

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

January-February 2017

NALC pastors to gather in Florida for annual Pastors Conference

Pastors of the North American Lutheran Church will gather Feb. 14-16 in Orlando, Fla., for the 2017 NALC Pastors Conference. The conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza Orlando Universal.

This is one of two annual events that all pastors of the NALC are encouraged to attend. The other event is the annual NALC Convocation in August.

The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, noted Martin Luther scholar, is the featured speaker for this year's conference. He will give two presentations on Luther's Doctrine of Vocation and two presentations on the Lectionary preaching texts for Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

The focus on Martin Luther was chosen because of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation which will be observed in October of 2017.

Bishop John Bradosky will lead the annual meeting of the NALC Ministerium and a worship service that includes the renewal of ordination vows and the blessing of anointing oil for use in congregations.

An essay from the NALC's Church and Ministry task force will be presented on Tuesday evening. The essay will report progress on efforts toward an NALC statement on Church and Ministry and addressing the question of the ministry of deacons.

Bishop Bradosky sent a letter to all congregations asking congregational leaders and members to support and encourage their pastor's participation in the Pastors Conference and to provide financial support for their pastor to attend. Each pastor and congregation will benefit from participation.



The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen leading a Bible study at the 2016 NALC Convocation. Dr. Nestingen is the featured speaker at the 2017 NALC Pastors Conference. He will lead two Lectionary studies and present two lectures on Martin Luther's Theology of Vocation.

The \$125 registration fee includes breakfast and dinner on Wednesday and breakfast on Thursday. Clergy spouses, seminarians and non-NALC clergy are welcome to attend but must register to be included in the group meals. Additional information is available on the NALC website.

NALC leaders visit newly-elected church leaders in Africa

Lutheran churches in Ethiopia and Tanzania elect new leaders

NALC leaders traveled to Ethiopia and Tanzania to meet with the new leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).

NALC Bishop John Bradosky was invited to the EECMY 20th General Assembly Jan. 22-28 at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Bishop Bradosky was invited to bring a greeting to the Assembly. His message focused on Mark 11 — the lesson of the fig tree and Jesus' expectation that His disciples (and Church) will bear fruit. Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, was also a guest at the Assembly. Pastor Buba spoke at the anniversary banquet.

An important item on the Assembly agenda was the election of a new president to serve for the next four years. The Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa, outgoing president, has served two terms and could not be reelected.

The Assembly elected the Rev. Yonas Yigezu as the next president of the church. Yigezu was ordained in 2006 and is currently EECMY's Director for Mission and Theology. He holds master's degrees in church management and development policy management from Westhill College and Manchester University in England, and in divinity from the Union Theological Seminary in New York N.Y. He is currently pursuing his doctoral studies at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind.

The EECMY is the largest Lutheran Church body in the world, with about 8 million members.

The EECMY is the only full communion partner of the NALC. That relationship was approved by the 2011 NALC Convocation, ratified by NALC congregations soon after, and sealed by a signed



The Rev. Yonas Yigezu, newly-elected president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, addresses the church's General Assembly.

agreement in November 2012 with a delegation of EECMY leaders in Columbus, Ohio.

On the last day of the Assembly, Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, joined the delegation to witness the election and join Bishop Bradosky for the next leg of this ecumenical/inter-Lutheran journey.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

Following the EECMY Assembly, Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Wendel traveled to Arusha, Tanzania, at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, to meet with the new Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

The Rev. Dr. Frederick Onael Shoo was elected to a four-year term as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania at the Church Assembly at Makumira University near Arusha on Aug. 16, 2015.

Bishop Shoo was installed on Jan. 31, 2016. Prior to his election, Bishop Elect Shoo served as bishop of the ELCT's Northern Diocese. Bishop Shoo was ordained for pastoral ministry in 1986. He succeeds Bishop Alex Gehaz Malalusa, who has retired after completing two four-year terms as presiding bishop.

The NALC and the ELCT signed a Memorandum of Understanding in August of 2013.

Bishop Bradosky has visited Tanzania on two prior occasions as a guest of Presiding Bishop Malalusa and ELCT, leading Bible studies and speaking extensively on discipleship.

Representatives of ELCT have been present for all but one of the NALC's Convocations. Bishop Paull Spring, the NALC's first and provisional bishop, was installed by the Rev. Dr. Benson Bagonza, bishop of the ELCT's Karagwe Diocese, who also preached the installation sermon. In a very real sense, the ELCT is the "mother church" of the NALC.

