

Pastor Didi Panzo begins work in Democratic Republic of the Congo

It is almost two months since Pastor Didi Panzo reached the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Stepping yet again into a vastly different culture — and something completely different from what he has experienced in these last months in the United States — he and his family prepared to continue their work as NALC Global Workers with World Mission Prayer League.

Pastor Panzo's arrival in the DRC was very challenging. He encountered difficulty obtaining a visa — something that was not new to his family after his previous time living and working in the country of Ecuador — and the expectation of furnished housing prepared for his arrival met further delays while it took two weeks to make the property livable.

Some of the other challenges facing Pastor Panzo as he gets settled in the DRC are the weather, which has been quite extreme with heavy rain every two days and a "burning sun," and the lack of consistent electrical service. The electricity in the DRC is a big problem, as there might be electrical power for five hours and then nothing for two to three days.



Those who are native to the DRC are used to that style of life, but it is a big challenge for Pastor Panzo. He has been complaining every day, but says no one listens to your cry for help. No one is able to solve the issue if you are not "connected." Streets are muddy and crowded; old cars and trucks pollute the air with smoke from the exhaust pipes; trash is everywhere, but life continues.

Since his arrival, Pastor Panzo has made the effort to accomplish what was planned on his check list. This is no simple task, but it is a moment to give thanks for in this incredible life transition. There are

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also many reasons to praise God, among them finding two faithful friends from one of the Evangelical churches in town.

His new friends are constantly helping him adjust to this new home, culture, and way of life in big and small ways. Whether it's killing the snake that was found outside the bathroom, or simply praying together, it is a blessing to have family in Christ Jesus.



Pastor Panzo has also had the opportunity to visit two churches since his arrival. One is an Evangelical church, and the other is a confessional Lutheran church the NALC is beginning to work with. Both churches were extremely welcoming, and Pastor Panzo was received with incredible enthusiasm. God willing, these are among the churches that will be partnering to assist sexual abuse victims and prevent domestic violence.

Pastor Panzo thanks God continually for the partnership that has made this transition possible. Black Forest Lutheran Church (Colorado Springs, Colo.), St. John's Lutheran Church (Greenville, Ohio), and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (Abington, Pa.) have funded the purchase of a used four-wheel-drive vehicle that is in good condition and will allow for mobility in the DRC.



Pastor Panzo's wife, Serafina, recently departed the United States and arrived safely in the DRC, where she will partner in this work that God has prepared in advance for them to do. Prayers for safety, endurance through adversity, peace, and wisdom would be greatly appreciated.

For more information on how you can partner with Pastor Panzo's work through World Mission Prayer League or to receive updates, please visit: thenalc.org/global-workers.

Nominations open for Executive Council, Court, Board of Regents

Nominations are now being received for positions to be elected at the NALC Convocation Aug. 10-12 in Anaheim, Calif.

The Convocation will elect two members of the NALC Executive Council (one lay person and one pastor) and one member of the Court of Adjudication to four-year terms.

The Convocation will also elect four members of the Board of Regents for the North American Lutheran Seminary. Three people will be elected to six-year terms and one person to a four-year term.

Congregations and individuals are welcome to nominate individuals for any of the open positions.

Nominations are also welcome for the Nominating Committee. Names received for the Nominating Committee will be forwarded to NALC Executive Council which will propose a slate of Nominating

Committee members to the Convocation for confirmation.

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

Please submit nominations by May 1. This will enable the committee to meet the constitutional deadline to make biographical information available to NALC members.

To submit a nomination, complete the Nomination Form available on the NALC website (under the 2016 Convocation tab) and return it to the Nominating Committee.

Nominees will be asked to complete the Nominee Biographical Form (also available online).

Questions may be addressed to the Nominating Committee at nominations@thenalc.org.

Congregations ratify amendments

NALC congregations have ratified several amendments to the NALC constitution that were approved by the 2015 NALC Convocation.

The amendments were ratified by 221 of the 228 congregations that voted. Three congregations voted against the amendments, and there were four invalid votes.

The amendments are all related to a change in the relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC. The amendments required a two-thirds majority of the NALC congregations voting by the Feb. 14 deadline.

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

Annual Reports from congregations

NALC congregations are reminded to complete their annual reports to the North American Lutheran Church. If congregations complete this report, the NALC will be able to report accurate membership statistics.

To make this process easier for congregations, the annual report has been divided into two parts. The first part includes only basic membership and financial statistics. A link to this form has been sent to congregations by email.

