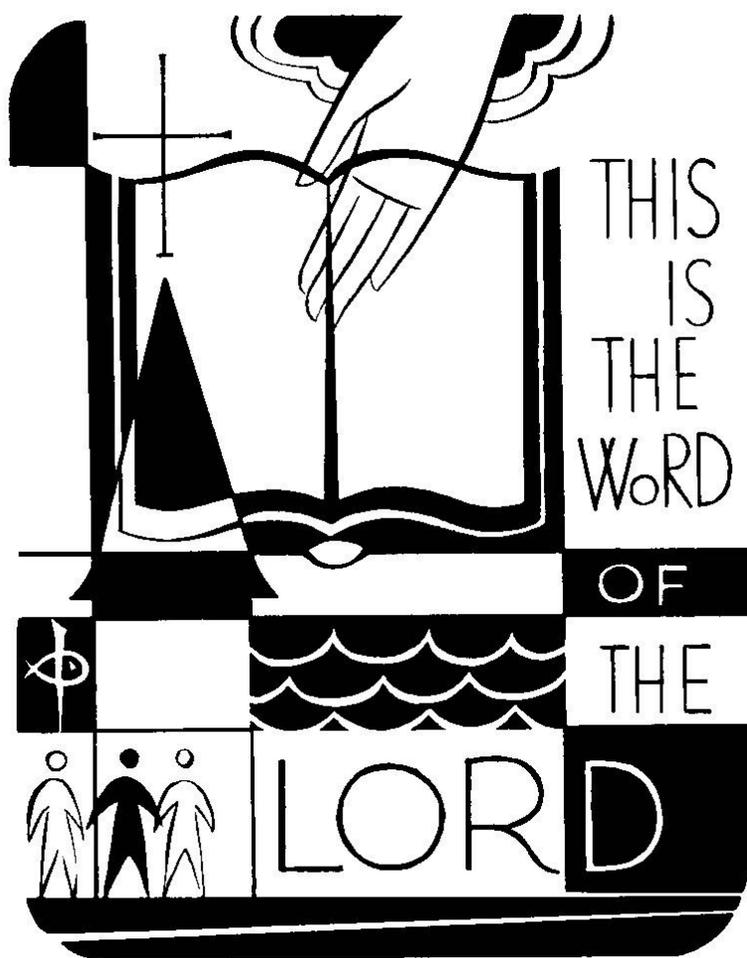


The Bible as the Word of God

NALC Commission on Theology and Doctrine issues a pastoral and educational letter on Holy Scripture



The Bible is a gift to the Church from the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The “good pleasure” (cf. Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV) of the Triune God is to free His fallen human creatures from the wrong and corruption of sin, the tyranny of the devil and the threat of death, draw them into communion with Himself and, in the end, fill the created universe with His glory. Coming from God, the Bible not only makes known this holy, loving purpose, it is also a means by which God achieves His purpose.

With these words, the newly released document on Holy Scripture, prepared by the North American Lutheran Church’s Commission on Theology and Doctrine, affirms the strong commitment of the NALC to the Bible as God’s gift to the Church.

It affirms that “the Bible not only makes known this holy, loving purpose” — “to free His fallen human creatures from the wrong and corruption of sin, the tyranny of the devil and the threat of death, draw them into communion with Himself” — the Bible is also “a means by which God achieves His purpose.”

From well before the formation of the NALC, it has been clear that the chief issue leading some Lutherans in North America to stray from faithful, historic Christian teaching has been, at its core, a departure from the Bible — “the Word of God written, which accompanies and makes known the gift of the Word of God incarnate, so that the world may believe in Him and have eternal life.”



Pastor David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Ministry Matters

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The Rev. Paull Spring, NALC bishop emeritus and a member of the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, explains, “When the North American Lutheran Church was formed, much emphasis was given to the doctrine of marriage and sexuality. This was understandable, given the controversial decisions on these matters within some churches, Lutheran and non-Lutheran alike. In reality, the presenting issues went deeper than marriage and sexuality, striking at the heart of the nature of biblical authority in the Church.”