With the election of a new bishop, it was important for NALC leadership to travel to Arusha to meet Presiding Bishop Shoo and discuss this special relationship.

Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Wendel were warmly greeted by Bishop Shoo and ELCT General Secretary Brighton Killewa. The leaders met for five hours, discussing the history of the NALC and its formation, the Memorandum of Understanding, and primary goals for the two church bodies.

A commitment to renewal of the ELCT Lutheran Junior Seminary (elementary and middle-school) in Morogoro was highlighted as a priority for the new presiding bishop, pending approval of the ELCT Council in March. It is anticipated that important information on this cooperative project will be announced at the 2017 NALC Convocation in



Pastor David Wendel, Presiding Bishop Frederick Onael Shoo, Bishop John Bradosky, and General Secretary Brighton Killewa pose at a meeting between Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and North American Lutheran Church leaders.

Nashville, Tenn. Leaders of ELCT have been invited to the Convocation.

In a note from Bishop Shoo following the meeting, he stated, "May our Lord continue to bless you and all the ministers and members of NALC. May the Lord bless us as we continue to witness and serve His people together. I was greatly touched by your unwavering faith and commitment to stand firm to the truth of the Holy Scripture. Please know that I will remember you in my prayers."

Following the consultation, the NALC leaders visited the Tumaini-Makumira University and School of Theology, and spent several hours consulting with the Rev. Dr. Joseph Parsalaw, Vice Chancellor; the Rev. Dr. Angela Olotu, Dean of the Theology Faculty; and the Rev. Dr. Faustin Marshall, Deputy Vice Chancellor and New Testament professor.

This was the second visit by Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Wendel to the ELCT school, and commitments were made to explore ways to strengthen relationships between the pastors, congregations and seminaries of the NALC and the ELCT.

Invitations have been extended to the three professors to attend the NALC Convocation and the theological lectures that precede it.

The ELCT is the world's second largest Lutheran Church with nearly 7 million members.

NALC Treasurer's Report

By Ryan Schwarz
NALC Treasurer

At the August 2016 NALC Convocation in Anaheim, I reported that the NALC was likely to operate at a significant financial deficit in 2016, and again in 2017 under the proposed budget (which was then approved by the Convocation). At this time I'd like to provide an update on financial results for 2016 and trends for the future.

Some Background

For those who were not at the previous year's Convocation, this probably came as a surprise. In the early years of the NALC, generous giving combined with modest startup expenses produced significant annual surpluses. By the end of 2014, the accumulated surplus had reached almost \$2.5 million, including both unrestricted funds and amounts earmarked for the seminary, missions, and other specific purposes.

However, as the growth of the NALC moderated in 2015, so did increases in donations.

Nonetheless, the NALC made investments: hiring of additional staff to serve congregations, launch of the North American Lutheran Seminary, and continued support for new mission start congregations. For those reasons, at the 2015 Convocation we forecasted a total deficit for 2015 of more than \$250,000 and proposed a budget



Ryan Schwarz, NALC Treasurer, addresses the NALC Convocation.

for 2016, approved by that Convocation, with a total deficit of almost \$350,000.

Due to the NALC's large accumulated surplus, it did not seem appropriate to express concern immediately. Those donations from past years were not meant to sit in the bank. Some use of the accumulated surplus to fund important initiatives was clearly appropriate. With time, it was hoped that giving would increase to match expenditures.

However, through the middle of last year no meaningful increase in giving had occurred. Believing that existing programs and activities are important, the Executive Council proposed a budget for the NALC in 2017 which included a total deficit of approximately \$450,000. This was a conscious decision to use some of the NALC's accumulated surplus to continue important

ministry initiatives, rather than scale back expenditures to match income in the near term. And for that reason, we highlighted the financial deficits at this past summer's Convocation.

2016 Financial Results

Since the Convocation, I am pleased to report that God's faithfulness in providing resources for our shared ministries has once again been demonstrated. Due to a few large one-time gifts and a surge in donations at the end of the year, the NALC ended with a smaller than expected operating deficit of \$50,000 and a surplus in the dedicated funds for missions and theological education of almost \$180,000.

The one-time gifts perhaps merit special note. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church was a small NALC congregation in Wichita, Kan., which disbanded in 2016. After selling its property and settling its affairs, the congregation gave \$100,000 to the North American Lutheran Seminary, \$75,000 to the Great Commission Fund for missions, and a smaller amount to the NALC's youth ministry efforts. At about the same time, a family which has generously supported the NALC in the past gave \$100,000 to the general operations of our church body.

