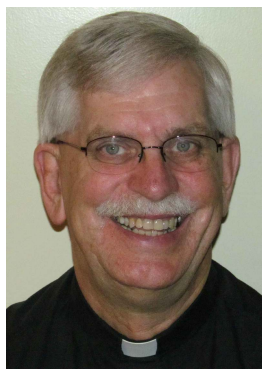


Brian Sutton

Rosemary Johnson of Hope Lutheran Church in Ladysmith, Wis., and Stephen Lord of Black Forest Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., are nominated for a four-year term on the Executive Council.



Tom Hux



Carl Rasmussen



Paul Reiff



Eric Waters

John Elling of Hope Lutheran Church in Ladysmith, Wis. and Brian Sutton of St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Statesville, N.C. are nominated for a two-year term on the Executive Council.

Four pastors are nominated for a four-year term designated for ordained ministers:

+ Pastor Tom Hux of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore.

+ Pastor Carl Rasmussen of First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Ill.

+ Pastor Paul Reiff of Faith Lutheran Church in Sturgeon Lake, Minn.

+ Pastor Eric Waters of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio.

The 2015 Convocation will also elect the bishop and two members of the Court of Adjudication.

Bishop John Bradosky is currently the only candidate for bishop.



John Bradosky



Carolyn Nestingen



Marty Ramey

Nominations for Bishop may be made by any Convocation delegate or by NALC congregations or the NALC Executive Council until the first ballot takes place at the Convocation.

Carolyn Nestingen of Roseville, Minn., and Pastor Marty Ramey of Dallas, N.C., will be elected to the Court of Adjudication. They were the only candidates nominated by the June 28 deadline. Biographical information on the nominees is available online at thenalc.org/2015-convocation.

‘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 and their topics include:

+ **“A Martyr for What Cause? Reconsidering ‘Bonhoeffer and the Jews’”** - Dr. Michael DeJonge, Associate Professor in Religious Studies at the University of Southern Florida, earned his Ph.D. in Religion from Emory University. He is the author of *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* and co-editor of *The Bonhoeffer Reader*.

+ **The Persecution of the Christians in Ethiopia** - Lensa Gudina, Managing Director of the Gudina Tumsa Foundation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She is the daughter of the martyred Rev. Gudina Tumsa.

+ **“The Great Divide: Muslim and Christian Notions on Martyrdom”** - Raymond Ibrahim, a widely published author, public speaker, and Middle East and Islam specialist. His books include *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam’s New War on Christians* and *The Al Qaeda Reader*.

+ **“Theology of the Martyrs”** - Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky, Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College, holds a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary. The author of more than seventy articles and many books, 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.



Michael DeJonge



Lensa Gudina



Paul Hinlicky



Raymond Ibrahim



Judy Stack-Nelson



Hans Wiersma

+ **Martyrdom and the New Testament** - Dr. Judy Stack-Nelson holds a Ph.D. in New Testament from Princeton Theological Seminary. She 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.

+ **The Martyrs of the Reformation** - Dr. Hans Wiersma, 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.

The Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology begin at 1 p.m. Tuesday and conclude with lunch on Wednesday. Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$150 registration fee.

For more information or to register go to www.thenalc.org.

Honoring Bishop Paull Spring for 50 years of faithful ministry

Bishop Paull Spring will be honored at the 2015 NALC Convocation on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his ordination.

All NALC congregations, pastors, members and friends are invited to send a thank offering to the North American Lutheran Seminary as a way of honoring Bishop Spring's 50 years of faithful ministry.



Bishop Paull Spring

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.

The total of the gifts will be announced at the NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14. Bishop Spring will preach at the closing worship service and renew his vows of ordination.

Paull Spring was ordained Oct. 17, 1965, at First English Lutheran Church, Wheeling, W.Va. He served congregations in Smicksburg, Pa.; New Stanton, Pa., and Warren, Pa. He was elected bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA in 1987. He served that synod until 2001.

Bishop Spring returned to service as parish pastor after his time as bishop, serving Grace Lutheran Church in State College, Pa., and two years as interim at St. James Lutheran Church, Huntingdon, Pa. It was also during this time that Bishop Spring worked as a leader in movements to hold the ELCA to Biblical and Confessional teaching and truth, especially with regard to sexuality and marriage.

Bishop Spring was chair of the group known as Solid Rock Lutherans which successfully worked to

defeat liberalizing actions within the ELCA at its 2005 Churchwide Assembly. Bishop Spring then became chair of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) working to defeat similar actions at the ELCA's 2007 and 2009 Churchwide Assemblies.

As chair of Lutheran CORE (renamed the Coalition for Renewal) after the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, in response to calls for the formation of a new Lutheran church, Bishop Spring participated in work to establish the North American Lutheran Church. He was elected the provisional bishop of the NALC in 2010 and guided the church through its first year of ministry.

"Bishop Spring is always concerned about the well-being of the whole Body of Christ and willing to commit significant time and energy to building up the Body. Add his humility and humor to his leadership skills and you have a unique and rare servant of the Church," said Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, who also worked closely with Bishop Spring as Director of Lutheran CORE.

