

Amy C. Schifrin called as Director of North American Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin has been called as Seminary Director for the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS), the new seminary of the North American Lutheran Church.

The Seminary Director serves as administrator of both the North American Lutheran Seminary and the NALS Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa.

Dr. Schifrin's call was issued by the NALC Executive Council. Her call was also approved by the Trinity School for Ministry faculty and Board of Trustees.

"Dr. Schifrin is both qualified and called by our Lord to serve in this capacity. She brings a tremendous commitment and passion for the faithful education and the spiritual formation of pastors for Word and Sacrament ministry in the mission field of our culture," said NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

"She has already been accepted and affirmed by the faculty at Trinity School for Ministry, peers with whom she will teach and lead," he said.

"I am certain both the students and faculty serving throughout



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin

our NALS Houses of Studies will be blessed by her teaching and leadership. The congregations of the North American Lutheran Church will be strengthened by the pastors who are both formed and informed by NALS under the excellent leadership of Dr. Schifrin." Bishop Bradosky said.

"I am delighted to welcome Amy Schifrin to the Trinity faculty. She is clearly well qualified for the exciting task of establishing the North American Lutheran Seminary at Trinity School for Ministry, and her homiletic, liturgical and musical gifts are

sure to be a great blessing to us all," said the Very Rev. Dr. Justyn Terry, Dean and President of Trinity School for Ministry.

"I am overwhelmed with joy as I accept this call to serve as Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary. I thank God that I am being called to serve as both a teacher and as an administrator," Dr. Schifrin said. "I want to help shape the next generation of pastors through their seminary formation so that when they arrive in parishes they will be faithful and bold, articulate yet humble, joyous and, above all, loving, serving those for whom Christ died and for whom He now lives: for you — all of you, His people, the beloved children of God."

"Theological education is more than passing on information, it is formation in faith, so that in Word proclaimed and Sacrament rightly administered, the One who brings life to the world will bring it to the gathered assembly," she said.

Dr. Schifrin was recommended for the position by a Search Committee which included the Rev. Paull Spring, Bishop

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Emeritus of the NALC; Dr. Robert Benne, professor emeritus of religion and philosophy at Roanoke College; and the Rev. Dr. Ben Johnson, former professor and dean at Hamma Divinity School, Wittenberg University; and former president of the Lutheran Bible Institute in California.

Dr. Benne, Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Schifrin all served on the NALC's 10-member Task Force for Theological Education that developed the plan for the NALS.

"First, let me express my sincere appreciation for the faithful work of the call committee, comprised of experienced theologians, led by the Rev. Dr. Ben Johnson," Bishop Bradosky said. "I am equally thankful for those eminently qualified candidates who applied for and participated in this process of discernment. The unanimous decision of the committee was based on the candidate's educational qualifications, teaching experience, congregational leadership, and administrative ability."

Pastor Schifrin currently serves as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Monona, Iowa, and Mission in Christ Lutheran Church in Strawberry Point, Iowa.

She is the mother of two grown sons, Hans and Nils. Hans just finished six years of service as a U.S. Army Infantry Officer and started seminary this fall. Nils is working as a physicist but is planning a vocational move as a musician.

Dr. Schifrin was born in Queens, N.Y. and grew up on Long Island. She earned a bachelor's degree in music from Arizona State University and a master's degree in music from Northwestern University. She taught music theory in a small college in Arizona before receiving a call as Lay Campus Minister and Director of Music at Iowa State University.

Dr. Schifrin earned her Master of Divinity degree from Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. She did her seminary internship in North Dakota. Her first call as a pastor was in Saskatchewan. Campus, parish, and seminary calls have taken her to the southwest, the midwest, and the mid-Atlantic states. She earned her Ph.D. in Liturgical Studies and Homiletics from The Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin addresses the 2012 Theological Conference sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE.

"I have served as a pastor now for 29 years, and I have been shaped by the love of white-haired saints and the littlest of children, by the suffering of those who have witnessed to me on their final journeys and by the tears of joy of those who have received mercy undeserved. I hope that my work as both a pastoral and an academic theologian has been a faithful expression of this gift of Divine Love," Dr. Schifrin wrote for her biographical profile for the recent election process for NALC Executive Council. She was elected to a four-year term by the 2013 Convocation.

Dr. Schifrin has served on the Joint Commission for Theology and Doctrine of the NALC and Lutheran CORE since it was formed. She was the primary author of the Commission's *Word of Counsel to the Church on The Sanctity of Nascent Life* which was released last December.

"At the NALS, this new and bright ministry of the NALC, we seek to form the next generations of pastors and teachers who are dedicated to continuation of the Apostolic witness until the Word of God reaches to the ends of the earth. He promises to sustain us and guide us as we live out His goodness and mercy in this broken world, and we are trusting in His promise," Dr. Schifrin said.

The 2013 NALC Convocation approved establishing the North American Lutheran Seminary to provide

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for the theological education of future pastors for the NALC.

There are two components of the NALS: the Seminary Center and Houses of Studies located within NALC Mission Districts. Both components make up the whole of the NALS.

There is one NALC seminary with one curriculum and one focus, but many possible locations. The plan is sort of a hub-and-spokes system with the Seminary Center at the hub and possible Houses of Studies dispersed throughout North America.

The entire NALS system will offer one coordinated curriculum so that all students are receiving the same theological education regardless of whether they are studying at the Seminary Center or a House of Studies.

This allows NALC students to take classes in a traditional setting with other NALC students either at the Seminary Center or at one of the Houses of Studies nearer to their homes.

The first NALS House of Studies was established at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. The Rev. Dr. Mary Havens is its director.

Other Houses of Studies will be added based on geographical need and financial resources.

"I firmly believe that God is leading us into a goodly future, a future that He is preparing for us," Dr. Schiffrin said. "We pledge not simply to teach our seminarians information about the life of Christ, but to continue their formation in Him so that as they are sent out to reveal His great love for the world through Word and Sacrament, they will know that they have no life apart from Him, and will seek to share that love in all the places to which God is calling them.

"Our basic work will be forming Lutheran seminarians so that they will be evangelically orthodox — so that empowered by the Holy Spirit, their confession of the historic Christian faith will be centered in the love that God the Father gives to the world through His Son. We come to know this



Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., hosts the North American Lutheran Seminary Center.

love through His Holy Word as it is proclaimed in the community which gathers in His name. Drawn into the life of Christ, disciples are then shaped for a life of faithful living, signs of God's unending mercy and love for all the world," she said.

"In the power and breath of the Holy Spirit, our NALS is being called by the church to prepare the coming generations, so that the Apostolic witness will reach those who have yet to hear and be grasped by God's great love for the world. Christ Jesus opens His arms to all from the Cross, and through the Ministry of Word and Sacrament his love outpoured is made present for the world to receive," Dr. Schiffrin said.