Truly these gifts and the many others which flowed in during

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4

the past year reflect God's provision and the generosity of the congregations and members of the NALC.

We are thankful that with these one-time gifts, the NALC finished 2016 in solid financial shape, with only a very modest operating deficit and a significant surplus in the dedicated funds. While there was a noticeable increase in congregational benevolence at the end of 2016, total congregational benevolence for the full year 2016 showed no increase as compared to 2015. Our hope and prayer is that, in light of the faithful responses and energetic commitment of those at the 2016 NALC Convocation, the all-important congregational giving to the NALC will show significant increases in 2017.

With regard to expenditures, total operating expenses in 2016 came in \$80,000 below budget, due to reduced expenditures on staff travel and task force/committee meetings, as well as substantially fewer attendees at the 2016 Convocation than budgeted (which reduces meal costs and the like). Travel and meeting expenses are expected to increase a bit in 2017 as activities which were delayed or deferred in 2016 now come to pass.

Grant-making from the Great Commission Fund was lower

NALC Summary Financial Information - 2016
(unaudited and subject to adjustment)

<u>NALC Operations</u>	2016	2016	
<u>Income</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>% Diff</u>
Donations from Congregations	\$ 1,508,462	\$ 1,674,000	-9.9%
Donations from Individuals	207,969	57,000	264.9%
Registration Fees - Convo & Confs	101,490	138,250	-26.6%
All Other Donations and Income	38,613	18,000	114.5%
Total Income	<u>\$ 1,856,534</u>	<u>\$ 1,887,250</u>	-1.6%
<u>Expenses</u>			
Staff Compensation and Travel	1,230,697	1,240,857	-0.8%
Convocation and Conferences	204,814	252,150	-18.8%
Task Forces and Committees	168,226	204,000	-17.5%
Communications	79,493	64,000	24.2%
Administration and Other	225,384	228,401	-1.3%
Total Expenses	<u>\$ 1,908,614</u>	<u>\$ 1,989,408</u>	-4.1%
Net Operating Deficit	<u>\$ (52,080)</u>	<u>\$ (102,158)</u>	-49.0%
<u>NALS and Theological Education Fund</u>			
Income	\$ 578,652	\$ 476,000	21.6%
Expenditures - NALS Operations	312,811	450,030	-30.5%
Expenditures - Scholarships/Other	109,420	175,830	-37.8%
Net Operating Surplus	<u>\$ 156,421</u>	<u>\$ (149,860)</u>	N/A
<u>Great Commission Fund</u>			
Income	\$ 142,251	\$ 75,000	89.7%
Expenditures - Grants	121,157	170,000	-28.7%
Net Operating Surplus	<u>\$ 21,094</u>	<u>\$ (95,000)</u>	N/A

than budget in 2016 due to fewer applications for seed funding from mission-start congregations. NALS expenditures were below budget due cessation of the North Carolina House of Studies program and lower than expected administrative expenses. Seminarian scholarships were below budget due to fewer enrolled seminarians at the NALS in 2016 than budgeted. Both the number of mission congregations applying for grants and the number of seminarians on scholarship have subsequently increased for 2017.

A chart summarizing the NALC's financial results is printed on this

page. These numbers have not yet been audited and hence are subject to adjustment.

As many congregational leaders have expressed their intention to increase benevolence giving to the NALC, we are looking forward to a positive financial picture for 2017, as congregations implement new spending plans in the new year.

Note: Audited financial statements and other information are available on the NALC website. You may contact Ryan Schwarz at treasurer@thenalc.org with any questions.



March for Life

NALC members were among hundreds of thousands of participants in the 2017 March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 27. The march mourns the 58 million babies aborted in the 44 years since the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalized abortion in the United States. "The Power of One" was the theme of this year's march.



Who Is Jesus?

Dear disciples of Jesus,

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

Who is Jesus?

For many, Jesus is one big question mark. This is true even for many pastors and theologians of the Church. It is the reality they choose, unending uncertainty about the nature and identity of Jesus. Just one big question mark.

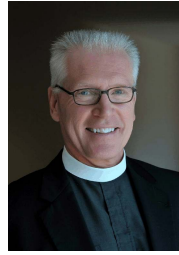
Some in our culture think of Jesus as complex, creative, and wise beyond our capacity to know or follow. Others see Him as simple and unrefined, having little to do with life today. Even more believe that everyone is entitled to make up their own mind about who Jesus is, and every opinion is just as right and true as any other opinion.