Contact the NALC Administrative Office at 888-551-7254 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org if your congregation did not receive the report or if you have any questions about how to complete it.

Speakers announced for Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology

Speakers for the annual Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology have been announced. The annual theological conference, held prior to the NALC Convocation, is scheduled for Aug. 9-10 in Anaheim, Calif.

Widely-respected Lutheran theologian, Dr. Carl E. Braaten is among the speakers for the NALC's annual lecture series named in his honor. Other speakers that have been announced include Dr. Phillip Cary, Dr. Wesley Hill, Dr. Mickey L. Mattox, and Dr. Michael Pasquarello III.

The 2016 lectures will respond to our Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" and reflect on the Church's answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Dr. Carl Braaten has been one of the leading theologians and teachers in the Lutheran Church for the past 50 years. He has authored and edited numerous books, journals and theological papers. He taught at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago for many years. He later founded the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.

Dr. Phillip Cary is Professor of Philosophy at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pa. He earned his doctorate and master's degrees from Yale University.

Dr. Cary is the author of four books on the theology of St. Augustine. He also authored *Good News for Anxious Christians*, "a little book based largely on conversations with his students where he hopes to lure them into trusting the Gospel rather than applying a whole slew of 'practical' ideas to their lives — unbiblical ideas that do little more than make them anxious."

Dr. Wesley Hill is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa. He is a graduate of Wheaton College and



Carl E. Braaten



Phillip Cary



Wesley Hill



Mickey L. Mattox



Michael Pasquarello

Bethlehem College and Seminary. He earned master's and doctoral degrees from Durham University in Durham, England.

Dr. Hill is the author of three books: *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters*; *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*; and *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*.

Dr. Mickey L. Mattox is Professor of Historical Theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis. He earned his doctorate at Duke University

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‘Holy God, Holy Lives’ is theme for 2016 NALC Convocation

“Holy God, Holy Lives” is the theme of the 2016 NALC Convocation and Mission Festival Aug. 10-12 at the Wyndham Anaheim Garden Grove Hotel in Anaheim, Calif. The theme is based on 1 Peter 1:16: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The NALC Convocation opens with worship at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 10. A Mission Festival will be the focus of the Convocation for most of Wednesday afternoon and Thursday. The Mission Festival is designed to inspire and serve as a resource to congregations. The Convocation is scheduled to conclude at 5 p.m. on Friday.

The Rev. Dr. Malcolm Guite, Chaplain of Girton College of the University of Cambridge, England, is the featured guest speaker for the Convocation.

Dr. Guite describes himself as a poet-priest of the Anglican Church, giving lectures, concerts and poetry readings. He collaborates with musician Steve Bell, who was featured at the 2015 NALC Convocation. The two will blend their unique gifts to highlight the Convocation theme.

The \$185 registration fee for the Convocation includes Wednesday dinner and lunch on Thursday and Friday.

The Convocation is preceded by the Women of the NALC Annual Gathering and the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology.

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering will be held on Tuesday, Aug. 9, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. One delegate from each congregation may vote at the Annual Gathering. Additional congregational members may attend as visitors. The \$75 registration fee includes lunch.

The Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology are scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, Aug. 9, and Wednesday morning, Aug. 10. The \$115 registration fee for the lectures includes lunch on Wednesday.

To register or for more information on any of the events during Lutheran Week go to thenalc.org.

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and holds master's degrees from both Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Simon Greenleaf School of Law.

Dr. Mattox is a historical theologian with primary expertise in the life and theology of Martin Luther. His first book, *Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs*, argued for the broad catholicity of Luther's evangelical readings of the stories of the women of Genesis. He is the co-author of *Changing Churches: An Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran Theological Conversation* which explains his conversion to Roman Catholicism and offers a theological account of the give and take involved in conversion from the Lutheran faith tradition to the Roman Catholic or Orthodox.

Dr. Michael Pasquarello III is the Lloyd John Ogilvie Professor of Preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif. Prior to joining the Fuller faculty in 2015, he taught preaching for 14 years at Asbury Theological Seminary. He earned a doctorate and a master's degree in the history of Christianity from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He earned his M.Div. from Duke Divinity School.

Dr. Pasquarello is the author of several books including *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* and *Sacred Rhetoric: Preaching as Theological and Pastoral Practice of the Church*. One of his forthcoming books is entitled, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Homiletic Theologian*.

To register or for more information go to thenalc.org.

Youth Encounter ending its ministry

In 51 years of ministry, Youth Encounter reached 8 million people

After 51 years of successful and fruitful ministry, Youth Encounter — formerly Lutheran Youth Encounter — will conclude its ministry. Youth Encounter will finish its event season and service-based programs in April.