For this reason, being clear and unequivocal with regard to the NALC’s understanding of the Holy Bible has been at the forefront of conversations in meetings of the Executive Council, the Commission on Theology and Doctrine and every ecumenical and inter-Lutheran conversation. While not wanting to question the commitment of our pastors and congregations, providing pastoral and educational guidance regarding the Bible is necessary and helpful as we seek to be faithful to our constitution, which states:

The North American Lutheran Church confesses ... The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith and life, “according to which all doctrines should and must be judged.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Part I)

Already, each of the NALC’s ecumenical consultations has prepared common affirmations regarding Holy Scripture, as those affirmations have been foundational for our ongoing conversations.

The *Initial Statement on the Ecumenical and Inter-Lutheran Commitment of the North American Lutheran Church*, approved at the 2011 NALC Convocation, asserts:

We intend to engage in ecumenical and inter-Lutheran endeavors at the international, national, and local levels, in accordance with our commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. (Emphasis added.)

To ensure that ecumenical endeavors with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) are “in



accordance with our commitment to the Scriptures,” the joint document, *Four Pastoral and Educational Affirmations*, was prepared and shared with the ACNA and the NALC as a common study document for use by congregations. One of those affirmations is about Holy Scripture.

Similarly, the NALC’s inter-Lutheran consultation with the Lutheran Church—Canada and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod prepared a common statement to guide the ongoing work of the consultation. It is titled, “*God’s Word Forever Shall Abide: A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures.*”

The inter-Lutheran consultation also led to the publication of *Reading the Word of God: A Daily Reading Guide for Three Years*. The reading guide includes calendars with daily readings from Scripture and weekly readings selected from *Luther and the Scriptures* by Johann Michael Reu.

The NALC Commission on Theology and Doctrine has been developing a document on Holy Scripture since 2014, with the intention that it have a somewhat “different angle,” aimed at practical questions such as: “What kind of a book is the Bible?” “How did the Bible come to be?” and “How may we profitably and faithfully read the Bible?”

“Responding to numerous requests, the Commission on Theology and Doctrine has prepared a letter of counsel and advice to the church on the subject of biblical authority. The commission presents this letter as a carefully nuanced and creative reaffirmation of the classic

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Lutheran understanding of the Bible. This letter, with the title, *The Bible as the Word of God*, was received with gratitude by the Executive Council of the NALC which authorized its distribution to the church to provide much needed guidance, reflection and encouragement,” Bishop Spring explained.

The statement is now complete and available on the NALC website at thenalc.org/letteronscripture. A study guide is being developed and will be released in the near future.

In keeping with the intention of the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, major headings of the statement are:

- + Where Does the Bible Come From?
- + What Kind of Book is the Bible?
- + How May We Understand the Bible?
- + What Is the Authority of Scripture in the Church?

Sub-headings are equally practical and helpful:

- + The Bible is a book of *Holy* Scriptures.
- + The Bible is both clear and deep, straightforward and complex ...
- + The Bible is the powerful Word of God which both kills and makes alive, ruthlessly exposing our sin and at the same time proclaiming Christ as our Savior.
- + In its holiness, in its clarity and complexity, as Law and Gospel, the Bible baffles human wisdom and challenges our habits of understanding.
- + The Bible is a transforming book through which God calls us to follow Christ and guides us on the way of discipleship.
- + The Bible is a truthful, reliable book that will not lead us into error and falsehood ...

For all who may struggle with reading and comprehending Holy Scripture, the section entitled,



“How May We Understand the Bible?” provides profound, yet simple guidance. It suggests:

- + Approach the Bible with Hopeful Prayer.
- + Be Guided By the “Rule of Faith” in Creed and Catechism.
- + Read Scripture in the Fellowship of the Church.
- + Interpret Scripture by Scripture.
- + Pay Attention to the Words.