Have you ever asked yourself what's behind the question mark? Isn't it true that we love to question Jesus and assert ourselves as the ultimate authority? We love to diminish His authority in order to assert our own! We question His identity but seem self-assured about our own. We prefer our own little kingdom in which we reign. Who needs another kingdom when we can barely survive in this one? Even if this Kingdom of Heaven existed, who could really know anything about it?

Our faith does not rest on our personal opinions or the wisdom of others. It is built on the foundation of the revealed Word of God in Holy Scripture.

Epiphany is a season of light that reveals the truth of who Jesus is. It was revealed to the Wise Men by a star. It was revealed in Jesus' baptism. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended, and a voice from heaven proclaimed that Jesus is God's beloved Son.

Surrounding the Gospel for the Baptism of our Lord in the third chapter of Matthew, John the Baptist is addressing the very source of our confusion



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

regarding the nature and identity of Jesus. Our sinful nature reminds us that we have eaten from the tree of knowledge so that we can take the place of God, that we might be our own gods. This is the very issue that requires repentance, the washing of Baptism. John the Baptist is proclaiming that believing in yourself is a dead-end street. Believing in your holy genealogy without being rooted in God through faith in Christ will not only be fruitless but also result in ultimate condemnation.

John the Baptist is announcing that the Kingdom of God has come near. John is preparing the way for the Lord, a voice in the wilderness announcing the presence of Christ Jesus. He is baptizing people for repentance and forgiveness, but he boldly proclaims that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire — all-powerful and responsible for ultimate judgment.

Perhaps you may remember that the theme for our theological conference this past year was “Who do you say that I am?” - Lectures on the person of Christ.” In introducing the lectures, I made the following comment: “After Jesus called His disciples, He began to teach them. The Gospels record that central to His teaching is who He is, His identity. In Luke’s Gospel, for the first eight chapters — beginning with the announcement of His birth — Luke wants us to know who Jesus is. In their journey with Jesus, His followers discovered who He is and, I believe, He wanted them and us to know. Christian education and all catechesis must begin here, in boldly and confidently answering the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’”

Continued on Page 8

Continued from Page 7

In the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus tests what His disciples had been learning. He asks them two questions. First, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (This is the opinion poll question.) These people had only a brief exposure to Jesus. They had many opinions and ideas about the identity of Jesus. The disciples told Jesus what they had heard: "John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets." Then Jesus gets to what may be the most important question he ever asked the disciples. "But what about you, who do you say that I am?"

Their response is perhaps the single most important response a disciple of Jesus could ever make. Our faith, the faith of the Church, is built on the response of Peter. "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

I believe that question remains the single most important question a disciple of Jesus could ever answer. If we do not know who He is, why would we be willing to follow Him, entrust our lives to Him, believe in Him and give our lives for His purposes, His mission?

Jesus is who He claimed to be — the way, the truth and the life. He is the only source of salvation and redemption. We are not saved by theological concepts, but by a person, Jesus Christ. It is not our conceptions of faith or grace that save, but only faith in the person Jesus Christ and through the grace of Jesus Christ that we receive forgiveness and eternal life.

The nature and identity of Jesus Christ is not only central to our faith but just as essential to our witness. If we are unsure who Jesus is, how could we ever possibly tell others about Him? This is the starting place for evangelism and mission, as well.

Like Luke, Matthew does not want us to miss the true nature and identity of Jesus. Immediately following His Baptism, Jesus faces the tempting wiles of Satan and overcomes them with the power of God's Word. Matthew records Jesus' preaching, teaching, healing, calling disciples, modeling life in the Kingdom of Heaven, and sending out His disciples to do what he was doing: preaching, teaching and healing. Jesus is feeding the

multitudes, casting out demons, blessing children, performing miracles, and preparing His disciples for His death and resurrection, giving the Great Commission and strengthening their capacity to lead the Church following Pentecost.

Each step in the journey of Jesus that Matthew records reveals the nature of Jesus' identity. Jesus is symbolized not by a question mark but by His voice, His touch, His footprints, His cross, and the empty tomb.

Matthew wants us to know that this Jesus of Nazareth is the compassionate Savior of the world. His love and compassion are for all people — rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, the marginalized and those in power, the oppressed and those who are affirmed. Jesus is God's anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ. He is the fulfillment of all that God promised to his people and to the entire world in the Old Testament. Matthew makes it clear that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven breaks into our world.