A special gathering celebrating the ministry of Youth Encounter is planned for 7 p.m. Thursday, March 31, at Discover Church in Brooklyn Park, Minn. Speakers and bands that have participated in the ministry of Youth Encounter will be a part of the event thanking God for all that He has done through Youth Encounter. Among those featured at the event will be Pastor Bill Yonker, a long-time event speaker, and the bands Echelon and Lost and Found. All donors, alumni, staff, and friends are welcome and invited.



Events like this 2014 Impact youth gathering were a significant part of the ministry of Youth Encounter.

Youth Encounter has been a Ministry Partner of the North American Lutheran Church since the NALC's founding.

"Youth Encounter was one of our first Ministry Partners. They have offered training and youth events that have blessed many of our congregations," said NALC Bishop John Bradosky. "Youth Encounter has touched the lives of countless youth with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the United States as well as in many other countries.

"Both those they served and those serving on Youth Encounter Teams have heard Christ's call to a variety of ministry vocations. Many still serve Christ in the Church and some are involved in leadership positions in the NALC," Bishop Bradosky said.

"As both culture and needs change, ministries must adapt but never compromise the Gospel or the Word of God. While the methods and needs have changed — forcing an end to this ministry — Youth Encounter was faithful to Christ without compromise. Their legacy continues to bless the NALC and many

other church bodies around the world. However, the immediate impact of this decision will affect the lives of current leaders. Please pray for all those whose lives are adversely affected by these changes. Pray for opportunities to continue service to Christ and His Church through the faithful use of their spiritual gifts," said Bishop Bradosky.

According to a Feb. 29 announcement from Youth Encounter, several factors have contributed to the situation resulting in the end of its work, including declining numbers of youth in the church, an increasingly competitive market for the attention of youth, and a challenging fundraising landscape. Youth Encounter has seen participation numbers and overall support decline for the past 10-15 years, creating debt and an unsustainable business model.

Youth Encounter had made significant efforts to reverse these trends. In 2014, Thomas O'Neill was called as the new president and was tasked with

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turning the organization around. Despite making significant headway in monthly giving, creating new programs to engage new markets, and making structural changes to cut overhead, there was not enough time to let these programs take effect and turn the organization around.

Over the past several months, the Governing Board of Directors and O'Neill have looked into every available option, including partnerships with other youth ministry organizations. Although alternative ministry models were explored, the current financial situation and available resources made closing down operations the only viable option.



The Christian band Echelon, which grew out of the ministry of Youth Encounter, leads worship at a Youth Encounter event.

“While it is not easy to mourn the closing of an organization, we also need to celebrate how big of an impact this organization has had,” O'Neill said.

Since 1965, Youth Encounter has shared the Gospel with young people in 32 different countries, has worked in and with thousands of churches across the United States, and has engaged over 8 million people.

Of greater impact are the 2,500 alumni who have served on traveling ministry teams. Not only did they serve as the “face” of Youth Encounter, but 72 percent have gone on to work in full or part-time ministry, further multiplying the number of people who are impacted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lutheran Youth Encounter was founded in 1965, with the idea of sending college students in a team format to bring contemporary music to the church at large. These teams traveled the United States and later to 32 different countries around the world.

As the ministry grew, large events called Congresses (later called Quakes and Zones) were added to further impact youth ministry in the United States.

Along with these two legacy programs, Youth Encounter has also spawned dozens of other ministries, including Spoke Folk, Side-by-Side, and Youth Create.

“The Governing Board of Directors and the staff at Youth Encounter are incredibly thankful for the many supporters, volunteers, host families and partner churches that have made this ministry so impactful throughout the years,” the announcement said. “God has wonderful plans for the future, and He will continue to use the Youth Encounter family to His glory. We have faithfully served and fulfilled His mission!”

In addition to expressing gratitude for the ministry of Youth Encounter, Bishop Bradosky focused on the NALC's continued work to provide resources for congregational youth ministry through a partnership with faithwebbing.com. “We celebrate the past even as we look forward to our new focus on youth ministry in the NALC. Gary Pecuch of faithwebbing.com is leading congregations in youth ministry through ‘Faith Webbing’ and ‘Outcome Based Youth Ministry,’” Bishop Bradosky said.

“We have been aware of the challenges Youth Encounter has been facing over the past several years. That reality forced us to find other youth and family ministries that are working and bearing fruit. This is a very helpful direction for the future that is a perfect fit with our focus on discipleship,” he added.