"Bishop Spring is a faithful pastor, a true pastor to other pastors and a preeminent theologian for the Church. He is responsible for encouraging many to consider Word and Sacrament ministry. As a bishop he lovingly cared for pastors serving in the church under his oversight. His leadership, wisdom and experience guided the church with faithful Biblical preaching and teaching as well as sound doctrine. He continues to serve the church with the same love and integrity," Bishop John Bradosky said. "Given his commitment to theological education and his care for pastoral formation, it is fitting for us to honor Bishop Paull Spring with a thank-offering to the North American Lutheran Seminary!"

Thank-offering gifts may be sent to the NALC; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112-2202. Please write, "Bishop Spring thank-offering" on the memo line.

NALC Convocation attendees invited to provide disaster support for Texas

Those who are attending the NALC Convocation and Women of the NALC Annual Gathering in Texas are encouraged to provide disaster relief for those in need in Texas.

Texas has been named a FEMA National Disaster Area by President Barak Obama. Although the federal government will assist in many areas, we should ask ourselves, "What can we do to help?"

First and most important are the power of prayer and Christian spiritual care. Then come the tangible needs.

What better way to support the State of Texas, site of the 2015 NALC Convocation and WNALC Annual Gathering, than to ask our congregations to donate Bibles or gift cards (valued at \$10 or more from stores like Walmart or Home Depot). The gifts

will aid individuals and families in the Texas counties of Cooke, Gaines, Grimes, Harris, Hays, Navarro, and Van Zandt.

A member of the congregation could bring the Bibles and/or gift cards to the NALC Convocation or the WNALC Annual Gathering. The NALC Disaster Task Force will ensure that they are delivered to the areas that have the greatest need.

Please bring Bibles and gift cards for \$10 or more to assist in this worthy cause. Simply drop them off at the NALC Disaster Response table in the Convocation exhibit area, and greet Mary Bates, Task Force Chair, and David McGettigan, Disaster Response Coordinator.

What a blessing your help will be for the many families in these disaster-stricken areas.

Convocation to consider constitutional amendments regarding change in NALC relationship with Lutheran CORE

The 2015 NALC Convocation will consider several amendments to the NALC Constitution when it meets Aug. 12-14.

The proposed constitutional amendments are all related to a change in relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

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.

Marriage Law and the Protection of Congregations' Religious Liberty

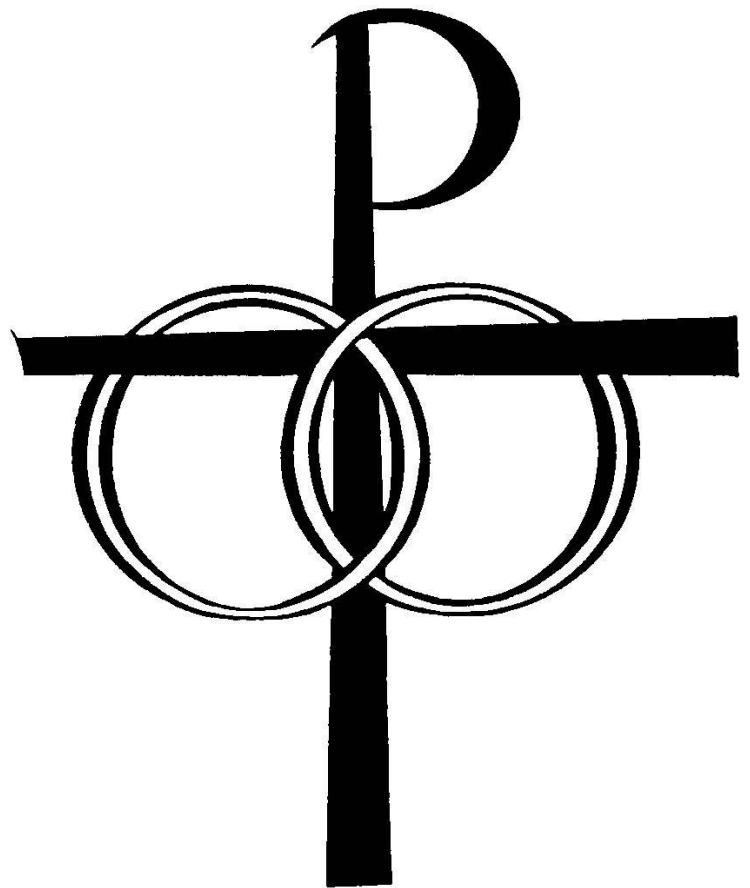
Dear friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who declares, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

Contrary to Jesus' authority and teaching about marriage that affirms the Father's intention in creation, the decision by a majority of the justices of the United States Supreme Court to legalize same-sex marriage in all 50 states is tragic, but not surprising. Many Americans live with the arrogance and delusion that contemporary wisdom makes our understanding superior to the revealed truth of God's Word. In this context the high court's ruling redefines relationships and marriage as a right preserved as a matter of human "dignity." Such dignity is based on an individual determination of fulfillment and morality without regard to external truth or teachings that preserve the greater good of all society. The Supreme Court has foolishly endorsed this idolatry.