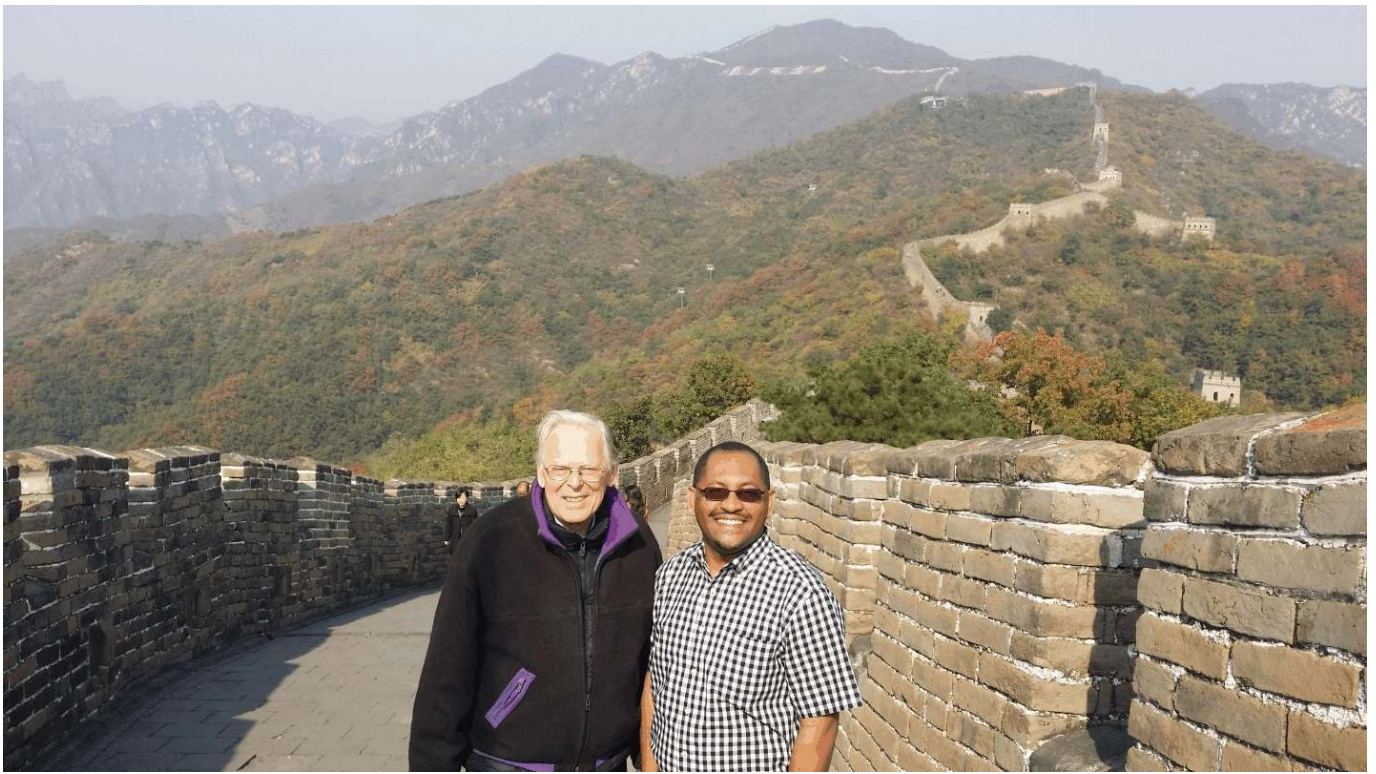
The Convocation authorized raising \$1 million for the establishment of the seminary. Seminary funding will come from support from NALC congregations and from individual gifts.

A fund-raising emphasis in congregations began in October. NALC congregations are encouraged to have a special Seminary Month emphasis as a part of the fund-raising efforts.

Donations to support the seminary may be given to the NALC Theological Education Fund through local congregations, online at www.thenalc.org, or sent to:

NALC Theological Education Fund
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

"While we rejoice in this decision, I invite you to join me in praying for Dr. Schiffrin in this time of transition and formative months of leadership in establishing our seminary," Bishop Bradosky said.



Professor Paul Martinson, one of the founders of China Service Ventures, and Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, pose on the Great Wall of China during a recent trip to explore NALC mission possibilities in China. Dr. Martinson was born in China to missionary parents and returned to the United States when he was two years old, when China was closed to foreign missionaries.

NALC Opening Doors in China



NALC delegation poses with leaders of the Chinese Christian Council. Pastor Paul Gao, who studied at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., is the current President of the Council. "I brought greetings to him from our Bishop and from the entire NALC family. They pray for us, and they look forward to having evangelical and ecumenical connections with the NALC," Pastor Buba said.



Pastor Gemechis Buba taught these seminary students while in China, giving a series of lectures on the formative pillars of the apostolic Church from the Book of Acts. There are about 21 officially registered seminaries in China. They are doing their best to prepare and produce pastors and leaders for the church in China. However, they don't have enough teachers, books and seminaries to train the number of pastors that are actually needed to cope with the growth of the Church in China.



"It was overwhelming to see this kind of love and joy as we visited a school in one of the rural towns outside of Chinyang," Pastor Buba said. "Some of these students are involved in the summer camp program offered by volunteers coming from North America, Hong Kong and some parts of China through China Service Ventures. This summer camp is a life-changing experience for these kids and for their families. There are some who are coming to Christ through the camps. Bible stories are shared as moral education and as a discipline of character formation. However, through conversation, Christ is shared with these kids and with their families."



“Churches throughout China are packed and overflowing. I looked around and rejoiced over what I was seeing. Thousands have come to worship in this church in downtown Shanghai. There is no empty spot in the main church, in the balcony, in the narthex, and in various classrooms in the church building. Many stand outside to follow the service on television screens,” Dr. Buba said. “Fervent prayer, faith in the Holy Word of God, and dedication in the face of persecution are three main forces behind such explosive church growth. Some of these brothers and sisters come to church two hours before the service to pray. There is no program that can replace these basics of the Christian faith.”



A local congregation in Chinyang. This church was planted by Daniel Nelson, an American Lutheran Missionary to China in the 1890s. His life and ministry are among the extraordinary stories of courage, dedication and sacrifice of Christian missionaries. Eventually he lost his life in China and was buried in China. His gravesite is unknown, but the church that was planted by him is still thriving. People pack all of the three floors and some sit outside. Their hunger for the Word of God is very evident.

Blizzard kills tens of thousands of cattle, devastates ranchers in S.D.

An early October blizzard — being called one of the most devastating blizzards in local history — killed tens of thousands of cattle in South Dakota and has devastated ranch families whose livelihood is dependent on them.

Some ranchers have reported losses exceeding half of their cattle herds from the storm that started Oct. 4 and dumped more than 4 feet of snow in parts of western South Dakota. The cattle — which had not yet developed the heavy coats that see them through cold winters — were drenched by rain before being hit by heavy snow and strong winds.

Zack and Amber West's situation is typical of the ranchers who had significant cattle losses in the storm. The Wests are members of First Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Philip, S.D. Pastor Frezil Westerlund, who serves First Lutheran and three other congregations, explains, "They worked to save up to buy a herd that they run on ranch they manage for the landowner. They lost 65 percent of their own cows.

"The relationship between rancher and animal is personal. These people are not just concerned about finances, they are mourning," Pastor Westerlund said.

"What was so bad was the calves that froze out there were the same ones born last spring that I carried into my bathroom, put in the tub, and dried off with the hair dryer," Amber West said.

Zach and Amber's son Easton, age 9, was given a calf last Christmas by another rancher. He named the calf Daisy. Daisy died in the storm, but the calf she gave birth to this spring survived. His sister Jaycee's calf died, but her cow lived. After the storm, the manager of a livestock sale barn in Norfolk, Neb., gave Easton a cow to nurse his calf.

"The family is optimistic. 'We will just be poor another year. We're use to it,' they say. But they are rich in many things: the beauty of the



These cattle were among tens of thousands of cattle killed by an October blizzard in South Dakota. Scenes like this were all too common across western South Dakota.

countryside, close family, good neighbors who brought their horses out to help look for survivors, and a faith that God will make all things right," Pastor Westerlund said.

"I saw the dead cattle; they were everywhere. What hurt most was that it seemed nobody knew what had happened," Pastor Westerlund said. "There was no national news coverage. Then I got a letter from Bishop John addressed to the members. We sent the letter by e-mail to our members, and they sent it to others. Everywhere you could hear people saying that somebody cares. The bishop cares, our church cares. The letter was a turning point of hope for many people."

Agricultural organizations have established a Ranchers Relief Fund to provide support and relief to those impacted by the blizzard. Donations to the Ranchers Relief Fund may be given online at www.ranchersrelief.org or sent to: Ranchers Relief Fund; P.O. Box 231; Rapid City, SD 57709.