Also profound is the section on “What is the Authority of Scripture in the Church.” It states,

According to the Formula of Concord, Scripture is the “pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true guiding principle by which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated” (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert translation, 527). Two distinct but interrelated roles are assigned to Scripture by this confessional statement.

The document makes clear these two distinct roles. Scripture is both the “pure, clear fountain of Israel” and “the only true guiding principle.” It states, “Only Scripture (*sola Scriptura*) can play these roles of ‘fountain’ and ‘guiding principle’ in the Church.”

Of particular relevance is the assertion, “The Church and its teachers may not say that God requires what Scripture does not require, nor may they encourage or approve what is not in harmony with Scripture.” A quote from Martin Luther addresses this directly:

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The Church also has no power to establish new divine promises of grace, as some prate, who hold that whatever is decreed by the church is of no less authority than what is decreed by God, since the church is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For the church was born by the word of promise through faith. ... That is to say, it is the promises of God that make the church, not the church that makes the promises of God. For the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church, and in this Word the church, being a creature, has nothing to decree, ordain, or make, but [is] only to be decreed, ordained and made ("The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther's Works 36, 107).

Every pastor, congregation and informed member of the NALC acknowledges the struggles, trials and challenges presented by Lutherans and Lutheran churches which have departed from the Bible as the Word of God. And yet, the statement reminds us,

Amidst these trials and troubles, however, the promise endures: "The word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8 ESV).

This utterly reliable and unshakeable Word of God is not hidden from us. By God's merciful gift, by the work of His Spirit, the Word of God abides in our midst in stable, written form. God's powerful and life-giving Word accompanies us on our pilgrimage, and through it His Holy Spirit continually stirs up faithful witness and faithful worship.

Speaking on the need for such a statement, the Rev. John Bradosky, NALC bishop, asserts, "It is critical for the NALC to be clear regarding our understanding and use of Holy Scripture. It should be obvious that without clarity regarding the authority and interpretation of Scripture we would be bound to repeat a past we have left behind.

"While honest open dialog regarding the complexities of the Bible and its proper interpretation is critical in our life together, we begin with the words of Scripture, ascribing to them the authority that norms all matters of our faith and life. We do so recognizing the faithful interpretation of those same texts from those who came before us and believed that they were true even when they were not easily understood or were in opposition to cultural trends.

"This teaching statement on Holy Scripture helps us to avoid the destructive mitigation of the Word of God in favor of human wisdom and the relativistic notion that every person has the right to determine truth for themselves, negating any possibility of absolute truth. The Word of God is absolute and true!" Bishop Bradosky said.

Bishop Spring expressed a final word of invitation: "It is the hope and prayer of the Commission on Theology and Doctrine that individuals, congregations, and pastors' gatherings will study and reflect on the content of this letter. The commission further hopes that this letter will strengthen and enhance the NALC's commitment to the Bible as the Word of God."

You may download *The Bible as the Word of God* at thenalc.org/letteronscripture. The ecumenical statements on Scripture are also available on the NALC website at thenalc.org/nalc-statements.

Advent devotions available online

Daily devotions for Advent and Christmas will be provided by NALC Life Ministries.

The devotions will provide a daily pro-life message from Advent through Jan. 18 (the date of the 2019 March for Life in Washington, D.C.).

The devotions will be available each day at thenalc.org/devotions. You can also follow along with this year's devotional by signing up to receive a daily text or email message.

To receive a daily text message, please text [@nalcadvent](https://textmessage.com/@nalcadvent) to 614-682-8693. To receive a daily email, please visit remind.com/join/nalcadvent and complete the brief request.

To learn more about NALC Life Ministries, visit thenalc.org/lifeministries.

Congregations may nominate candidates for NALC bishop

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are encouraged to nominate pastors for the office of bishop of the NALC.