The Supreme Court may have the power to dictate what state governments must claim to be marriage, but it most certainly does not have the power to change what God has revealed to be true marriage, an integral part of His plan for human life which is inherent in the order of the world He has created.

God alone knows the long-term consequences of the decision for our nation. Now Christians who uphold the orthodox Christian faith and confess that God alone defines marriage must be bold to confess the truth of God's Word without regard to the consequences. The North American Lutheran Church will not shrink from the challenge and the opportunity this decision provides. Both our message and our life become even more distinguishable from the confused and misguided state of our cultural context. To that end we will be providing resources to equip all our congregations and pastors to confront an idolatrous culture and government.



Our first response must be one of prayer and careful deliberation. There is no need to panic about each congregation's right to continue to practice Christian marriage. NALC congregations and pastors can legally continue to teach, preach and practice our confession:

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman. (Common Confession 6, Marriage and Family)

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A few of our leaders with knowledge of the law and the rights of churches to exercise religious liberty have prepared a helpful guide, “Marriage Law and the Protection of Congregations’ Religious Liberty.” We encourage you to carefully read it and then review your governing documents and policies to ensure that you are consistently in line with our confession of the Christian faith.

The guide is self-explanatory and should be sufficient for congregations charting their way through the turbulent waters in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision. However, if you need help, NALC members with legal backgrounds have volunteered to assist our congregations with these important matters.

Let us pray all the more fervently that our Lord will shield and protect families, and especially children, from the destructive impact of redefining marriage to be whatever sinful human beings desire. Let us not forget that we are bound to follow the One who possesses even greater authority, the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. One day every knee will bend and every tongue confess that He alone is Lord. For us, there is no other option except an obedient response to His Word and His authority.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. John F. Bradosky
Bishop

The Rev. Mark C. Chavez
General Secretary

Marriage Law and the Protection of Congregations’ Religious Liberty

Guidance to Pastors and Congregations in the United States from the NALC

In light of the recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, NALC pastors and congregations may be concerned about potential implications for their ministries. While that concern

is very understandable, we urge NALC members not to panic. From a legal point of view, it is unlikely that church bodies, congregations, or pastors will be compelled to violate their religious beliefs by participation in the formalizing of same-sex unions. At least for the foreseeable future, the religious liberty provisions in the United States Constitution will almost certainly continue to protect church bodies, congregations, and pastors who align their practices on marriage with their confessions of faith.¹

This is not to minimize the challenges that the *Obergefell* decision may create, both for laypeople living out their faith in the world and for congregations operating schools or community service organizations (more on that below). We also recognize the possibility of other legal challenges to congregations whose teaching on marriage is consistent with the historic Christian consensus, such as challenges to the ability of pastors to sign state marriage certificates, or, more speculatively, challenges to the tax exempt status of congregations. These are possibilities that cannot be ruled out. However, as to the fundamental question of whether government actors in the United States might compel church bodies, congregations, and pastors to participate in formalizing same-sex unions, that is a very remote possibility today.

Still, some understandably ask whether their congregations can or should do anything specific to strengthen the protection of their religious liberty as it relates to marriage. The answer is “yes!” Congregations can and should take steps to protect their religious liberty by doing what they ought to do in any event: state clearly what they believe and confess, adopt congregational policies consistent with their stated beliefs, and follow those policies consistently. The following is some initial specific guidance for congregations in this regard.

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¹ Indeed, this same U.S. Supreme Court, just three years ago, ruled unanimously that churches have complete freedom in hiring clergy and other religious education personnel, regardless of secular employment laws. (*Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & School v. EEOC*, 2012).

State What You Believe And Confess —

Congregations should have a broad statement of faith that lays the foundation and evidences the sincerity of their religious convictions. With respect to marriage specifically, the 2005 *Common Confession*, which is endorsed in the NALC's Confession of Faith, affirms that we "believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. . . . We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the Biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman." Many NALC congregations have endorsed the *Common Confession* in their governing documents or in some other manner. Other congregations should consider endorsing the *Common Confession* or some other statement on marriage.

Adopt Congregational Policies Consistent With Stated Beliefs —

Congregations obviously should act in accord with what they say they believe about marriage. The best way to do this is by enacting policies regarding the congregation's practices. These policies should cover:

1. Congregational Practice — A congregation should have a policy governing the circumstances under which it will host a wedding or wedding-related event. This policy, among other things, should make clear that the congregation will only recognize, participate in, solemnize, and host weddings between one man and one woman.
2. The Use Of Facilities — Congregations often permit outside groups to use their facilities. Such a congregation should adopt a policy defining the bounds of acceptable third-party use of church property. To avoid confusion over its beliefs regarding marriage, a congregation should include a prohibition on third-party use of church facilities for weddings, for the formalizing or blessing of sexual relationships, and for receptions or celebrations of weddings or other unions. This prohibition should apply to all weddings and unions, or at least to all unions that fall outside of Christian marriage as the congregation understands it. In addition, congregations should consider restricting the use of their facilities to those that are consistent with the church's biblical beliefs.