More information on the ministry of Youth Encounter and the March 31 event is available online at www.youthencounter.org

Rod Dreher and Peter Leithart to speak at Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

“Relevant or Remnant?” is the theme of the 2016 Canadian Rockies Theological Conference April 5-8 at the Coast Canmore Hotel and Conference Centre in Canmore, Alberta. Featured speakers are Peter J. Leithart and Rod Dreher.

The 2016 conference, which organizers describe as “A Call to Faith from the Fringes,” will be held at the Coast Canmore Hotel in Canmore, Alberta — just outside of beautiful Banff National Park.

Dr. Leithart is President of Theopolis Institute and an adjunct Senior Fellow of Theology at New St. Andrews College in Moscow, Idaho. He is ordained in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

He is the author of many books including *Defending Constantine*, *Against Christianity*, and *Deep Exegesis*. His most recent books are *Gratitude: An Intellectual History*, *Traces of the Trinity*, and *Delivered from the Elements of the World*. He writes a bi-weekly online column for the journal *First Things* — firstthings.com. He has published articles in many periodicals, both popular and academic.

Dr. Leithart’s three lectures are titled “Faith in an Apocalyptic Age” with these three sub-titles: “Harlot and Beast,” “Witness,” and “Worship.”

Rod Dreher is a senior editor at *The American Conservative* — theamericanconservative.com. He has written and edited for the *New York Post*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *National Review*, and other publications. His commentary has been widely published and broadcast. His books include *How Dante Can Save Your Life*, *The Little Way of Ruthie Leming*, and *Crunchy Cons*.

Dreher’s three lectures are titled: “From Medieval to Postmodern: How We Got Here,” “The Benedictine Achievement,” and “The Benedict Necessity.”

Each of the speakers will respond to the other’s presentations and interact with those in attendance.



Rod Dreher



Peter Leithart

NALC Pastors Karl Johnsen and Phillip Gagnon, the organizers of the conference, offer this explanation of the conference theme:

For many years Christians of the western world have looked for ways to make ourselves relevant. ... But for the past several decades, despite our attempts to be relevant, the church in the western world has been in steady decline. ... The church in North America and Western Europe has in all of its expressions been steadily pushed away from the center, and toward the fringes of society. This has been a cause of anxiety and concern. But still we hear the call to make ourselves relevant, always with the expectation that things are about to turn around.

But what if this does not happen? What if we do not experience (at least in our lifetimes) a great revival?

... Though this may be the case, it need not be a cause of despair. Instead let it be a cause of us to consider how to be faithful in a world that finds us increasingly irrelevant. How might we keep the lamps trimmed and burning until such time as our Lord returns or calls us back from exile?

More information on the theological conference is available on Facebook or on the NALC website.

How Easy It Is to Be Distracted

I encouraged you at the beginning of this Lenten season to keep your eyes focused on Jesus. That is not an easy task when the distractions seem so powerful and attractive. In one of my readings from the Psalms (26:2) with David I prayed that the Lord would examine my heart and my mind. Even with sound doctrine and the authoritative Word of God in my life constantly helping me to focus on Jesus, I become even more aware of my sinful nature.

Some of the sins are easy to recognize and confess: pride, envy, hatred, greed, lust, self-justification, a lack of discipline... I could go on, but perhaps your own list has captivated your thinking.

As this season draws to a close and we enter into Holy Week, I am focused on the more subtle nature of evil and sin that seems to loom underneath the surface of nearly every other sin. It is so prevalent yet it always seems to surprise me when I recognize and name it.

Not long ago on Christmas Eve I was seated beside my son at worship. In between the wondrous preludes, he put his hand on my knee and said, "Dad, this is a special day!" I acknowledged that Christmas Eve is a very special occasion. Then he said, "Dad, this is special because it is the first time in my life that I have been able to celebrate Christmas Eve with you!" It was hard to hold back the tears as I reflected on my ministry during his entire life. Worship schedules always included services at 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 p.m. By the time I returned home the family was asleep and I was exhausted. As he saw the tears in my eyes, he quickly apologized, "I didn't mean it that way, Dad! I am just glad we have this time together now."