"Some people are giving to the Ranchers Relief Fund, others want to give directly to a rancher through our congregation. We need cows, calves, fence, prayer and encouragement. Many people in our ranching community are helping those who have suffered losses," Pastor Westerlund said.

A Year ... And Still Counting Both Blessings and Ongoing Needs

Hurricane Sandy Disaster Relief Update

By Pastor David McGettigan

October 29, 2013 — One year to the day of Hurricane Sandy's landfall, with the eye of the storm directly over Absecon Island (whose largest community is Atlantic City, N.J.), so we gathered to remember and pray. The ceremonies — both county and city — prepared by our Spiritual Care Outreach Team were poignant, tearful, but, most of all, hopeful.

We gave God thanks again for our safety and for the recovery we have enjoyed. We prayed for those among us whose lives are still frayed and shattered by homes as yet awaiting final restoration. We held onto and hugged with prayer those whose spirits are increasingly frayed by the wait, the pain of more loss of work and income, and the bureaucratic morass that is typical when huge amounts of money and human power must be managed over large stretches of different counties and communities. We celebrated staff, volunteers, and the generous support of unknown but true friends like so many of you reading this article.

The Atlantic City Long Term Recovery Group (ACLTRG) — of which St. Andrew By The Sea Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Atlantic City, is a founding member and its Senior Pastor, David McGettigan, the Vice-Chair — has made significant strides in organization, staffing (both paid and volunteer), and funding. We now have 87 homes in active reconstruction. An additional 27 have been finished. In the “pipeline” of case management (the initial step of the recovery process) are over 200 more homes and owners.

We believe we are finally over the initial hesitancy to ask for help, and we are planning new initiatives to reach those who are still living in unsafe home environments. We recognize a marked increase in visits to physicians and the local Emergency Room for respiratory ailments especially among the very



Hulda, a person helped by disaster relief efforts following Hurricane Sandy, hugs Construction Manager Janice Banter.

young and the very old due to mold growth. Many of whom are still living in homes which have not yet been touched by relief efforts.

We have plenty yet to do and your ongoing financial and volunteer support is still needed. We use NALC Disaster Relief funds through ACLTRG to work with folks who otherwise might not qualify for government or grant funding. Thank you for helping us give the hopeless hope!

Each time a home is finished, there is a rededication and prayer. Hulda is a gracious and loving friend whose home was finally completed Oct. 18. The seriously damaged portions had been completely overhauled from floor to ceiling and inside the walls. Hulda tearfully thanked her “angels” — the ACLTRG Staff, 117 volunteers who over time

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worked on her home, and those whose financial gifts helped her hear the words, "Welcome home, Hulda," a long, long year after she had to leave as the waters rose.

Hulda's own words:

Today I am standing here in front of you and my beautiful house and my heart is filled with joy. I was born in Jamaica and was one of 10 children. I am no stranger to hardship and getting by with little. I never lost faith. But, when Hurricane Sandy destroyed my house, I knocked on lots of doors for help with no answer. I almost gave up hope when AC Long Term Recovery Group opened their door for me and let me in.

So to my case manager, Francina, I want to say: thank you for taking the time to listen and care for me. I appreciate it. A special thank you goes to the man who started it all, Mr. Craig Snow. I know you have a special loving heart. You even lost sleep over how to help me. If it hadn't been for you and your people I wouldn't stand here today.

This brings me to the day I met Janice. I liked you from the very beginning. You were my first Angel. What a strong lady with a gentle soul. To you and your crew, thank you from the bottom of my heart. To my amazement volunteers starting to pour in. Soon the good news came that Joining Hands was going to help. I met wonderful people that came

from all over the country, taking time off to come help me. I was so humbled by it. I met Peg, a wonderful lady, who started this foundation eight years ago and with the help of all of you she is still going strong. Peg, what would people like me do without an amazing organization like yours?

You all have no idea how much every single stroke of paint, every laid tile, every hug or smile meant to me. People come into our life disguised as Angels, and sometimes Angels come into our life disguised as people. All it takes is open eyes and ears and the willingness to see miracles. To me you're like Angels sent from above to cleanse my soul of sadness and fill it with love.

You are my inspiration, and I want to thank you for without you I don't know what I would do. You've changed my life forever and turned my sadness upside down. For this I want to thank you again and again. To end this off, I just want to say may God bless you all.

Thank you, God, for your amazing love extended across time, distance, and even the storms of life as you connect us with each other! Amen.

You may support NALC Disaster Relief by giving online at www.thenalc.org or by sending a gift to:

NALC Disaster Relief
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

NALC preparing for next disasters

As part of its preparations for any future disasters, the North American Lutheran Church is asking each of its congregations to identify a Disaster Relief Coordinator.

The local coordinator will serve as a contact person for NALC Disaster Relief in providing information about how to respond to any major disasters.

The local coordinator will also receive training on how to coordinate disaster response should the need arise in their area.

In addition to a local Disaster Relief Coordinator in each congregation, there will be a Disaster Relief Coordinator in each Mission District and a national disaster response team.

Congregations should send the name and contact information for their Disaster Relief Coordinator to Kathy Jacobson in the NALC Administrative Office at kjacobson@thenalc.org. They should also give this information to their Mission District's Dean or Disaster Response Coordinator.

A New Thing Christian Church Lithonia, Georgia

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

A New Thing Christian Church of Lithonia, Ga., is an NALC mission congregation in the Stone Mountain area of metropolitan Atlanta.

Their vision is very simple — to go and fulfill the mandate to make disciples in the name of the Triune God. According to Pastor Trina Petersen, “We want to be as Biblical as possible.”

The priorities of the congregation are expressed in the acrostic SHAPE —

Serve others.

Honor Scripture as the authoritative source and norm.

Apply what has been studied and walk in wisdom.

Pray the will of God and intercede for one another.

Embrace worship as a lifestyle.

Pastor Petersen has spent a great deal of time cultivating the sense that the church is not the building, but the people of God, who are living a life that reflects who they are and whose they are.

Every few weeks the congregation holds what they call a “Taking It to the Streets” Sunday. The day begins with everyone gathering together for prayer and Communion, and then for the next 45 minutes to an hour, the people go out to such places as restaurants, bus stops, and gas stations to share the Gospel, to find out the needs of people, and to learn how the congregation can be of service to the community. Then everyone comes back to share their experiences and to report on what they have learned.

According to Pastor Petersen, “Jesus did not just sit in the Temple. Most of his ministry was out in the community. Jesus went to where the people were. We want to follow his model.”

Those who are not comfortable with going out remain and pray for the others.



Every few weeks, Pastor Trina Petersen and members of A New Thing Christian Church gather for prayer and communion before “Taking It to the Streets” — going out into the community to share the Gospel.

A New Thing Christian Church works with three other congregations to serve the indigent and the working poor in the Stone Mountain area.

They provide food, clothing, and legal assistance, and hope to soon be able to offer computer access for people who live in extended stay hotels or in low income housing, or are homeless and sleep on the streets.

They also have a strong worship and arts ministry. They go out and share the Gospel through dance, the spoken word, and drama. They go to coffee houses and other places where unchurched people gather and speak in a language that unchurched people can understand.

This past summer the church partnered with a local community center. The men of the congregation spent time with children who were attending a summer camp. They serve a hot meal to about 80 people each week. They not only provide the food, they also sit down and talk with the people while

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Mission Connect

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they are eating. In addition, they give these people a sack lunch, so they are actually serving 160 meals a week.

“Some of them sit down and eat their sack lunch outside the building right after they have eaten the hot meal. They must be really hungry,” Pastor Petersen said.