3. Pastoral Acts Outside The Congregation — A congregation (with its pastors' involvement) should adopt a policy that ensures that pastors, when undertaking pastoral acts outside the congregation (e.g., presiding at a family wedding out of town), conform their behavior to the congregation's beliefs.

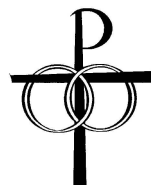
Follow Those Policies Consistently —

A congregation should follow its policies consistently. Ensuring consistent practice requires adopting processes through which someone or some group is responsible for approving each church-hosted wedding, third-party use of congregational facilities, and pastoral act outside the congregation. Being consistent and deliberate about following your policies will help ensure that your church is viewed as taking seriously its stated beliefs.

* * * * *

As mentioned above, the *Obergefell* decision may create special issues and considerations for congregations that operate schools or other community service ministries. We will develop additional guidance for these and other situations, and will share that guidance with the NALC when ready. We also believe that some guidance to congregations regarding congregational membership policies and practices may be appropriate, and we will work toward providing such guidance. Finally, we would note that our NALC brothers and sisters in Canada have been living for some time now under legal rulings similar to the *Obergefell* decision, and consequently there is likely to be much that we can learn from them.

We know there is great unease about the cultural shifts that appear to be occurring. But in these times, we must remember that God's people can and will have a profound impact through their faithful witness to Christ's love and truth. Even while we love those who look to persecute us, we can still take steps to protect the faith that we attempt to live each and every day. It is our hope that, in doing so, light and hope will shine even in times of spiritual darkness.



Are We Ashamed of our Faith or Bold Witnesses?

One of the daily lectionary readings this week was from Matthew 9, including verses 37-38 where Jesus says to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Many NALC folks have asked me about the recent Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod International Conference on Confessional Leadership in the 21st Century, in Wittenberg, Germany. As is often the case with several days of lectures and discussion, it’s difficult to remember all that was said in such a way that it can be shared.

What did make such a memorable impression, however, were the presentations by speakers in countries and regions where there are large Muslim populations, with equal or smaller Christian populations. Their experience is really a call and a challenge to those of us in North America (and the global north) who generally prefer to keep our Christian faith to ourselves, afraid we will be seen as Bible-thumping Christians at best and fanatics at worst. So, many of us Lutherans rarely speak about Jesus, faith, the Word of God, or our church!

The Rev. Ville Typpö, pastor of Istanbul Lutheran Church in Turkey, spoke about this saying, “In Finland, no one wants to talk about your religion. It’s not something to talk about. In Turkey and Muslim countries, it’s the first thing they will talk about — what is your religion — and they expect you to be prepared to defend your faith. They will defend Islam and if you won’t talk about and defend your Christian faith, it means (to them) that you’re ashamed of your faith.”

Bishop Amos Bolay, of the Lutheran Church in Liberia added to that, saying, “Muslims are always ready to be visible and show their faith.” He related a time when there was a wedding, and an out-of-town Muslim family member stayed in his home. He said the man made his Christian home a mosque — laying out his prayer rug on the front



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

porch and praying visibly toward Mecca! Bishop Amos said, “We Christians want to go pray in our closet so that no one will see.” He concluded, “If a house was burning, you would pound on the door to save the people inside. Christians won’t do that for people who don’t know Jesus.”

I hope we in the North American Lutheran Church hear in these testimonies the challenge of these brothers in other parts of the world, but even more, the clear call of our Lord Jesus who does indeed send us out of our churches and homes, into the harvest to be light and salt, “letting our light so shine before others that they see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16, the Sermon on the Mount)

After World War II, our families were growing as babies were being born and our churches were booming. We built bigger and bigger church facilities, with sanctuaries that would seat 700-800, with classrooms for every age and group. People were so happy the war was over, they flocked to churches. In such a time, we were lulled into thinking it would always be that way, so we became the institutionalized Church, with membership in the organization being the important thing, following the minimal rules and regulations for membership.

In the institutional Church, there was/is little room for discipleship, witnessing, sharing the Word of God with those neighbors whose homes are

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burning — those who don't know the Triune God, the Son Jesus Christ, or the saving Word. We became, for all intents and purposes, “organizational functionaries” — members of an organization that would continue on forever as it was in the 1950's post-World War II era.

Oh, how Satan deceived us and led us into a laziness and lukewarm-ness that caused us to be totally unprepared to face the decline, opposition and, yes, persecution that the Body of Christ would experience in the 21st century!

The tragic reality of Lutheranism in North America is that many “members” of Lutheran congregations would prefer to simply hold on to the institutional organization, hoping things will turn around and our church buildings will once again be full, our pastors inspiring and charismatic, children and youth up early on Sunday mornings excited about going to worship!