What he did not realize was that my greater guilt was not a result of his comment but how blind I was to his perspective. I never asked how my children perceived me in the hectic pace of my life in ministry. What has the capacity in our life to so blind us from seeing the truth? It is the subtle seduction of selfish ambition. In all of our longing to keep Jesus in clear focus, how easy it is to replace Him with ourselves — our need to be the center of attention. That old idiot ego becomes the focus.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

We strive to be different, to see ourselves as unique, educated, above others. We discover in the Word an important insight into Christ but use it to make ourselves look insightful! The Holy Spirit inspires us and we use it to help people recognize how "Spirit filled" we are. This selfish ambition seems to always lurk below the surface of every sin as we long to be valued and treasured by others.

Martin Luther also understood the subtle distraction of selfish ambition. He writes, "Even people who have a good understanding of God's Word often stumble over this sin. This sin causes all heresies. As the saying goes, 'Ambition is the mother of heresies and sects.' People must pray every day that God would keep this secret rebel inside of them in check. We can't do enough to protect ourselves from this shameful wickedness. Other human vices are so crude that we easily perceive them but this one sneaks up on us. It disguises itself as honoring God and doing what His Word tells us to do. However, selfish ambition lays hiding like a secret rebel behind it all."

Focusing on Jesus always reveals more about ourselves, our sins and our sinful nature. It is the wonder of His grace that frees me to face the truth about myself without fear. The assurance of salvation through faith in Him frees me for repentance. The journey of Lent leads me to new life in Him and to the understanding of the fruitless, destructive absurdity of selfish ambition. For we are so loved and so treasured by God that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

May He grant us such peace as this journey draws to a close.

Journey of St. Elias Christian Church

St. Elias Christian Church is a multi-national mission congregation on the north side of Chicago, worshipping in the Arabic language. It was founded in 1995 by the Rev. Rimón Said, a native of Jerusalem.

St. Elias Christian Church serves immigrants who left their native countries to seek a better life in the United States. Many of its members have fled war and persecution in their homelands.

St. Elias Church began with 15 people who attended the church regularly for Sunday worship services. All members are Christians who come from different backgrounds and denominations. There are people from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan, and sometimes there are attendees from Egypt and Sudan.

While Pastor Said and his family come from a Lutheran background, most families are originally from the Greek Orthodox, Assyrian Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical churches.

It was not easy for Pastor Said to start a church where none had existed before. One of the challenges he faced was how to transition people from Orthodox and Catholic backgrounds to Protestant traditions, helping them to understand the Bible as they should.

None of the members were familiar with hearing a sermon, participating in singing hymns, or taking leadership. Pastor Said and his family spent a lot of time and energy helping people become comfortable with singing hymns and listening to a sermon.

The increasing harshness of the war in the Middle East over the last few years has caused many St.



Elias members to lose family members back home, and they have become more disappointed and depressed. Political issues affect all of the congregation's people. Many provide financial support to their families in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Some people left the congregation because they do not agree with each other about what is happening in the Middle East.

St. Elias Christian Church needs your help. First and foremost they need you to pray for them as a congregation. Then, helping their congregation financially, if you are able, would be very much appreciated. Their members are very poor and many send most of their money back home to support their families. If you feel that God is guiding you to help a multi-national mission congregation like St. Elias Christian Church, they would deeply appreciate your help. Upon your request, they would like to send you their monthly newsletter, which is printed in Arabic and English, so you can read more about the congregation and its activities.

To learn more about St. Elias Christian Church or to support their ministry please visit www.thenalc.org/north-american-missions.

What Is a Pastor?

A Pastor Must Be Found Trustworthy

St. Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2:

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

In this instance, Paul is writing about himself as an apostle. However, we can hear him speaking also to pastors and other leaders in the Body of Christ. Pastors are indeed called to be servants of Christ and so stewards of the mysteries of God. And Paul says — when you are called to be a steward — you must be found trustworthy. As we continue our series on pastors and pastoral leadership, one of the most important challenges is for the servant of Christ to be found trustworthy!

A wise pastor once shared with me that the pastor ought to make no significant changes until earning the love, confidence and trust of the congregation. The customary rule was to wait at least a year before making big changes in a congregation. In some congregations and with some pastors, it may take longer than that.

Once there is confidence and trust, a pastor's ministry will generally thrive. Until that exists, the congregation may view every action, decision and initiative of the pastor as suspect. Trust is the key to pastoral leadership and faithful shepherding. The question remains, however — how does the pastor earn the trust and confidence of the congregation?

The answer may sound ridiculously simple: A pastor earns the trust of the congregation by showing herself or himself *worthy* of trust! How does the pastor accomplish that? There are a number of ways a pastor proves worthy of trust.