A New Thing Christian Church traces itself back to January 2011 and a handful of people, who were committed to living Biblically-based lives.

At the same time Trina Petersen was finishing seminary and was waiting for her first call. She felt that God was leading her to the North American Lutheran Church. A few of these people knew her, so they kept in contact with her. They told her, “When you begin your church, we will become members.”

On the first Sunday she met with them, the only ones she knew were coming were her own immediate family. However, a total of 29 people attended.

They first started meeting in her sister’s basement, but soon outgrew that location. So Trina Petersen offered to move out of her own home and make it available to the congregation. The bedrooms are used for office and classroom space, the living room and dining room function as the fellowship hall, and the family room, kitchen, and sun room serve as the sanctuary.

Upon giving up her own home, Pastor Petersen moved into her sister’s basement. She said, “Many people would see that as a sacrifice. I see it as a joy. We outgrew the space we were meeting in and had to move to something larger.”

A New Thing Christian Church became an official congregation of the NALC on May 5, 2011, and then called Trina Petersen to be their pastor. She was ordained on May 29, 2011.



Members of A New Thing Christian Church, in partnership with a local community center, serve a hot meal to about 80 people each week. They not only provide the food, they also sit down and talk with the people while they are eating. In addition, they give the diners a sack lunch, so they are actually serving about 160 meals weekly.

She is very grateful for the gifts they have received from several other NALC congregations, including microphones, a baptismal font, and altar furniture, as well as for financial support from Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

Currently, they are raising funds for new sanctuary chairs. Pastor Petersen said, “We have a lot of mismatched folding chairs, and we have yet to have a sign.” They are very intentional in not including the need for chairs in the church budget. They want the majority of the budget to be outreach and community oriented, not for inward use.

The name of the church is based upon Isaiah 43:18-19, where God says, “Forget the former things, the things of old; behold, I am doing a new thing.” They are a Lutheran church, but they feel that lifting up Christ is more important. Pastor Petersen explained, “We are Christo-centric, so Christ needs to be in our name.”

Pastor Petersen also shared, “It can be a dangerous thing when congregants actually listen to the Word of God and apply it to their lives. They become disciples who want to make a difference.” There have been times when the congregation has wanted to do a task or undertake a new ministry,

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which she has felt was too ambitious for a group of their size. “But, Pastor,” they would respond, “didn’t you say that if we could do it on our own, then we would not need God?”

The people of A New Thing — ANT — call themselves the Mighty Ants. They say, “Like an ant, we can carry 10 times our weight.” To which Pastor Petersen responds, “Sometimes I just have to step back and let them do it. When folks take the Word of God and start living it out, that is what I call dangerous discipleship.”

Already numbering about 50 adults and 20 children in worship each week, they are making plans to expand to two services in the fall. But their biggest goal for the future is to acquire space in the area where they do their outreach ministry. Right now they have to carry in everything — food, clothing, and computers — and set it all up each time. They would like to acquire a more permanent site. The ideal would be to find one location where they would be able to do everything — worship, education, fellowship, and outreach.

A New Thing Christian Church is worthy of our prayers and financial support. You can learn



Children from a local community center’s summer camp participate in a three-legged race with members of A New Thing Christian church. (Photos courtesy of Brandon Gregory Photography)

more about them online at their website — www.anewthingchristianchurch.net. You may contact Pastor Petersen at 404-408-3481 or beholdanewthing@gmail.com.

Pastor Petersen said, “We consider it a privilege that God has chosen us and trusts us as instruments through whom He is doing a new thing.”

Reprinted from *Lutheran CORE Connection*.

Great Commission Society launches website

The Great Commission Society (GCS) of the North American Lutheran Church has launched a presence on the NALC website to provide congregations and individuals with a listing of mission partners and projects they can support directly. Visitors to the GCS web pages can study and learn about the exciting work being done locally and throughout the world.

The Great Commission Society is made up of people who are passionate about making and mobilizing disciples for Christ’s mission in the world.

The NALC encourages individuals and congregations to work with and financially support mission directly. GCS members will be able to encourage favorite mission projects to apply for a listing on the GCS web page so that they may

solicit contributions from other NALC congregations and individuals.

Each project will be screened to ensure legitimacy, need and use of funds. Once approved and posted, an organization or project is introduced to a much wider audience that can support it with prayer and financial gifts. In most cases you will be able to link directly to the website of each listed project to get further details.

The GCS membership contribution for individuals is \$240 per year (\$20/month). For congregations, it is \$100 per month or \$1,200 per year. Membership contributions are used to fund mission starts in the United States and Canada and also to provide emergency support for unexpected needs of ongoing missionaries, projects or mission starts.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, presided at the ordination of Faisa Atomsa on Oct. 6 at St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Riverside, Mo. Pastor Atomsa has been called to serve the Oromo Evangelical Christian Church, an NALC congregation in Kansas City.



Members of the Micronesian Evangelical Church (which meets at St. Matthew's every Sunday afternoon) also sang some beautiful Micronesian music during Communion.



Pastor Jeff Cottingham, Pastor Mary Fast, Pastor Russ Saltzman, Pastor Gemechis Buba, Pastor Faisa Atomsa, Pastor Challa Baro, and Pastor Bud Elliott.

Kansas City Ordination



A choir from the Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church in Minneapolis provided several selections of spirited Oromo music that had everyone moving and clapping their hands.



An overflow crowd was present for the ordination.

For All the Saints . . .

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The celebration of All Saints Day is not only an important opportunity to reflect on the lives of those who came before us but to look at the reality of the present and our hope for the future.

As I speak about our values in the North American Lutheran Church — Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded and Congregationally-Focused — I remind those listening that our tradition is rooted in all the saints who came before us. This value is anchored in the witness of the saints who gave sacrificially — even their lives — for the sake of boldly proclaiming Christ and pursuing His mission here and throughout the world.

We remember their sacrifice and pray that we might also be encouraged to follow their example of faithfulness in following Christ Jesus.

We live in a world of instant gratification. When Christians permit themselves to be normed by the world, confusion abounds. Immersed in the immediacy of the present, we often abandon a worldview that is eternal. In our impulsiveness, we believe our faith in God should produce instant results: We shouldn't have to struggle or deal with loss or the stress of relational and financial difficulties. The peace, joy and bliss of heaven ought to be ours immediately, instantly, right now. This is how saints ought to be treated, we tell ourselves.

When we are normed by the world instead of the Word, we are like those Paul describes in Romans 1:

“And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools instead. And instead of worshiping the glorious ever-living God, they worshiped idols.”



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

This situation not only describes our world but the predicament that the Church has been facing for multiple decades. When you trust your own wisdom over the Word of God, you end up creating and worshiping idols. When you trust your own emotions over the Word of God, you end up worshiping yourself and your own foolish ideas. You leave the light for the darkness, clarity for confusion, the truth for a lie.

We like to think of ourselves as much wiser than those who came before us, but the truth is that the saints who came before us can be a source of encouragement and strength. They were wise, resilient, patient, and bold in their proclamation of the Gospel. We want convenience. They gave of themselves sacrificially for the sake of Christ and His Church.

One of the sights in Rome that left me breathless was the Colosseum. It was not just the massiveness, design and construction of the building, but the knowledge that it is a place where countless thousands of Christians were persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ, that impressed me. While the crowds filled the stadium and rooted for the lions, Christians were mauled, torn to pieces and devoured. No one was able to tame the lions or withstand their strength for long. Yet the Christians kept coming — offering their lives as a testimony to the greater truth and reality of life in Christ. There is now a large steel cross inside the Colosseum to remember all those Christians who would not deny Jesus to preserve their lives.

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“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

How can the persecuted be blessed?

In Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes, Jesus repeats the issue of persecution for emphasis. It may have been the first time His disciples heard Him say it, but it would not be the last. Jesus made it very clear that a cross was in front of Him, and, if they were following Him, a cross was in their future as well. Jesus didn’t hide anything from us. “If you are going to be my disciple, then in this life this is what you can expect: persecution, a cross. When the Kingdom of Heaven worldview Jesus proclaimed intersects with the worldview of our culture, the conflict will put us at odds with the world. At that intersection, we face the cross. We either succumb to the pressure of the culture or remain steadfast in Jesus. He said, “I have told you these things, so that *in me* you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The beatitudes are descriptive of what the saints have when everything else is stripped away. When everything else is gone, we still have the only One who matters, the only One who brings life and purpose for living: Jesus Christ.

Being a saint is not about our righteousness but the righteousness of Christ. It is about the One who is in us, the One in whom we live and move and have our being. There is no room among us for pretentious self-righteousness, but for humility for the grace that is ours in Christ through Word and Sacrament.

When you are in Christ, then the world will hate you, the devil will target you, and your sinful flesh will give you no rest. That is why we flee to God’s Word, receive absolution for our sins, eat and drink Christ’s body and blood, and live in our Baptism. We focus not on check lists or proscriptions for righteous living, but on the only One who makes us saints of God: Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words seem ageless: “When Christ calls a person, He bids them come and die!” Bonhoeffer is reminding us that the Cross of Christ, His sacrificial love for the salvation of the world, must be manifest in our own lives. His love for us, His presence with us, will give us the capacity to offer ourselves as witnesses of His redemptive love. It is at the Cross that sin is forgiven, salvation is received and new life begins. The cross is not the sign that all is lost but that everything is gained.

How should we respond to persecution when it comes? The witness of Scripture offers us several methods:

First, there are times when we just need to leave, avoid it when we can. Jesus escaped mobs that wanted to stone Him and plots to kill Him.

Second, it is important to face persecution without compromise. Those who oppose Christ want us to become just like them. Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus, but their response should be ours, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God” (Acts 4:19). Faithfulness to Christ and the truth of the Gospel can never be compromised.

Third, the Scripture commands us to love our enemies. It’s easy to think of ways to get even when someone has hurt us or those we love. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and break the cycle of revenge. In Romans 12, Paul writes, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. ... Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Fourth, we should pray for those who persecute us. Many of them are broken people who have also been injured in some way and most are not believers. They are those who need Christ.

Fifth, we should remember that we are not alone. Isolation is the enemy of the soul. When we think we are all alone it is easy to doubt and give up hope. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the saints in heaven are watching and cheering us on to the finish line. (Hebrews 12)

Finally, when persecution comes, focus on the promise. Jesus is with us now and heaven is just around the corner. Paul encouraged the church in Corinth with these words. "As it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'" (1 Cor. 2:9).

All Saints Sunday was also an international day of prayer for persecuted Christians throughout the world. Christians are being imprisoned, persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus — in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China, in various places in Africa, and in other places throughout the world. We are not talking about the death of a few people but tens of thousands of deaths.

Last week I sent our staff an article by Stu Bykofsky, a columnist at the *Philadelphia Daily News*. After describing many examples of the slaughter of Christians, the author wrote this:

The most curious thing to me is the silence of major media, which largely ignores one of the great stories of our generation, and Christian churches. They turn a cheek to persecution while turning a blind eye to their brothers and sisters being massacred, tortured and driven off their land.

I don't understand it and I can't join it.

"In the end," the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

This friend is silent no more. Christians, how can you be?

This article was written by a Jewish man who knows what happens when we remain silent while persecution and murder happens around us.

When you ask the victims of the families of those who have been killed what we can do to support them. They all answer in a similar way: "Please pray for us."

So we must not hide from the truth of what is happening around us, but pray for them and for those who are persecuting them that they too will come to faith in Jesus. We never know when or how persecution will come, and we also pray that when it happens to us it will bring out the best in us not the worst. The best that is in us is Christ. Prayer helps us to love the unlovable people in our lives. We are powerless to change people. But our prayer acknowledges that God can and will transform them by the power of His redemptive love.

While overt persecution of Christians is rampant in many other parts of the world, we who live in this culture must deal with the much more subtle and insidious persecution that sucks us into compromise with false gospels and alternatives to Jesus, undermining both the content of the Gospel and our capacity or need to share it. This persecution requires wisdom and discernment lest we face the greatest persecution of all — marginalization that is so complete that there is no reason for the culture to persecute us as we have conformed to the culture with our complete passivity.

As I stood before the Coliseum in Rome I thought about another Lion: the Lion of Judah — Jesus Christ. There was never one life that was offered that was not ultimately defended and given new life by the far greater Lion. Not only did this Lion of Judah tame the beasts of the Coliseum but the lives of the leaders in Rome and then its people until faith in this Lion became the faith of the Holy Roman Empire.

Part of our problem when we go through difficulties is that we think the best is behind us. The saints bear witness to the more powerful worldview of the Kingdom of Heaven and the fact that the best is yet to be! Their witness encourages us to live today with that same hope and promise.

Remember the saints, and pray for those Christians persecuted today for their faith in Christ. In spite of the consequences, boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that opportunity we rejoice and say, "Thanks be to God."

With you following Christ Jesus,

Bishop John Bradosky

The True Church — Today

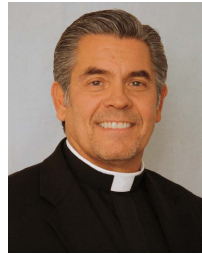
As I write this, my mind is on Reformation Day (October 31). At this point in the young life of the North American Lutheran Church, it seems worthwhile spending a few moments pondering the Reformation asking, “Where is the True Church today?”

This is an especially timely topic as we are part of a Lutheran body that is variously described as “schismatic,” “sectarian,” “divisive,” etc. As I have the opportunity to visit non-NALC Lutheran congregations at times, it is surprising that there are some folks who believe that there is a true Lutheran church, and it is that church which was created “new” in 1988! Some who remain in our former Lutheran church bodies find it hard to believe that we would leave the “True Church” for a new Lutheran denomination. And yet, we are in a situation not unlike that of Martin Luther at the time of the Reformation.

Although many Lutherans don’t realize it, Luther never intended to leave the Roman Catholic Church, but only to discuss, debate and, hopefully, renew the Church in the saving Gospel of God’s free gift in Jesus Christ. Luther would’ve been satisfied to remain in the existing Church so long as he could freely preach that we are saved not by pieces of paper, not by our money or donations to the Church or acts of penance, but by grace through faith in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Though Luther hoped to remain in a reformed Catholic Church, the corruption of the Church at that time led the pope and bishops to reject the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, to excommunicate Luther — by their own actions creating schism, leading finally to a splintered and fractured Christianity. (Sound like Lutheranism in our own time?)

The reality of the Reformation led confused lay people to ask, rightly so, “Where now is the True Church to be found?” “How will we know that we are in the True Church when there are two churches, two bodies or more, of Christians?”



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

To answer and reassure the faithful, Luther first asserted that the True Church is not to be found in a place — not in Rome, not even in Wittenberg! Luther went on to assert that the True Church is to be found where the *Seven Marks of the Body of Christ* are found. In other words, Luther said, the True Church of Jesus Christ is not found in church structures. We might add that the True Church is not to be found in denominations or, for that matter, in the alphabet soup that has become North American Lutheranism — not in the ELCA, ELCiC or the LCC, LCMS, LCMC or NALC! Instead, Luther said, look for the marks of the Body of Christ and there you will find the True Church. Though many Lutherans are not familiar with Luther’s Seven Marks, they are especially relevant for Lutherans in North America today. So, what are these seven marks?