True discipleship moves the question mark from Jesus' identity to our identity. The real question of life is not, "Who is Jesus?" but "Who am I in relationship to Christ?" Jesus is unchanging. We are the ones who are in constant need of transformation, and the human structures of the church are in constant need of reformation.

Baptism was not essential for Jesus but it is for us. In His baptism, Jesus is identifying with us, modeling the life of faith for us. The writer of the book of Hebrews brings even more clarity to Jesus' baptism. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need"* (Hebrews 4:15-16). Jesus has identified so completely with us that we can approach Him totally confident that He will understand us and that He is interested in all we do in our lives.

Through Baptism we are claimed by Christ, adopted as His children, heirs of His Kingdom. We are

Continued on Page 9

marked not by a question mark but by a cross — anointed by the Holy Spirit, promised forgiveness and eternal life in the Kingdom Jesus came to proclaim.

Baptism is not an insurance policy for heaven, but our boarding pass to a lifetime with Jesus. Baptism begins a relationship with Jesus which is nourished, fed, strengthened, enriched and kept alive by faithfully availing one's self of God's means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, and in the faithful presence of a community of disciples.

Jesus is not watching from a distance but joining us on the road of our pilgrimage through life, and He is interested in all aspects of our lives — our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures. This life begins with the gift of faith that grows and matures and is passed on through our lives in word and deed so that others come into that same life-giving relationship with Christ Jesus.

My identity is that of a disciple of Jesus, following Jesus by believing in Him, by loving Him, serving Him by serving others, and by being obedient to all that He has commanded.

Let me make just one more point regarding Matthew's description of the Baptism of Jesus: the point of divine affirmation. Jesus was praying and the God of all creation opened the heavens and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. And God spoke from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

Too often we seek outward affirmation from those around us. While there is nothing wrong with being liked or thought well of, there is a danger in putting too much value in the affirmation of others. As humans, we are relational beings, and it is natural to want to connect with others in a positive way. As we accept the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, we also wonder about our heavenly connectedness and its place and priority in our life.

Jesus was not seeking affirmation, but the Father showed up in this powerful way. Perhaps it was a sign to remind Jesus that he was not forgotten but that an ever-vigilant Father was affirming the work that Jesus had begun and would continue to do.

BAPTISM of the LORD



Perhaps it was a sign for us to love who the Father loves — His Son — and that none of us can accomplish God's will for our lives without His presence, encouragement and affirmation.

While we can never be certain why the Father showed up in the way He did, we can be certain, as we look at the life and ministry of Jesus, that it served His intended purpose. After His baptism Jesus continued to carry out God's plan for humanity with precision and assurance, even when confronted by adversaries, both human and satanic. Regardless of His opposition, Jesus did not allow anything to deter Him from completing His task in this life — securing our redemption and salvation through His life, death and resurrection.

Those who say it was easy for Jesus to do what He did because He was divine miss the weight of His humanity. In this life He faced all that you and I face. He dealt with any issue that you and I have or ever will have to encounter. Jesus led others by showing them what it was like to obediently follow the will of the Father. He commanded his disciples as one who followed the commands of His Father. Matthew is reminding us that God the Father was

Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

so pleased with the faithfulness of His one and only Son that He affirmed Jesus before those who needed to hear the affirmation.

That final point in the baptismal experience of Jesus is simply this: when God is pleased, nothing else matters.

Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians, “You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (*Galatians 3:26-27*). And so the words spoken to Jesus at His Baptism are words for us to hear. They are addressed to us right now in this moment, “You are my Son, you are my Daughter, with you I am well-pleased.” St. Augustine paraphrases, [God says to us] “On You I have set my favor; through You I am doing what is my pleasure.”

Through you I am blessing your family.

Through you I am changing your workplace.

Through you I am working my perfect plan.

Through you I am strengthening my ministry in this congregation.

You are God’s beloved. Everything must start there; and sometimes you will have to fight to keep your identity clear.

2017 — like every year — will have its ups and downs. “Remember who you are.”

Some ventures will fail. Some will succeed. “Remember who you are.”

Temptations will come for you to give up or become cynical. “Remember who you are.”

In our own Baptism Jesus says to us: “You are my Beloved, in you I am pleased.”

It is good to be with you following Jesus in this new year.

Bishop John Bradosky

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

“Auschwitz and Addis: The Church and Persecution” is the theme of the 2017 Canadian Rockies Theological Conference May 9-12 in Canmore, Alberta.

Featured speakers are the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, and the Rev. Dr. Paul Hinlicky, Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College in Salem, Va.