1. Preach the word in season and out of season, and preach only the Word of God! (2 Timothy 4:2). NALC Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring writes: "The most effective way for a pastor to build trust in



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Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

the congregation is through a faithful ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. Isaiah says, 'Thy word shall not return to me empty.' Truer words were never spoken. A pastor who ministers the Biblical word of Law and Gospel, according to the Lutheran Confessions, is laying a firm foundation for an ongoing, trusting relationship with a congregation."

Unfortunately, in our time of shrinking worship attendance and involvement, pastors are often tempted to turn to what they hope might fill the pews once again, with all manner of stories, gimmicks and strategies. Put that together with our human need to push our own agenda in sermons, and in many places you will find the sermon time anything but preaching of the Word of God!

Congregations will naturally react to such abuse of pastoral position, as they will note, and rightly so, that they aren't being fed with the solid food of God's Word. They will sense the pastor is not worthy of their trust, offering something other than the Word of God.

2. Deep listening and openly sharing. Retired Bishop Ron Warren comments, "Building trust between a pastor and congregation includes a balance between deep listening which focuses on the other persons and openly sharing personal viewpoints with care and compassion. Jesus was a master of building trust in relationships."

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Most pastors, if they are honest, will admit that they are better *speakers* than *listeners*. This causes folks to perceive that the pastor thinks “it’s all about me — the pastor.” It is a constant challenge for pastors to be focused on and attentive to the other — the one who is sharing with us a hurt, a concern, a need. And then, being caring and compassionate, we may offer a personal response that meets them where they are. Trust develops as the other person senses that their pastor is truly listening and hearing what they are saying.

3. Keep confidential matters confidential.

Nothing shows that a pastor is not trustworthy more than the divulging of information intended to be confidential. It is critically important to the care of the souls entrusted to us that pastors keep confidences. Unless given specific permission to do so, pastors ought not share about the health, well-being or challenges of parishioners — not in sermons, not in announcement, and not in public prayers. The sharing of confidential information in just one or two circumstances will quickly convince the congregation as a whole that the pastor is not able to keep confidences. This lack of trustworthiness will often compromise the pastor’s ministry as a whole, as it raises doubts about the pastor’s commitment to the nature and aim of the call to ministry.

4. Pastoral visitation and awareness of the congregation’s history.

Retired Bishop Ralph Kemski states, “Pastoral visitation must be a priority when arriving in the parish. Pastors should listen carefully to members and be aware of the congregation’s history.” There are many reasons for pastors to visit the households and/or visit with those in their spiritual care. This is how relationships grow and develop. This is how trust is built, and this is how pastors come to understand and appreciate the congregation’s unique history, customs and culture. When a congregation comes to believe that the pastor truly values each and every follower of Jesus in his or her care, listening and seeking to be sensitive to what is important and cherished in this particular congregation, they will come to trust the pastor. The pastor will be seen as wanting to be part of the community, not an outsider trying to change long-held patterns and practices. It may well be that there are patterns and practices that

need to be changed, but change never happens effectively and positively until the shepherd has earned the love and trust of the congregation.

5. Build consensus and foster joint decision-making in all things. In this time when worship attendance and involvement are declining in all congregations, it is common for call committees and congregations to indicate in the call process that they are looking for a pastor who will shake things up and help the congregation “turn things around!” This leads the newly called pastor to come in ready to just that — and is surprised in six months when folks are complaining there are too many changes made unilaterally by the new pastor.

Someone sent me a cartoon of a church council meeting where someone says, “We need to get a new young pastor with lots of new ideas to help us do the same things we’ve always done!” This is all too true, and it is a trap. Regardless of the spoken intentions of call committees and councils about “stirring things up,” the new pastor ought not make unilateral changes or decisions about anything until earning the confidence and trust of the congregation, and especially the congregational leadership.

Listening to folks and learning the history of the congregation is Job Number 3 for the pastor, after Job Number 1, which is preaching and teaching the Word of God, and Job Number 2, which is showing oneself to be worthy of trust. Pastors who make changes too quickly to worship, sanctuary arrangements, structure, schedule, etc. will do so to their own peril. Similarly, a new pastor who begins a ministry by authorizing purchases and spending without the full consensus and support of the council will hinder the development of trust and confidence, creating difficulties down the road.