First, Luther said, look for the *Holy Word of God*. The holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the Holy Word of God and, “wherever you see this Word preached, believed, professed and lived,” Luther said, “do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, ‘a Christian holy people’ must be there, even though their number may be very small.” Luther continues, “Those who have the pure Word of God are those who ‘build on the foundation with gold, silver and precious stones;’ those who do not have it in its purity are the ones who ‘build on the foundation with wood, hay or straw’ ... this is the principle item, and the holiest of holy possessions, by reason of which the Christian people are called holy; for God’s Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches: it is indeed the very holiness of God. ‘It is the power of God for salvation

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Portrait of Martin Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

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to everyone who has faith', as we read in Romans, and 'Everything is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer' as we read in 1 Timothy 4:5. ... God's Word shall not return empty, as we read in Isaiah 55:11"

"Second," said Luther, "God's people ... are recognized by the *Holy Sacrament of Baptism*, wherever it is taught, believed, and administered according to Christ's ordinance ... it is the holy bath of regeneration through the Holy Spirit, in which we bathe and with which we are washed of sin and death by the Holy Spirit, as in the innocent holy blood of the Lamb of God."

"Third, God's ... holy Christian people are recognized by the *Sacrament of the Altar*, wherever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ's institution. This, too, is a public sign and a precious, holy possession left behind by Christ, by which His people are sanctified so that they exercise themselves in faith and openly confess that they are Christian, just as they do with the Word and Baptism..." The Sacrament of the Altar serves as the glue that binds together in one fellowship, the Body of Christ on earth. We are

bound together, not by our organizations, but by the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Fourth Mark is the *Office of the Keys*, exercised publicly. "That is, as Christ decrees in Matthew 18, if a Christian sins, he should be removed; and if he does not mend his ways, he should be bound in his sin and cast out. If he does mend his ways, he should be absolved (forgiven). That is the Office of the Keys." A real church, as Matthew's Gospel taught, has to deal with real forgiveness of real sins. Luther writes, "And those who refuse to be converted or sanctified again shall be cast out from this holy people, that is, bound and excluded by means of the keys, as happened to the unrepentant Antinomians." The Antinomians are those who are "anti-nomos" — those who are opposed to the law, and so opposed to calling sin — sin, in need of forgiveness. A church that believes and professes that "anything goes," contrary to Holy Scripture — is not the Church!

Fifth, "the Church is recognized externally by the fact that *it consecrates or calls ministers*." Luther writes, "There must be bishops, pastors or preachers who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions in behalf of and in the name of the Church, by reason of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul states, 'He gave gifts to men,' (Ephesians 4:8)." A public Church has a public ministry which publicly preaches God's Word and publicly administers the sacraments of Christ. In other words, the public ministry does God's work and not just the work of human institutions. Luther continues, "Now wherever you find these offices or officers, you must be assured that the holy Christian people are there; for the Church cannot be without these bishops, pastors, preachers, priests; and conversely, they cannot be without the Church. Both must be together."

"Sixth," Luther writes, "the holy Christian people are externally recognized by *prayer, public praise and thanksgiving to God*. Wherever you see and hear the Lord's Prayer prayed and taught; or psalms or Biblical songs being sung in accordance with the Word of God and the true faith; also the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism used in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian

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people of God are present.” In other words, the Church is visible and recognizable in public assemblies for worship, and in its public prayer, and catechizing of the people.

And finally, Luther writes, “the holy Christian people are externally recognized by the *Holy Possession of the Sacred Cross*.” This does not mean we are the Church when we wear the cross as adornment around our necks, or place it as a decoration in our homes or church buildings, but Luther writes that “the Christian must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh ... by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God’s Word, enduring this for the sake of Christ: as he says in the beatitudes: ‘Blessed are you when men persecute you on my account.’” The true Church will experience trials and tribulations and persecution for the faith. Conversely, we are not the Church when we glory in our institution, our grand buildings, our constitution, and organization. We are not the Church when we glory in all that we have accomplished, selling out to the world and the ways of the world. We are the Church when we possess and bear the cross, for Christ’s sake.

Luther concludes by saying, “Now we know for certain what, where and who the Holy Christian Church is, that is, the holy Christian people of God, and we are quite certain,” writes Luther, “that the Church cannot fail us. Everything else may fail, and surely does,” writes Luther, “for when the devil saw that God built such a holy Church, he erected a chapel beside it, larger than God’s temple.”

When everything else seems to be failing us — when denominational structures, human institutions, and, yes, even family and friends may seem to be going astray — when bishops, pastors and congregations fall into false belief or unbelief; when Christians deny the truth of God’s Word and Christ’s saving death and resurrection, look for the signs of the true and visible Church.

Martin Luther assures us, when you see and experience these seven marks, you are seeing and

experiencing Christ’s real Church. And just so, in this North American Lutheran Church, let us manifest and cling to these things: the holy Word of God; the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; Confession and Forgiveness; the holy Ministry; public prayer and worship; the Cross of Christ, borne willingly for His sake. And just so, let us be joyful, and hopeful — that the true Church continues, and will continue, because Jesus Christ is Lord and Head of His Body!

(The above excerpts from Martin Luther are from “On the Councils and the Church,” 1539. I would also recommend the book, *Marks of the Body of Christ*, edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999.)

Pastor Wendel authors Advent devotions

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! is a new Advent daily devotional booklet by Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism. The devotional booklet will be available for free online at www.thenalc.org starting on Christ the King Sunday (Nov. 24). Use it as a personal, family, or small-group Advent devotional! For more information contact Pastor Wendel at dwendel@thenalc.org.

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

“Strong Medicine: The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation as Antidote to the Lethal Me Culture of Today” is the theme of the annual Canadian Rockies Theological Conference May 5-8 in Canmore, Alberta. Featured speakers are Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto and the Rev. Dr. Walter Sundberg.

Dr. Siemon-Netto is executive director of the Center for Lutheran Theology and Public Life in Capistrano Beach, Calif. Dr. Sundberg is professor of church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.

More information on the conference is available at www.thenalc.org or by contacting Pastor Phillip Gagnon at pastorphil@me.com.

I wonder what she heard? I wonder how often this happens?

By Pastor Timothy Lundeen

*Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son
Of God, creation's author,
Redeemer of your wandering ones,
And source of all true pleasure:
O Lamb of God, O Lord divine,
Conform our lives to your design,
And on us all have mercy.*

*O Holy Spirit, perfect gift,
Who brings us consolation:
To men and women saved by Christ
Assure your inspiration.
Through sickness, need, and bitter death,
Grant us your warm, life-giving breath;
Our lives are in your keeping.*

— “All Glory be to God on High”
(LBW 166, vv. 3-4)

While at the 2013 North American Lutheran Church Convocation, attendees were invited to walk or catch a ride across the Monongahela River over to the First Presbyterian Church for the worship service. So we walked across one of the oldest bridges in Pittsburgh and then up the narrow streets to an old church in the middle of a block. The church building was as beautiful as it was old.

My wife and I sat next to the wall that was framed with beautiful wood architecture and stained glass windows rising two stories in height. The windows were dedicated in the names of former members — some dating back to 1756. Information provided to us as we worshiped dated the membership back to 1744. The building itself dates back to 1906.

At one time the steeples of First Presbyterian and another church sharing the block claimed the skyline. Today the city has built up around the church building. The churches are surrounded by buildings that all but hide them from view unless a person stands in the middle of the block. Between the two 100-year-old buildings are a small cemetery and a garden. From where we were sitting inside



The worship service at First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh during 2013 NALC Convocation.

the church, we could see the cemetery and the garden, beautiful and historic at the same time.