The conference will consider how the Christian church has in the past become complicit in movements that have led to the persecution of innocent people by those who claim allegiance to Jesus Christ. Dr. Hinlicky will speak about what Christians can learn from the rise of Nazism in Germany. Dr. Buba will address the situation in Ethiopia under the Communist Derg.

The conference is held at the Coast Canmore Hotel in Canmore, Alberta — just outside of the beautiful Banff National Park.



Gemechis Buba



Paul Hinlicky

NALC Pastors Karl Johnsen and Phillip Gagnon are the organizers of the conference.

More information on the conference is available on the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference Facebook page or on the NALC website.

From Now On

A report from the NALC Church Planting Conference

The North American Lutheran Church was blessed to host a church planting conference Jan. 5-6 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Ga. The theme, “Plant, Grow, Bloom — It’s Not an Option!”, provided a good Biblical grounding to help the presenters — Pastor Richard Dalton, Pastor Trina Petersen, and Pastor Wendy Berthelsen — share training and teaching.

We were blessed to have over 50 people in attendance. We gathered in community, worshiped together, broke bread together, and learned from one another. We are incredibly grateful for the hard work of so many servants.

It was my joy to lead Bible study each morning. As I am continuing to study the Gospel of Luke in my personal life, the first morning of the conference, we studied Luke 5 together.

The heartbeat of the text is found in Luke 5:5: “*Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’*”

Just before this text, we see Jesus preaching and teaching. Giving the spoken Word of God on one side of the lake. But on the other side of the lake, we see Peter, James and John trying to fish. On their own, apart from Jesus.



Missions Update

Pastor Gemechis Buba
Assistant to the Bishop
for Missions

Why don’t they see any result? It isn’t because they were lazy. They are hard workers. Is the problem with the lake? Is the problem with the net? Is the problem the way the disciples are doing it? What is the missing piece?

This text makes the most important point in discipleship, mission and evangelism clear. As sacramental, confessional Lutherans, this becomes a very important text for us. Obviously, the missing piece was Jesus and His Word. It was the only thing added in this fishing exercise. Jesus didn’t have them change their style. Or their net. Or the boat. Or the lake. Or the fisherman. They didn’t change any of that. The only element that was missing or added was Jesus and His Word.

There are many hardworking churches and hardworking pastors. They are spending their time,

Continued on Page 12



Those attending the NALC Church Planting Conference in Fayetteville, Ga., pose for a group photo.



Pastor Gemechis Buba and Pastor Richard Dalton leading a session at the NALC Church Planting Conference.

Continued from Page 11

talent, and energy: showing up early in the morning and not going home until late at night. They are hardworking fishermen on the other side of the lake from Jesus and his Word.

“We have worked, but have not caught much. We have tried everything, but we have not seen much fruit.” These are common sentiments expressed by many leaders in the church. We have done everything that we know. We have changed the color of the building; we have put in new carpet. There are new musicians; we have changed the council leadership. We have tried this program and that program. We have tried everything we can think of ... but there is no result! And rather than growing, we are not even plateauing; we are declining. We don’t know what to do. We have worked hard all night.”

Hard work without Jesus is not going to give us any result. We need to keep the Word at the center of our mission and the center of our ministry. When we lift up Jesus, he draws people to himself. The magnetic attraction in the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ is not the building, the pastor, the choir, or the musicians. It is Jesus Himself — Christ

crucified. The Son of the Living God at the center of our lives.

The greatest mistake and crisis in the western church was when we started to push the Word of God away from the center. When we put ourselves at the center, the church started to decline. In our time together in Atlanta, we did not teach new programs or mechanics, but we were there to remind them — and now you — “let’s bring Jesus and his Word to the center of our mission and ministry.” And let’s do that well. Then we will see the result.

Jesus brought the most stubborn fisherman to his knees with the Word of God.

When Jesus is at the center, the driest humanity breaks into pieces. Human hearts melt. When the Gospel is at the center, sinners confess and receive salvation. Is Jesus at the center of the Church? Or on the other side of the lake where we are not? Are we working very hard on the other side of the lake while not depending on Him?

The concluding remark that Jesus made was not criticism, but three little words. There were no harsh words. He simply said: “From now on ...”

From now on — it will not be like yesterday. **From now on** — it will not be like 2016. **From now on** — it is not going to be like my previous experience. Jesus is an expert at giving you a new season, a new experience, a new chapter. It is the year of God’s favor — **from now on**.

To access resources from the conference including video teaching, handouts and more, please visit thenalc.org/mission-resources.