6. We build trust when we do what we say we’re going to do! This is important advice for each of us in any relationship — whether marriage, work, family, church. We build trust — we earn others’ trust when we do what we say we’re going to do. If a husband says he’s going to be faithful to his wife, but has an affair, he breaks trust and shows himself unworthy of trust. To rebuild that trust, he must be

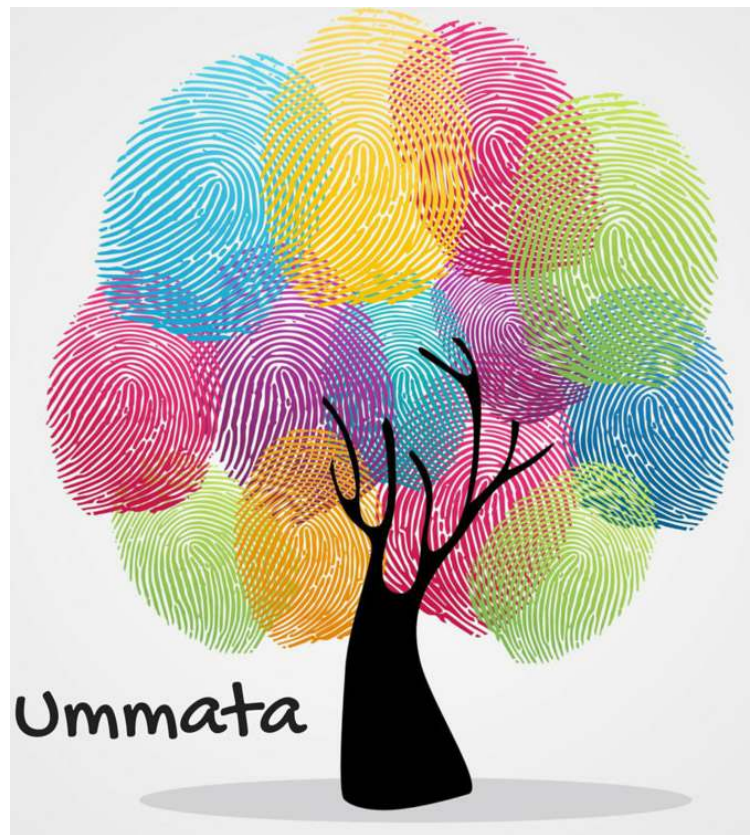
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Multi-National Mission and Leadership Conference is in April

Ummata: Multi-National Mission and Leadership Conference will be held April 11-13 at the Holiday Inn Express in Dublin, Ohio (suburban Columbus). Keynote speakers include Pastor Gemechis Buba and Pastor Brian and Christine Hughes.

Join us for this two-and-a-half-day training conference for multi-national pastors, evangelists and leadership teams, providing worship, teaching, training, discussion, and prayer centered on the theme, “Ummata,” the Oromo word for “community,” based on 1 Peter 2:9-10.

For more information or to register, please visit thenalc.org/ummata-conference!



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faithful, as he has promised. For a pastor or a council leader, people will trust us when we do what we say we will do.

If the pastor says he will visit a parishioner this week, he should visit that parishioner. If the pastor says she will be at a meeting, she must be at that meeting. Of course, emergencies happen and schedules change, but trust comes from being accountable, responsible and doing what we say. This is one of the simplest ways a pastor — or anyone — earns the trust of others! And just because we are in the loving, caring Body of Christ, we ought not think we are relieved of accountability, responsibility, and the need to be worthy of trust.

My hope is that these reflections on pastoral trustworthiness will be helpful to pastors and congregations, as we seek to more faithfully minister in Christ’s name, as servants of our Lord and joint stewards of the mysteries of God!

Thrivent Choice Dollars deadline is March 31

March 31 is the deadline for members of Thrivent Financial to designate Thrivent Choice Dollars from 2015 to the ministry or charity of their choice.

The North American Lutheran Church and North American Lutheran Seminary as well as most NALC congregations in the United States are eligible to receive Thrivent Choice Dollars.

Thrivent members who are eligible to direct Choice Dollars may do so online at www.thrivent.com or by calling 1-800-847-4836.

List of congregations seeking pastors is online

The updated list of congregations seeking NALC pastors is available online at thenalc.org/pastoral-vacancies.

What about our ‘Back-door’ Losses?

The summer 2015 issue of *Leadership* magazine included an article entitled “Meet the Dones.” Writer Joshua Packard, a college sociology professor, shared insights from his interviews of close to 100 individuals who have left the church.

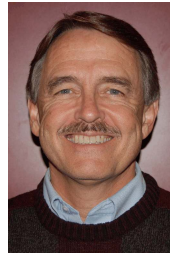
What these people had in common included:

- + They had once been “highly active” in their churches.
- + They initially didn’t want to leave and struggled over their decision.
- + “They felt stifled by church structure” and indicated that the church they left had a more hierarchical and less participatory leadership structure.
- + Many of those interviewed were disillusioned with churches that were more focused on programs and structures than on people and relationships.