When we see decline in our congregations it is all too common to blame the pastor, the liturgy, the “boring” Lutheran hymns, seeking all kinds of “saviors” — whether a new pastor, a new program or identity, a different style of worship — finding finally that there is only one Savior and one hope of resurrection. Our only hope is the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The only turn-around possible for declining congregations is to move away from our institutional mentality, to focus on the risen presence of the Word of God incarnate — Jesus Christ who is given to us in Word and Sacrament for forgiveness, life and salvation! And then for us to embrace, anew, the life of discipleship.

As members of the living Body of Christ that is the Church, we wish to respond to our incorporation into that Body by going out into the harvest to save those who are living in darkness and fear — to go out to bring the Light of Christ, inviting others to hear the Word, to be baptized into His death and resurrection, to become part of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. Renewal comes in the Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit at work in us, through the Word of God — not through programs or people or pastors.

Bishop Emmanuel Makala of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania shared at the conference that the rapid growth of the Body of Christ in his country and in many places in Africa happened “because of the joy of Baptism — as St. Luke records it, ‘that we rejoice that our names are written in heaven!’” (Luke 10:20)

In our day it is not outside the realm of possibility that some of us will have the opportunity to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, not simply to our neighbors, friends or family members. We may well be the ones who are being held hostage by terrorists, being asked at risk of life itself, “Are you a Christian — are you a disciple of Jesus?”

*If you won't talk
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it means (to them)
that you're ashamed
of your faith.*

At the upcoming Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology and NALC Convocation, we will ponder these realities of our time, and we pray that we will come to better understand martyrdom as “life-giving witness” — Jesus' and ours! We hope to see you at the Lutheran Week activities Aug. 11-14 at the Hyatt-Regency Hotel in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. More information is in this newsletter and can be found on the NALC website.

Let us be empowered and prepared by the Holy Spirit working through the Word to not be ashamed or afraid to confess the faith that is in us — that we are always living in the joy of our Baptism into Christ — that we are always living the joy that comes from our names being written in heaven!

Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church

Kansas City, Mo.

Faisa Atomsa is the pastor of the Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church of Kansas City, Mo.

Originally from Mendi, a small town located in the Western part of Ethiopia, he grew up in a Christian family and was part of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

From being a child in the church choir at a young age to his time as a refugee in Kenya, he felt a call to ministry. God had placed a burden in his heart for the lost and the desire to reach out and tell others about Christ.

In 2004, he was blessed with the opportunity to come to the United States and, after several years, started to attend Bible College. In 2008, he began working with the Oromo community in Kansas City.

The Oromo are a people from Ethiopia and the country's largest ethnic group. This particular community speaks their native language, Afaan Oromoo. The need to have a place for the Oromo people to worship in their native language in Kansas City led to the formation of an Oromo-speaking church.



Three congregations worship at St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kansas City suburb of Riverside, Mo. They celebrated a joint worship service for Easter. The pastors of the three congregations are, from left, Pastor Phillip Istaro, Micronesian Church; Pastor Bud Elliott, St. Matthew's; and Pastor Faisa Atomsa, Ebenezer.

The congregation began meeting in 2008 at an ELCA church. In 2013, Pastor Atomsa was ordained in the NALC. The journey continued in 2014 when Pastor Atomsa and some of the church members decided to leave the ELCA church and completely start over.

Starting over was a difficult thing to do, as the congregation was forced to leave everything behind. Some members also stayed behind to continue worship with the old church. Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church needed a new beginning and did so by starting a house church. They met weekly in members' apartments.

After several months of prayer and meeting together in apartments, they were welcomed into St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church (NALC) in Riverside, Mo.



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St. Matthew's graciously allowed the use of their church building for Ebenezer's worship services, which was incredibly valuable as the growing Oromo congregation needed a larger worship space. Ebenezer began meeting at St. Matthew's in June of 2014. In the fall of 2014 Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church was officially welcomed into the NALC as a mission congregation.

Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church is a lively congregation full of young families, most of whom have come to the United States in the last 10 years. Many members have young children or are just starting families. The members hold a range of jobs, from working as housekeepers to taxi drivers. Some are pursuing their education while working and helping support their families back home in Ethiopia. Some of the members came from Mekane Yesus congregations in Ethiopia while others came from different backgrounds, but all share a common love for Jesus Christ.

The congregation has a very deep love of Jesus and loves to worship. Ebenezer is passionate about the Gospel and what God wants them to do here in the midst of their community.

Currently, Ebenezer meets on Sunday afternoons for worship. In addition, they have Saturday morning prayer programs and Wednesday evening Bible studies. On Sunday mornings there is Sunday School for the children. There is also a small worship team that sings traditional Oromo songs during worship.

The Oromo culture is community based and that is why, after every church service, there is a time of fellowship where everyone eats "dabo," a traditional bread made by the women in the congregation, and drinks coffee.

This congregation is growing deeply in faith and learning how to reach out more to those in the community. They want to reach out not only to those in the Oromo community but also to be a light and example to all in the Kansas City area.