At the start of the worship, we rose to sing the hymn printed above. The sound of the NALC in worship was resounding through the open windows out into the garden and onto the street. While standing, I could see out through the small foldout portion of the window. The sounds of our singing attracted a woman who came and sat in the garden. She sat facing the building, just in line of the open window so she could hear us. The expressions on her face

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revealed a person living in a lot of pain. When we were not singing, she mouthed words to herself. When we sang (she sat through three hymns, the Scripture readings, and the sermon delivered by a bishop from Tanzania) she was quiet. The only movement she made was to reach into her bag and pull out a two-liter Vodka bottle and pull a drink from it.

As we sang the hymn, especially verses 3 and 4, my thoughts were drawn to this woman. I wondered if she heard us, if she heard the words, if they were making a difference for her, if I should go outside and invite her to come in?

Inside, we were warm and packed into almost every available space. Outside, the air was cooling and there was enough room for her, enough for her to hear the words to the song:

*To men and women saved by Christ
Assure your inspiration.
Through sickness, need, and bitter death,
Grant us your warm, life-giving breath;
Our lives are in your keeping.*

Was that enough for her? When the sermon ended, I noticed she had moved on. I wonder what she heard? I wonder how often this happens? I was disappointed that she had already left.

Being seated close to the back of the church, my thoughts raced from worship, to the woman sitting just outside the window, and back to worship. I wondered if I should go outside and sit with her? The reality is that I did nothing. Not me, not anyone of us made any attempt to join this woman during our worship. We were inside, nice and warm (hot!) and safely kept in this beautiful fortress, and I did not use the time given me to share the saving grace and life of Jesus with this woman. The truth for me is that we are just not that good at doing this.

My hesitation was full of excuses: Would her bag with all of her personal belongings be allowed inside the church? Would she accept my presence close to her, even if I only went out and sat with her? As it is, I basically talked myself out of sharing that time of ministry with her, and she left alone, to be alone.

As I write this, I think about our church, the NALC, and the challenge of the Great Commission. We walked past many street people on the way to the worship at First Presbyterian Church that night. Many of you saw them too. Maybe a couple of you remember seeing the woman as well. We walked, we sat, we roasted inside the comforts of the sanctuary, raised up song and worship to our Savior, prayed for the will and the way to carry the message to others, all the while, for some of us, missing even the smallest opportunity to share that time with another. This is the challenge we face.

*Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son
Of God, creation's author,
Redeemer of your wandering ones,
And source of all true pleasure:
O Lamb of God, O Lord divine,
Conform our lives to your design,
And on us all have mercy.*

Pastor Timothy Lundeen serves Grace Lutheran Church in Erskine, Minn. He also serves as dean of the NALC's Minkota Mission District.

Executive Council names Inquiry Panel

The NALC Executive Council has appointed an Inquiry Panel which will serve as a part of the discipline process of the NALC.

The NALC Constitution authorizes the Executive Council to develop a process for discipline and appeals. The Inquiry Panel is a part of that plan should such a process be needed.

The five members are:

- + Pastor Jim Bangsund, San Jose, Calif.
- + Pastor K. Glen Johnson, Calgary, Alberta
- + Bishop Ralph Kempinski, Aiken, S.C.
- + Pastor Solveig Zamzow, Grafton, Iowa
- + Mr. Vic Stevens, North Ridgeville, Ohio

Contact information for the panel members is available at www.thenalc.org.

All ten of them were cured, but only one was healed

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin, the new Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary, wrote this reflection on Luke 17:11-19 for the Christian Leadership Center: An Ecumenical Initiative of the University of Mary in Bismarck, N.D. She is one of several NALC pastors who have written reflections on the lectionary Scripture readings for each Sunday for the Christian Leadership Center. The reflections are designed to assist preachers in their sermon preparation but would also be encouraging to any reader. Their website is www.clcumary.com.

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When He saw them He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

In every life there comes a time of desperation, a time when we'll try almost anything to make life better. Sometimes the pain comes from a lingering illness, when day by day you feel your strength leaving your body. Sometimes it comes when a heart has been broken one time too many. Sometimes it comes when your son is deployed and you see two uniformed soldiers with their heads bowed at your front door. Sometimes it comes when the baby you'd been so hoping for was lost before 12 weeks and now months later your arms are aching because you still want to hold her. In the deepest places of our sorrow, in the heaviest places of our fears, in the coldest winter of our nights when

no matter what we do we can't get warm, we know a desperation that just wants the pain to end.

The ten lepers knew it all: the loss of family, of work, of home, of human touch, of laughter, of rest. Body, mind and spirit were being eaten away by a disease that would reduce them to nothing. There wouldn't even be a place for them in the graveyard. They were in physical pain as their skin and muscles, joints and bones deteriorated. They were hungry all the time, for who would give these beggars a full meal? Without food their strength diminished day by day, and with no place to lay their heads, all they could do was walk around the edges of a community until they would collapse. And underneath all that physical and emotional distress was a torrent of spiritual agony that was far worse, for as they looked at one another's mutilated bodies and then at their own, they could no longer recognize themselves as human beings, as men made in the image of God.

They see Jesus in their no-man's land between Samaria and Galilee, and, like shackled prisoners awaiting transport from the county courthouse to the state penitentiary, they cry out for mercy, and they'll take it any way they can get it. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Even though these lepers have long been chased out of the Temple, the echoes of the psalmist still cling to them,

*Have mercy on me, O Lord
according to your loving kindness.*

Have mercy on me.

In your great compassion blot out all my offenses.

Have mercy on me.

*Wash me through and through from my wickedness
and cleanse me from my sin.*

Have mercy on me ...

They want an end to their sickness. They want an end to their pain. They want an end to their

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isolation. And Jesus, who walks into the borderlands of all lives, speaks His eternal mercy into them.

“Go and show yourselves to the priests,” He commands, “to the ones who can pronounce you clean.” Hoping against hope they listen to Him. Anxious to have their lives restored, they follow His orders and set out on their way, but His word was already cleansing them before they travelled very far. Long before they got near to the priests, they were made clean. Like the scales that fell from Paul’s eyes, they could see a new future beyond anything they had imagined.

All ten of them were cured by His word, cleansed as if they had come through a mountain stream sparkling in the midday sun. Flowing water over them and around them, pure and clear — everything old and decaying washed away — able to start anew — a second chance at life.

All ten of them were cured, but only one of them turns towards Jesus. All ten of them were cured, but only one comes and falls at Jesus’ feet. All ten of them were cured, but only one gives thanks to God. All ten of them were cured, but only one was healed. For only one, this one, a Samaritan, an outsider among outsiders, sees that the kingdom of God, and that the King Himself, has come near.

In this world it’s easy for us to think that the cure of a disease is the be all and end all, the greatest thing that could ever happen. And make no mistake, the curing of every disease is a cause for rejoicing. I don’t know of a person who hasn’t prayed, who hasn’t begged for such a miracle on behalf of a loved one who is suffering. But on this day Jesus is showing us that there is even something more than a cure, something greater, and that is faith; for without faith, we won’t know how to live even when we are made well.

When the Samaritan saw what was happening to him, and who the source of this incredible goodness was, he turned to Jesus. The direction of his life — its purpose, its meaning, its value — has changed. He falls at Jesus’ feet. He worships Him. He worships Him with all his heart, soul, mind, and, at last, his strength. He worships him with his whole

*Your faith
has made
you well.*



body. He praises God by thanking Jesus, and the implication is as clear as day: “Lord, have mercy,” the faithful have always cried, and now, the Lord, the King of all creation has come among us with healing in His wings. Ten have been equally cured. They will be restored to the love of their families and the dignity of their labors, but the one who receives this healing in faith is receiving so much more. For when all the diseases and heartbreaks of this life have taken their toll on us, when there is more scar tissue on our limbs than there is youthful flesh, when the respirator is breathing for us and the patter of the nurses’ feet around our bed is all we hear, when all earthly hope is gone, we know that this One — this Jesus — will make us new again.