The 2019 NALC Convocation, Aug. 7-9 in Indianapolis, Ind., will elect a new bishop for the NALC. Bishop John Bradosky has announced that he will not accept nomination to a third term as bishop when his term expires in 2019.

According to the NALC Constitution, congregations are the primary source of nominees for bishop. Congregations are encouraged to begin the process of discerning who they might nominate for bishop. Any NALC pastor may be nominated. Congregations may nominate more than one person for bishop.

The only other source for nominations prior to the Convocation is the NALC Executive Council. The council has announced that it will not be nominating any candidates this year, so it is important that congregations nominate pastors for the position.

Congregations decide how they will nominate candidates, but some formal action by the congregation or its council should be taken. A congregational meeting, such as an annual meeting, would be a good place to formalize any nominations coming from a congregation as it would involve as many members as possible.

Congregational members are encouraged to engage in conversation about people who might serve as bishop with their pastor or mission district dean.

To prepare for the nomination and election process for bishop, the Executive Council provided a packet of information to congregations in August. The packet includes a booklet of prayers encouraging NALC members to engage in a year of prayer and discernment leading up to the election.



The installation service for Bishop John Bradosky at the 2011 NALC Convocation in Hilliard, Ohio.

The prayer booklet, nomination form, and more information on the election process may be found online at thenalc.org/election.

Congregations are encouraged to submit nominations to the Nominating Committee early in 2019. The Nominating Committee is required to make biographical information on all candidates for bishop available to NALC congregations 90 days prior to the Convocation. Receiving nominations by April will allow the committee time to gather the biographical information from candidates.

The committee has set a May 3 deadline for all nominations prior to the Convocation. Additional nominations for bishop are possible from the floor of the Convocation, but it would be helpful to the process to have all nominations submitted in advance so that biographical information on all candidates can be available to delegates.

Questions about the nominating process may be addressed to committee chair, Marc Voigt, at nominations@thenalc.org.

Mission district deans meet to discuss ministry and mission

Deans from the mission districts of the North American Lutheran Church gathered Nov. 14-15 in Columbus, Ohio. The annual meeting of the deans is a time for the deans to report on what is happening in their mission districts and to work together for the sake of the whole church.

A focus of this year's meeting was the upcoming election of a new bishop for the NALC. The deans talked about ways that congregations within mission districts can work together to discern possible candidates for bishop and encourage their congregations to make nominations.

Bishop John Bradosky reported on his work as a way of helping the deans to understand the work of the bishop and the demands on the bishop's time.

The deans discussed the proposal from the NALC Task Force on Structure and the possibility of creating some sort of regional assistants to the bishop and how the task force's recommendations might be implemented. The deans would like to provide guidance to the new bishop in staffing decisions. The deans created a task force to review regional and staffing possibilities that will seek input from all of the deans and offer a report to the new bishop and the NALC task force.

Several mission districts are already responding to the restructuring proposal by reducing the number of congregations in each mission district and creating mission regions, the deans reported.

Five mission districts in Ohio now work together as the Ohio Mission Region. Three mission districts in Texas have formed the Texas Mission Region. The Great Plains Mission District has divided into three mission districts that will work together as the Great Plains Mission Region.

Mission districts on the northern and central east coast of the United States are forming the Atlantic Mission Region. The Carolinas Mission District is in



the process of dividing into smaller mission districts but will continue together as a mission region.

The deans discussed the possibility of regional representation on the NALC Executive Council. Their consensus was that regional diversity be encouraged in the nominating process but not required.

The deans also discussed the need for honoring the confessional principles of NALC members across the continuum of confessional Lutherans. Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC general secretary, provided a paper called, "Learning from Our Past," which detailed the intentional way that various strains of confessional Lutheranism were included in the creation of the NALC and in some of the reform movements that preceded its formation.

The deans received written and oral reports from Bishop John Bradosky and NALC executive staff.