Pastor Atomsa and Ebenezer Oromo are grateful for all the support they have received from the NALC, the Great Plains Mission District and St.



Matthew's. Many at Ebenezer have very few family members here in the United States. The support received from the NALC through words of encouragement, advice, and donations has been incredibly meaningful and helped them to realize that they have many brothers and sisters here with them and supporting them. Their prayer is that God will bless all in the NALC and that you will reach out to those in your community wherever you are.

If you are interested in knowing more about Ebenezer's mission or joining with them in relationship and partnership, please visit the NALC's Great Commission Society website and download the adoption paperwork today at www.thenalc/great-commission-society.

Drops From the Well

“Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.”

A great gift of our Lord is the chance to drink deep from His living water. Reading the Word of God on a consistent basis is at the heart of our faithful obedience as followers of Jesus. We read His Word to know Him better. And yet, for so many, this is a challenging task. Daily readings get lost in the shuffle of life.

The online NALC Discipleship Moments this last month have been less about teaching on discipleship and more about being a disciple (www.thenalc.org/discipleship-moment). We have tried to help you peek behind the curtain to see how the staff of the NALC are following Jesus in their daily life and devotion.

Will you join them? Will you take a step deeper into the Living Waters of Jesus? We are continuing to create resources to empower people to engage with the Word of God and take steps into deeper faith. “Drops from the Well” is one such resource.

Utilizing the lectionary Scripture readings from Sunday morning, Drops from the Well can be delivered to your phone (U.S. numbers only) via a text message or to your email inbox.

More than a verse-a-day, Drops from the Well focuses on sending out one key point or Gospel kernel with the hopes that you read and reflect on that drop each day of the week. Every morning at the breakfast table, pray this “drop” together as a family. Every night around the dinner table, use the “drop” as the lens through which you recap your day. You can share highs and lows around this verse, talk about a mistake you made and the way the Living Water, even in this little “drop,” helped you through.

To receive a “Drop” from the Well of Living Water every Sunday night:

+ Sign up for a weekly email at <http://2hoots.com/users/add/59>. (Be sure to check the box for “Weekly Sunday Message.”)



+ Text the word “Drops” to 614-328-5636.

There is a reason this resource is called Drops from the Well. This “drop” is not meant to replace reflective devotional reading of Scripture. Rather, it can provide a simple way for people to enter into the Fount of Living Water in a new way.

Do you remember singing that wonderful VBS song, “Deep and Wide,” as a kid? For too long we have been stuck on the second verse: “hmmm and wide. hmmm and wide...” We have forgotten to go deep — in our relationships, in our reading of Scripture. Perhaps checking in with those we live with around a “Drop from the Well” can help us take a step deeper into the Living Waters of Jesus Christ.

So, how do you tap into Drops from the Well?

+ Delivered to your phone or email inbox, you can now share a “drop” of Scripture around the breakfast table as a launch pad into your day.

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+ Use this “drop,” which may have been the focus of the sermon you just heard on Sunday morning, to ask questions about worship and the sermon and to live into applying the “drop” to your day.

+ Use this “drop” in *Lectio Divina*. The steps are: 1. *Lectio* - reading; 2. *Meditatio* - reflection; 3. *Oratio* - response; 4. *Contemplatio* - rest.

For more information go to www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/praying-with-scripture or voxveniae.com/lectio-divina/#.VYhKAWAscaj.

+ Or Luther’s version *oratio* (prayer), *meditatio* - (meditation); *tentatio* (test). For more information, visit gnesiolutheran.com/oratio-meditatio-tentatio.

+ Use this “drop” as the second step in Faith5. Those steps are: 1. Share; 2. Read; 3. Talk; 4. Pray; 5. Bless.

For more information on the Faith5, go to www.faith5.org.

+ With children, develop simple signs to help them remember the “drop” and stain it on their hearts.

+ Use the “drop” with 3DM’s Circle. Go to 3dmovements.com for more information.

+ Turn the “drop” into your prayer.

+ Write the “drop” on a note card and keep it in your pocket so that when you touch it, the “drop” is brought to the forefront of your mind.

+ Sent the alarm on your phone to ring at 4:14 p.m. Eastern time each day (a reference to the general theme verse of John 4:14). When the alarm goes off, read the week’s “drop” again, as the entire NALC gathers to read Scripture and pray together at the same time every day.

Is God Calling You to go to India?

Last February, a delegation from the NALC traveled to various parts of India for 10 days to officially inaugurate the NALC’s partnership with UEM and India Transformed. The delegation, including Bishop John Bradosky, Dr. Gemechis Buba and other key leaders and volunteers, was blessed 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.” Close to 200 evangelists, pastors, and other ministry workers gathered together for worship, teaching, and Bible study. Another primary purpose of this journey was to visit the NALC global workers that are sent by World Mission Prayer League (for more information, please visit: www.wmpl.org).