Clergy vestments needed

Pastor Didi Panzo, an NALC Global Worker in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is seeking clergy vestments for pastors in Africa. Used or new albs, stoles, chasubles, or crosses may be sent to Pastor Mike Tavella at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Abington, Pa. For more information contact Pastor Tavella at mgtavella@msn.com or 215-659-2642.

What is a pastor and what is pastoral leadership?

Let's recap. As we transition from one year to another, it is common to review the year past, summarizing in such a way that we move forward into the new year with increased clarity and intentionality.

Having spent 2016 focusing these Ministry Matters articles on issues of pastoral leadership, I thought it might be helpful to recap and summarize what we've discussed. If you've missed one or want to re-read, you will find the newsletters archived on the NALC website, www.thenalc.org.

What did we learn about pastors and pastoral leadership as we've "conversed" through the year just past?

We began by acknowledging that there is confusion regarding the pastor, the pastor's call, authority and leadership and how that relates to lay leadership in the congregation. This leaves pastor and parish unsure how to relate to one another, how to lead the congregation, how to resolve what are sometimes simple problems.

This confusion often begins with a lack of clarity or understanding of the "call" of the pastor. In Lutheranism, there is to be both an "internal" sense of call from God as well as an "external call" from the Body of Christ affirming that this person seems to have been called and thus the Church extends a formal call to the person.

The two, together — the internal and external call — work to discern the movement and activity of the Spirit with regard to God's call to ministry. Neither is more important or valid in the call of a pastor. (See the January 2016 *NALC News*.)

Unfortunately, some pastors enter ministry thinking "it's all about me!" This is defined as "narcissism" — as excessive interest in oneself. Pastors with narcissistic tendencies have little desire to involve



Ministry Matters

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Assistant to the Bishop
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other leaders, a need to control and not share decision-making, and a tendency to show offense when and if anyone should disagree. Sometimes lay people in the congregation think the church is all about them, as well. No wonder a pastor and council president, both having narcissistic tendencies, will conflict and do battle! Both have forgotten, or never understood, that it's not about the pastor or the council — it's about feeding and caring for Christ's sheep! (See John 21:15-19 and the February 2016 *NALC News*)

St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, "*Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.*" Besides our all-too-human tendency toward narcissism, another great barrier to pastoral ministry is failure to earn the love and trust of one's congregation. How does a pastor build trust? NALC active and retired leadership offered these words of advice: preach the Word of God and only the Word of God. Practice deeply listening and openly sharing. Keep confidential matters confidential. Make parish visitation a priority and be aware of and sensitive to the congregation's history. Build consensus and practice joint decision-making. (March 2016)

But we ought not move too quickly away from "preach the Word of God," for not all understand what that means. In April, we discussed the need for faithful NALC pastors to engage in Biblical preaching that discerns both Law and Gospel,

Continued on Page 14

keeping the Scriptural Word as the primary focus for every sermon, making preaching “incarnational.”

The Scriptures proclaim not a spiritualized Christ, but an embodied, enfleshed Lord who comes to us, yes, through the work of the Holy Spirit, but through Word and Sacrament — what Luther called the “means of grace.” God gives Himself to us in His Son, Jesus Christ, who is now embodied in the Word — written, read, studied and preached — and in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, broken and poured out for us in the Lord’s Supper. This is the challenge and the expectation of every faithful pastor and preacher in the NALC. (April 2016)

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and neglected aspects of leadership in congregations is that of maintaining unity. Although this is, or should be, one of the primary tasks of the pastor, he or she cannot create and maintain unity alone. It is the work of the leadership team as a whole — pastor, congregational officers and council.

This happens only through thorough knowledge of and commitment to living the Holy Scriptures, seeking no other agenda other than that established by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, as pastor, officers and council work to foster a climate of direct, open and honest communication, building consensus in all things. (May 2016)

One of the most destructive factors in the pastor-congregation relationship is the “hire and fire” mentality many have with regard to their pastor. The NALC Manual on the Call Process states on page 9:

Calling a pastor is not the equivalent of “hiring an employee.” The call process is much more relational and covenantal. Calling a pastor is much more like a marriage, and the call process more similar to finding a mate for life. In this sense, going slowly and intentionally, seeking God’s will, and developing a relationship are more important than lining up skills and needs.