The Samaritan, as with all who live in faith, will live his life thanking and praising God continuously, witnessing to all the world that God’s great love is for every human being. By living such a life of thanksgiving, the faithful will be ordering the gift of every day according to God’s holy will. And gift it is. For when lives are lived with faith in Jesus Christ, our hearts will have already been drawn to eternity, where His healing flows without ceasing.

May you, like the Samaritan, rise and go into the world on this day, trusting in faith, that He will make all things well. Amen.

NALC Network preparing launch of online services for NALC churches

As part of the continuing effort to effectively use the Internet and other digital media, the North American Lutheran Church announces the NALC Network.

“The NALC Network is the new vehicle to fully empower each NALC church and mission with the communicative possibilities of the Internet and rapidly-developing mobile communication. Not only will the NALC Network provide services for individual churches, but each church will participate in the network, the aim of which is to share stories, ideas, best practices, and undertake joint communication efforts,” report David Hahn and Todd Harrison, who are leading the development of the project.

Congregations that need a new and invigorated website or want to become part of the mutual effort, may sign up at www.nalcnetwork.com. Organizers

are looking for two or three more churches to be early adopters of the network.

“We’re really looking forward to upgrading our digital communications and web tools with the NALC Network. We’ll be reaching out to the community at the same time we’re growing closer to other NALC congregations,” said Pastor Lyle Belleque of Peace Lutheran Church in Devils Lake, N.D.

“At Zion Lutheran, communication is essential for our mission. We are happy to be pioneering members of the NALC Network, which we think is a great idea and bonding vehicle that will ultimately enable all of us to communicate more effectively with members of our congregation, the NALC, and our entire community,” said Donna Evans of Zion Lutheran Church in Brentwood, Pa.

Forum to feature Benne, Arand, Sánchez

The Gospel and Our Common Witness in the Public Square

Leaders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada have been meeting regularly with leaders of the North American Lutheran Church over the past two years. Despite some differences, our churches are all committed to the authority of Holy Scripture and the *Book of Concord* as a true exposition of Scripture.

One result of the meetings has been a commitment to work together to address critical social and ethical issues. One of the central matters facing all Christians, including Lutherans, today is how the church should relate with society.

Our churches will sponsor an open forum on the theme, “The Gospel and Our Common Witness in the Public Square.” The forum will be held in Werner Auditorium on the campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo., at 7 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 16. The event is free and open to the public.



Robert Benne



Charles Arand



Leopoldo Sánchez

A major presentation on the theme will be given by Dr. Robert Benne, an esteemed Lutheran scholar who regularly addresses matters of society and culture from the perspective of Lutheran theology.

Two Concordia professors, Dr. Charles Arand and Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez, will offer briefer presentations on how Lutheran theology can address two current public square issues: the environment and immigration.

Your Annual Stewardship Campaign

This month's column is about your congregation's annual stewardship campaign. Specifically, I am focusing on *financial* stewardship.

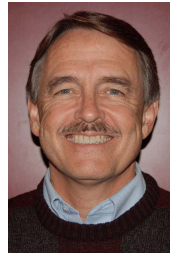
I came across an article from RSI Stewardship, the largest Christian fundraising ministry in North America. The article is entitled, *Twelve Tips for Better Annual Fund Campaign Results*, and was written by Joel Mikell and Bill McMillan. Before sharing highlights from this article, I want to mention that my congregation used RSI for a major capital campaign in 2005. We were very pleased with the campaign they organized for us. However, this particular article focuses not on capital campaigns, but on a congregation's general budget *annual* stewardship campaign, something most Lutheran congregations probably deal with when preparing for a new budget year.

The key thematic statement in the article's introduction was this: "When people know the vision and needs of the church, they are much more likely to invest their time, talent, and resources."

One of my personal shortcomings in ministry has been to approach financial stewardship from two perspectives: "Our bills and obligations" as a congregation and focusing on the need for members to be growing in their tithe as responsible, committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Both are appropriate reasons to give. However, what I have *not* done often enough is to also emphasize how financial contributions are necessary for achieving a shared vision or ministry goal. This might include, in the words of Mikell and McMillan, "an annual plan that details the bulk of your ministry objectives."

Another tip from the article: In sharing your vision and plans, remember that "few people are motivated by numbers. Most people respond to the stories behind the numbers. ... Today's churchgoers are donating to organizations that are making a difference in the community."

Next tip: "People respond more generously when they know how their giving will make a measurable difference." Obviously a very different emphasis from the usual plea, "People, we have bills to pay!" The authors also stress the importance of ministry plans where it's clear to your members how these



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

ministries will reach people who are *outside* the church.

One suggestion is to change the term "pledge card" to "promise card." This is a minor point, but worth considering.

Another tip is to be sure you are keeping up with the changing landscape when it comes to online giving. This might be nothing more than regular reminders to your members that bank "bill pay" systems can be used for regular contributions to church. This is especially helpful when it comes to members who do not worship on a regular basis.

Next suggestion: "Public displays of enthusiasm around the response of your members are a great way to build momentum." Also, in the course of the year, "Celebrate incremental achievements." One more personal confession on my part: I have been far more diligent in the "ask" than I have been when it comes to celebrating and thanking members for their generosity. Another point: "Never underestimate the power of saying thank you." Express your thanks not just to the congregation as a whole, but to individuals on a more personal level. "When givers recognize the significance of their contributions, they will be encouraged to keep giving."

A final tip: "Progress reports are a great way to demonstrate movement toward larger ministry goals that the annual campaign intends to fund ... and report back not just numbers but stories of life change through your ministries."

I hope you have found this helpful. RSI regularly makes articles like this available to pastors on their mailing list. You might want to check out their website: www.rsistewardship.com.

Ordination Anniversaries recognized at Convocation

60th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Robert Pflueger
Pastor Henry S. G. Sheppard

55th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Eugene A. Lehrke
Pastor Paul G. Senff

50th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor William H. Breen
Pastor Ronald L. Deck
Pastor M. L. Jacobson
Bishop Ralph A. Kempiski

55th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Eugene A. Lehrke
Pastor Paul G. Senff

50th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor William H. Breen
Pastor Ronald L. Deck
Pastor M. L. Jacobson
Bishop Ralph A. Kempiski

45th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor John E. Jackson
Pastor Robert D. Kitchen

Pastor John P. Lingle
Pastor Richard G. Mahan
Pastor Hans Scherner

40th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Donald R. Bachman Jr.
Pastor Thomas W. Corbell
Pastor Ralph W. Easterhaus
Pastor John D. Hopper
Pastor Ivan P. Nordstrand Jr.
Pastor Richard V. Pearson

35th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Donald R. Allman
Pastor Timothy L. Anderson
Bishop John F. Bradosky
Pastor Clyde Elliott
Pastor Timothy E. Johnson
Pastor Robert Palan
Pastor M. Henry Pawluk
Pastor Thomas E. Reiff
Pastor Ronald R. Walter

30th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Robert W. Carlson Jr.
Pastor Kebede Dibaba
Pastor Mark C. Dill

Pastor Timothy A. Duesenberg
Pastor Melvin G. Harris
Pastor Barry S. Kendall
Pastor Gerald M. Merkouris
Pastor Frederick W. Meuter III
Pastor Stephen E. Seibel
Pastor Donna Hacker Smith
Pastor David L. Steffenson

25th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Joel J. Berthelsen
Pastor Jimalee Jones
Pastor Tamara J. K. Keen
Pastor Lauren R. Ley
Pastor Timothy Nappe
Pastor David Priem
Pastor Robert Vitek
Pastor Frezil Westerlund

20th Anniversary of Ordination

Pastor Aaron D. Albrecht
Pastor Seth J. Jersild
Pastor Karl Johnsen
Pastor H. Ray Ramsburg
Pastor Dennis Reich

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