The deans expressed their appreciation for the ministry and leadership of Bishop Bradosky during his eight years as bishop and to Pastor Dan Powell of Grace Lutheran Church in Springfield, Ohio, who organizes the deans' gatherings and facilitates ongoing communication among the deans.

What I wish I had known about stewardship

By Pastor Dona Johnson

In my senior year of seminary, I knew I was in trouble. I had learned the languages and focused on systematic theology and biblical studies — but I knew nothing about stewardship.

I was told it was something I needed to learn on my own time. Thankfully, a pastor who was passionate about stewardship was willing to mentor me. I then learned about stewardship — biblical stewardship. I learned that God is the sovereign owner. God owns it all by right of creation and by right of redemption. And God entrusts us with the gifts of time, talent, treasure and testimony not for our self-promotion but for His kingdom.

In *Stewards of God*, Milo Kauffman writes, “When Jesus becomes our Lord we become His stewards. There can be no lordship of Jesus without stewardship on the part of His followers. Lordship implies stewardship: one cannot exist without the other.”

The NALC’s Living and Giving Stewardship Team is serious about faithful stewardship. It is our desire that every congregation grow as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mercies (*1 Cor. 4:1*). So much so, we’re now offering an all-day stewardship intensive called *Stewards of God’s Influence*.

This workshop is open to all mission districts willing to host a group of congregations. Although this is especially geared for pastors, council members, officers and lay leaders, all are welcome and encouraged to attend.

In this all-day intensive, you will discover how to create a culture of generosity in your congregation, develop a stewardship team, see giving not as transactional but as transformational, and implement the essentials of an effective stewardship campaign.

In September, our Living and Giving Stewardship Team offered the workshop in the Southwest Ohio Mission District. Christ the King Lutheran Church in Centerville, Ohio, hosted 40 pastors and lay leaders



NALC stewardship workshop in Centerville, Ohio.

representing eight of the mission district’s 11 congregations. Here are a few testimonials:

- + *Stewards of God’s Influence* helped me tremendously look at my own giving and its impact on my life and ministry.
- + I never thought of stewardship as year-round. I had a small view of stewardship — for me it was about money and fundraising.
- + Such an encouraging presentation. So positive! I love that prayer and Scripture were a priority!
- + I learned three things: leadership needs to be invested, stewardship needs to be bathed in prayer and it requires a pastor’s commitment.
- + I loved it!! Very helpful, positive and constructive.
- + Stewardship is not just about money but a change of heart.
- + Leaving a legacy of faith — awesome!

If your mission district has a desire to grow in faith and stewardship and would like to learn more about hosting *Stewards of God’s Influence*, please contact me at revdonajohnson@gmail.com.

It is never too soon to plan for your next stewardship campaign and grow in year-round stewardship!

Kuwala – Shine, girls, shine!

NALC congregation in Manitoba starts girls school in Malawi

By Pastor Peter Lurvey

The medallion said “Joy.” And it set in motion God-directed events that are changing lives both here and on the other side of the world.

Some Lutherans in Canada were looking for both local and global mission projects on which to focus.

A local Christian school for high-risk kids — those vulnerable to exploitation, gangs, drugs and early death — provided the local focus.

The global focus started because of the little medallion Rozanne Boonstra had made celebrating her new church — Joy Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Rozanne and her husband, Myles, were attending an NALC Convocation, and they were looking at mission displays when one of the display hosts noticed the medallion and struck up a conversation.

That led to interest in the country of Malawi in south central Africa. That led to visits to the country and seeing the need for Christian education for girls. After much prayer and work, it has led to the establishment of Kuwala Christian Girls School, Inc., a registered charity in Canada, and a reality in the countryside of Malawi.

Kuwala means *light*, and the desire is for the light of God’s love in Jesus to shine to and through the girls at the school and beyond.