Following are some personal observations based on my own ministry challenges and what I’ve learned from other pastors and lay leaders:

The above observation on “dones” emphasizing the importance of relationships over programs and structures is key. While new people are often drawn to a church based on the preaching, worship music, youth and children’s ministries, my sense is that *meaningful relationships* formed with other members are a more important factor when it comes to their long-term, active involvement in congregational life.

Granted, there are the exceptions to the rule. Sometimes a congregation grows by virtue of a pastor’s charisma and popularity. In these situations quality growth does not depend to the same degree on building relationships with other members. However, other issues can arise in this case including the difficulty of finding long-term support staff who are able to thrive in this kind of solo-leader congregational culture. Also, there is the challenge of the congregation adjusting to the eventual departure or retirement (or death) of this pastor.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

This principle regarding the importance of strong relational ties within congregations has been true for at least the last 50 years. But the importance of this principle has become even more evident as the number of “dones” (and “nones”) in North America has increased — and increased dramatically.

Don’t be fooled by the emergence of mega-churches these last 50 years. Much of the growth in mega-churches is due to bored, apathetic or disillusioned individuals who used to attend smaller congregations. These small-church “refugees” often connect with a program-driven mega-church as a way to have their “spiritual needs” met while being relatively anonymous in a larger church setting.

In other words, this is a way for them to be “fed” without any sense of accountability, whether in the giving of their time or money. And no matter how hard conscientious, mega-church leaders try to prevent it, a great many of their new people eventually “fall through the cracks.”

So the principle still holds true: Whether a church is large, mid-sized or small, meaningful involvement in congregational life depends, more often than not, on relationships.

A confession: While the congregation I serve has a healthy number of small groups, it is an ongoing challenge to address our “back door.” Small groups definitely help when it comes to facilitating relational connections within our congregation. However, there are always some people who are simply not motivated to become a part of a group — especially any group that already has a long history.

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Finally, some suggestions for those of you who are either pastors or congregational leaders frustrated by this back-door challenge.

Try not to “beat yourself up” over this challenge. We are living in a very challenging time for congregations. Some attrition is, dare I say, inevitable. Not everyone can be reached and then fully integrated into the life of your congregation. And, added to our challenges, denominational loyalty — something we used to take for granted — seems to be a thing of the past.

Once you’ve shed that sense of personal responsibility for those who have drifted away from

your congregation, try to periodically monitor the percentage of your members who are not only regular worshipers, but who are — or are not — connected to an ongoing class, volunteer ministry, or group. I realize that this can be a demoralizing exercise. But the challenge of building relational ties between members cannot be effectively addressed until you know what percentage of your people are *disconnected* and, consequently, are at risk for drifting into inactivity.

Then, two ideas for addressing this issue:

1. New groups and ministries for new and less active people. That is the single best programmatic strategy for integrating people into congregational life in a meaningful way.
2. For an inside-out, one-to-one, more spiritual effort to deepen the commitment of less-than-active members, consider the Navigator Church Ministries congregational renewal process I wrote about in my last column.



The North American Lutheran Church has an agreement with faithwebbing.com to provide congregational youth ministry coaching.

To get connected visit faithwebbing.com and fill out the contact form. The site is designed to provide forms, resources, and links for adults that work with children and youth.

You can also connect with consultants Gary and Laurie Pecuch through faithwebbing@gmail.com.

Two new resources have recently been added to faithwebbing.com: “Fundraising: Passive and Recycling Income” and a list of mission trip organizations.

Remember there are three remaining scheduled webinars for this school year. All three will run from 2 to 3 pm (ET). Registration details will be available about a week before each webinar and will be distributed through the usual NALC communications system.

March 15 - Faith Webbing - Part 2
April 19 - Website Tutorial
May 17 - Intro. to Outcome-Based Youth Ministry

Church Planting and Renewal Conference

Join the Virginia Mission District for a one-day conference focusing on church planting and renewal! The event is set for Saturday, April 2, from 8.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba will be presenting the keynote addresses.

This Regional Conference includes inspiring speakers, worship, small group, and exploration time. You don't have to be a part of the Virginia Mission District to be a part of this exciting day.

Workshops include: “Nuts and Bolts” of Planting a Church; Developing a Congregational Prayer Ministry; Discipleship 101; and Renewing and Reviving an Existing Congregation.

Please contact Pastor Brad Hales at: pastorhales@hotmail.com to register or for more information.



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