This October, Pastor Mike Malinsky will be leading a different type of trip to India in conjunction with the NALC. This will feature a combination of sports camps, eyeglass clinics and medical exams for the students, and fun times with the children’s home kids, as well as working with UEM leadership.

Please prayerfully consider taking part in this short-term mission Oct. 4-14. For more information, please contact Pastor Malinsky directly at mmalinsky73@gmail.com.

Please continue to lift up our brothers and sisters in prayer. What these global workers and colleagues at UEM face every day is a deep struggle in the midst of terrible physical and spiritual poverty. It is a great joy to see the Gospel so powerfully at work.

Discipleship Moments

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

The Discipleship Moments are available online at www.thenalc.org/discipleship-moment.

The videos are also available in the NALC’s Facebook group.

Annual Gathering for NALC women

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering will take place Aug. 11-12 under the theme, “A Gathering of Witnesses.”

The women will meet 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday.

Tuesday’s theme is “A Gathering of Witnesses: Secure in Christ’s Love, Christians Tried and True.” Keynote speaker is Pastor Donald G. Miles, president of India Transformed, a ministry in partnership with an Indian ministry to plant churches and care for abandoned children.

Other speakers on Tuesday are Ida Martinson of China Service Ventures, on “The Costs and Joys of

Witnessing in China,” and Carnen Hale of Elam Ministries on “The Bold & Courageous Church in Iran.”

Wednesday morning’s theme is “A Gathering of Witnesses: Commissioned by the Lord, Laborers in the Harvest.” Keynote speaker will be NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

Those at the Annual Gathering will also elect five members of The Women’s Council.

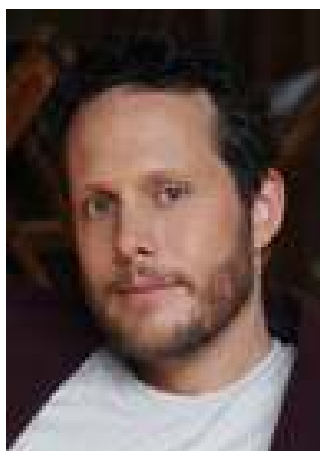
Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$75 registration fee. You may register for the Women’s Gathering and other Lutheran week events at www.thenalc.org.

NALC Mission Festival is Nov. 5-7

“Mission Possible” is the theme of the NALC’s 2015 Mission Festival Nov. 5-7 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio, with the main theme focusing on the relationship between discipleship and mission.

Keynote speakers for the festival include Bishop John Bradosky; Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, and Pastor Henry Graf.

Pastor Graf is the pastor of Promise Ministries in Fort Wayne, Ind. He is the coauthor of *More Than a Story*. He is passionate about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Following his most recent book tour, his congregation has been gracious in sharing his time with the larger body of Christ, including Youth Encounter events across the country, connections with the Danish Lutheran Church and, most recently, taking the stage at TEDx Fort Wayne.



Pastor Henry Graf



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

The NALC’s annual Mission Festival is a training resource for Mission Districts and congregations.

Early-bird registration for the Mission Festival is now open at \$75 per person. The rate increases to \$100 per person on Sept. 1. For more information or to register go to: thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015.

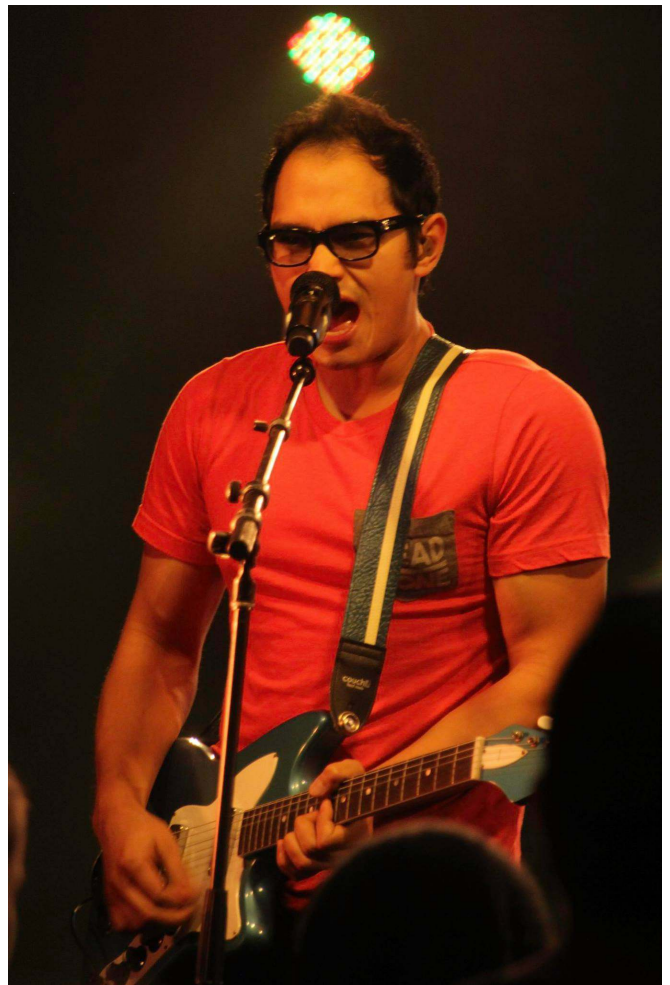


Pastor Bill Yonker

IMPACT

National Youth Gathering

Chicago - June 25-28



Bill Kristijanto, one of the musicians from Bread of Stone which led music for Impact.