Land has been purchased, a Malawian board has been formed, staff hired and infrastructure has been built — a well and water tower, a sanitation system, some transportation, dorms and classrooms, and temporary cooking and dining facilities.

September 2018 saw staff and 60 students begin high school. Sixty girls with a brighter future.

But why only girls?



Students pose in front of new classroom at Kuwala Christian Girls School in Malawi established by members of Joy Lutheran Church in Winnipeg.

“Girls in Malawi suffer disproportionately compared to boys,” said engineer Myles Boonstra, Kuwala board member. “Girls often drop out of school and are forced into early marriage. They work at home to support their family, and endure pregnancy at a very young age. The few girls who are able to remain in school often face issues of starvation, abuse and rape. Extreme gender bias is reinforced by cultural norms throughout rural Malawi.”

United Nations’ statistics show that just under a quarter of Malawian adolescent females are married. At an age when our children are getting braces, taking guitar lessons, and messaging friends, too many girls in Malawi are getting married, having babies and struggling to survive.

Back from a recent trip to Malawi, Joy Lutheran member, Susan Wiegner, had a chance to visit a home typical of the students at Kuwala. “These girls come from small rural villages where they live in brick homes with little to sustain them. No water, no heat, no power, and getting food can be a struggle,” says Susan, recently retired from an investment firm. “They are expected to marry at a young age and start bearing children. Add to that the potential

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for gender-based violence and life is difficult for them. We're trying to break this cycle and empower these girls."

The families of the girls cannot afford to pay school fees, so Kuwala relies on the donations from supporters to provide for the education, and room and board. \$100 a month will ensure a girl gets a hand up out of poverty and an education in a Christ-centred environment.

So much has been done by little Joy Lutheran Church. Although they don't own their own building, they have started a Christian school for girls on the other side of the world.

What about the future? What's on the horizon? St. Peter's Lutheran Church, the other NALC congregation in Winnipeg, has committed to building a permanent kitchen/dining/meeting hall facility, with a gift of over \$100,000. Along with their significant financial support, St. Peter's is also sponsoring 12 of our students.

And the vision is bigger — more students and staff, a greenhouse, dorms and guest houses, a chapel and solar power for the school, which is in an area that has intermittent power at best.

Mark Kinzel is an investment executive, member of Joy Lutheran and a board member for Kuwala. "Our goal is to create a long term education program for girls," he says, "with the intention of helping them break out of poverty, create a better life for themselves, their families and their villages. Our investment creates immediate benefits and allows us to move young women forward and influence the future of their communities."

The students, staff and board invite you to partner with Kuwala. Exciting things are happening, and you can be a part of it.

+ Pray for Kuwala, the girls, staff and leadership team here and in Malawi. Check us out at kuwala.org, and follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

+ Give your donations of money, talents, abilities and presence. \$100 a month covers the cost of educating one girl. Men's groups, women, seniors,



Construction in progress at Kuwala Christian Girls School in Malawi.

youth groups? Honor a loved one. Adopt Kuwala students.

+ Get a group together to visit Kuwala. They'd be happy to see you!

+ Invite one of our speakers to make a presentation to your group.

+ Become a *lighthouse* congregation in the United States, to help establish a U.S.-based Kuwala charity, and help shine the light on Kuwala.

+ Make Kuwala your church's *global focus*, as we all act locally and globally with the love of Jesus.

+ Fund a specific project — like a chapel, greenhouse, solar power or teachers' housing.

In the age of Uber, Twitter and other social "disrupters," Myles Boonstra says, "Kuwala Christian Girls School is a disruption. Kuwala is focused on girls who have no other options, and helps them achieve their God-given potential. It's a safe place for girls to live, receive nutritious meals, get a basic education, and grow in a Christ-centred environment."

Kuwala invites you and your church to come on board and help girls shine.

For more information on Kuwala Christian Girls School, visit kuwala.org or email info@kuwala.org. Donations may be sent in care of Joy Lutheran Church; 2-50 Barnes Street; Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T4Z7.