Accountability and clear expectations between pastors and councils are essential to healthy, open, communicative relationships that last. The positive energy and effort invested in the relationship

between the pastor, the council and the congregation will not only help those involved in the leadership team, it will bear good fruit within the community as a whole and be a witness to the world of how we Christians love and care for one another. (June 2016)

Bishop Paull Spring shared recently that, in his experience, 75 percent of all congregational conflict results from lack of pastoral leadership skills or lack of a pastor’s ability to deal with conflict in a healthy, faithful manner. We need pastors in the Church today who have leadership skills! This is not something that is usually taught in seminary, nor is “leadership” something that we are born with. The U.S. military continues to be a place where leadership can and must be taught and learned. Hence, in July, we cited the “Top Ten Leadership Lessons from the United States Sergeant Major Academy.” I encourage you to read them again in the July 2016 newsletter.

In September, we turned to the topic of “The Pastor and the Congregation’s Vision for Mission.” The Word of God reminds us, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish*” (Proverbs 29:18). Together, pastor and congregation share responsibility for seeking God’s will and guidance with regard to a vision for faithful mission and ministry in their local context. When a congregation is beset by competing visions, it is common for individuals to try to gain power and authority, to take control and establish one’s own vision and direction. No wonder pastors and lay leaders so often find themselves in the midst of tension, conflict and power struggles.

And speaking of tension, conflict and struggle, in October, we turned to the issue of heightened anxiety in our day and age. Pastors and preachers can be adept at “afflicting the comfortable.” Are we equally competent comforting the afflicted? It may be the case that some of us pastors are afflicting our congregations with additional anxiety at just the time when anxiety is already extremely high. And at a time when what is needed for congregations are the words of our Lord and of Holy Scripture, communicating peace, promise, reassurance and hope! It is the role of the pastor to be discerning and discriminating with regard to how we minister and preach to the flock entrusted to us.

Continued on Page 15

One would hope it needn't be said, but essential to pastoral leadership and effectiveness in ministry is "Love, Respect and Good Communication." What does this look like? All should remember that it is not "my" or "our" congregation, but the Church of Jesus Christ where we seek what is best for all. When angry or upset, deal with it in a healthy, productive way. Be a good listener; make clear, straightforward comments; exercise self-control; show respect; work together for a positive outcome; memorize and live Galatians 5:22-26. (November 2016)

Finally, in December we acknowledged that pastoral ministry happens not in some kind of perfect, sanitized community, but in the Church — made up of humans who are "all-too-human!" This means we minister in a broken world where all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God — including pastors, council officers, and every member of every congregation. How do we minister faithfully and successfully in this human Body of Christ? Forgive as we've been forgiven; state expectations clearly; bear with one another; speak the truth in love. In short, we are to love one another as Christ loved and gave Himself up for us (John 13:34; 15:12). (December 2016.)

Now that we've spent 2016 focusing on topics and issues of pastoral ministry and leadership as I see them in the NALC, I would like to invite you — pastors and members of the NALC — to send me your questions regarding pastors, pastoral leadership, congregational life and leadership. When possible and appropriate, I will address my articles in 2017 to your suggestions. Please be aware, I will not be able to address every topic or question, but will choose from among those of greatest interest to the most people, as we continue to talk about "Ministry Matters" in the North American Lutheran Church. Email your questions and suggestions to me at dwendel@thenalc.org.

Call process update

The list of congregations seeking to call NALC pastors is available on the NALC website at thenalc.org/pastoral-vacancies.



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

Faithwebbing.com is a web-based youth and family ministry coaching service offered by Gary and Laurie Pecuch of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio.

To gain access to the members only section, fill out the contact form at faithwebbing.com or send an email to faithwebbing@gmail.com.

February Webinar: The next faithwebbing.com webinar will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 21, at 2 p.m. Eastern Time. We are continuing with a march through the list of Faith Skills. Next up is how we help youth to develop written standards to live by and personal ministry plans. We will see how far we get during the hour.

Here is the webinar link:
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2934623301941407234>

Webinars will be offered on the third Tuesdays of March, April and May. All webinars will be held at 2 p.m. ET.

Previous webinars are posted on faithwebbing.com.

An Outcome-based Ministry Training Program will launch with the initial onsite event in Grove City, Ohio, Feb. 16-18. Participants are entering a 12- to 14-month training experience designed to equip them with the necessary tools to build a long-term sustainable ministry in their congregations.

National Youth Ministry Leaders Conference: Folks have been asking for a National Youth Ministry Leaders Event specifically for NALC congregations. The event for adults who work with congregational children and youth will be offered Aug. 7-8 (just prior to the 2017 NALC Convocation in Nashville, Tenn.). More information coming soon.



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