Nancy Kinyanzwa Jepkoech



Happy Fun Time

Photos by David Budnick, a youth from St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Winnipeg.

You can view more of David's excellent photography at davidbudnick.smugmug.com.

Continuity Challenge for Congregations

The clergy shortage is upon us. Congregational vacancy lists grow longer. The Boomer pastors are retiring in droves.

And the next generation of pastors?

As I've mentioned in previous columns, only half as many Millennials attend church compared to Boomers back in the 1980s. So don't hold your breath waiting for significant numbers of younger seminary graduates to become available for call.

What's needed for long-term ministry continuity is an entirely different congregational leadership paradigm. Otherwise, far too many congregations will end up closing their doors due to the lack of pastoral candidates available for full-time calls.

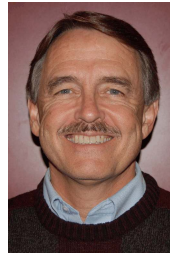
Seminaries are desperately trying to adjust. The emergence of more online courses is one way they are adapting to a decreasing number of potential residential, on-campus students. However, this might be a case of too little too late.

A traditional seminary education as the norm is increasingly becoming a thing of the past. By one estimate, 50 percent of Protestant seminaries will be closing within the next decade. Probably an exaggerated prediction, but still a hint of how rapidly things are changing.

How can your congregation adapt to this new reality when it comes to the limited supply of seminary-trained, full-time pastors?

1. Retired part-time clergy are still available in many parts of the country. Lots of Boomer pastors are retiring, and some are not adjusting all that well to their new life-stage. Some of them would love an opportunity to be involved in ministry on a part-time basis.

2. Perhaps a trusted, gifted member of your congregation would consider seminary studies. These could begin online. This person might only have to do one year of full-time residential study. The rest could happen with distance learning. Check with the North American Lutheran Seminary,



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

the NALC office, St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, or the Institute of Lutheran Theology for some options. Or consider Fuller Seminary, which is extremely innovative regarding online study options and now has seven satellite campuses in the United States.

3. Develop a long-term strategy for recruiting and sustaining lay leadership for most of your ongoing ministries. This could include both compensated (typically part-time) staff, and volunteers. Note: Even a small stipend paid for a key ministry leadership responsibility can serve to legitimize that leader in the eyes of your congregation. It also brings an added level of accountability to that position. Examples of positions that can be well served by lay leaders include worship music leadership, small groups coordinator, community service director, children's ministry, youth ministry, and seniors ministry director.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that the developing clergy shortage signals the death knell for vibrant and effective congregational ministry. The fact is, very few Lutheran congregations have realized their full potential when it comes facilitating lay leadership. And these lay ministry opportunities will more often than not prove to be a blessing to those who step forward.

The late Erma Bombeck, a well-known columnist, once said, "When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left and could say, 'I used everything You gave me.'" In far too many of our congregations gifted lay people are denied the opportunity to fully utilize their God-given gifts and talents.

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Martin Luther toy is fastest selling ever

A little plastic Martin Luther may be just as popular in Europe in 2015 as the Reformer was 500 years ago.

A little three-inch plastic Martin Luther toy has become the fastest-selling Playmobil figure of all time.

The German toy manufacturer announced in February that the first edition of 34,000 pieces sold out in less than 72 hours, forcing the company to urgently request its factory to produce more of the “little Luthers.”

Dressed in his 16th century academic robes and sporting a neat brown bob, little floppy cap, big brown eyes, and c-clamp hands, Martin Luther stands ready as he holds his tiny quill pen and a copy of his New Testament in German.

The Little Luther was produced as a part of Germany's celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 at the request of church and tourism officials.

Luther is revered in Germany not only as the Reformer of the church but also as the father of the German language.

The only other German figure that matches Luther's strong sales is the German painter and artist Albrecht Dürer whose toy sold 80,000 pieces



Playmobil's Martin Luther has become the company's fastest-selling toy ever.

over three years. Dürer was a contemporary and supporter of Luther.

Concordia Publishing House is among those selling the Luther toy in North America. You can order him for \$9.99 from cph.org.

Little Luther is ready to help children and adults celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

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Bottom line is that a significant percentage of congregations will not have much choice in this matter. This is urgent. It's time to prepare for a future when the availability of full-time, seminary-trained pastors will be something we will not be able to take for granted. It's time — even if it is partly motivated by necessity — to fully embrace the priesthood of all believers.

The Biblical vision for this is perhaps best expressed in 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9: “As you come to him,

the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Pastor Don Brandt serves Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore. You may contact him at donb@oursaviorssalem.org.



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