Advent – A time to point to Jesus

Dear disciples of Jesus throughout the North American Lutheran Church:

In a very few days we begin a new Church Year. The season of Advent is a wondrous time of preparation and anticipation. I encourage you to immerse yourself in this season, instead of enduring it as a necessary requirement in order to get to Christmas — the true focus of our energy and attention.

One of the key figures in this season is John the Baptist and his message and ministry.

In thinking about his ministry, I thought about the challenge that *Smith Magazine* offered its readers — to attempt to write their autobiography in six words. The results were profound.

In reading those very brief autobiographies, I was reminded of the renowned theologian Karl Barth, who was asked at a press conference, “What is the most profound truth you have learned in your studies?” Without the least hesitation he offered six words: “Jesus loves me this I know.” He paused and added another six for good measure, “for the Bible tells me so.”

What would John the Baptist’s autobiography look like in six words? *Wilderness preaching, repent and be baptized or Change and transformation, essential Kingdom living.* If we follow his life a little further, perhaps we would write, *Arrested and imprisoned, lost his head.*

Throughout his life, his message was focused on these six words: *Jesus, Son of God, world’s Savior.*

John had an urgent message for this world. Where do you hear this message today? We hear many commercials that make us feel a sense of urgency to buy things we don’t need or give things to people they will never use. The commercial message of Christmas is found everywhere, but where is the spiritual message of Christmas? Who will bring a word to this world about the only true meaning of Christmas — Jesus Christ?



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

The world says this is a time for caring and sharing, and for family and charity. Even churches begin to sound like the rest of the world saying the same things. “Come to our church,” they all say. “We are the friendliest. We have the best pastor. We have the best Sunday school. We have the best worship services. Come to us, and you will experience all the love and sharing and caring and hugging and singing that you’re looking for this time of the year.”

This is not bad, but it is not what God intends or what the world needs.

The witness of John the Baptist reminds us that the goal of faithful living is not to blend in with the rest of the world. It is not to be politically correct or to be led by political agendas, no matter how popular. John is not trying to sell something or convince people to purchase something, as if Jesus were a possession or commodity that could be purchased. His message is focused on reaching the heart of every person he encounters.

John’s message is powerful because it comes from God. The priests and Levites from Jerusalem ask, “Who are you?” He tells them clearly that he is not the messiah. He is not Elijah, and he is not a prophet. Then they ask him the most important question of all. “What do you say about yourself?” John says, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord!”

Voice and crying go together. The voice preaches faith; the cry calls for repentance. The voice offers comfort; the cry signals danger. The voice sings mercy; the cry announces judgment.

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John the Baptist's entire life and ministry point to Jesus. John removed all false suspicions about who he was. He is not the Christ! The people around him offered him glory. Instead, he deflects all the glory toward Jesus.

John admitted the limitation and incompleteness of his ministry. His baptism was with water, but he pointed to Jesus who baptizes people with the Holy Spirit, providing forgiveness, transformation and new life. John spoke of his own unworthiness to untie the sandals of Jesus, he recalled the imagery in the book of Ruth of the kinsman redeemer removing his sandals in preparation to receive his bride, something that John was unwilling to do because he was not the bridegroom. One of the Church fathers writes, "When Christ does remove his sandals, he leaves his footprint on our souls." John was not the perfect one, but his work was to prepare the way for the One who is the perfect Savior and Redeemer of the world — Jesus Christ.

John's message reminds us that spiritual preparation begins with repentance. The process of repentance begins by recognizing our sins and confessing them to Christ. Whenever we confess our sins, we remember God's promise of forgiveness to us in Baptism. In this process of repentance, we receive forgiveness. The power of Christ's forgiveness is in the cross and the empty tomb. The magnitude of His grace assures us of our complete forgiveness.

Reform, which is often overlooked, is the final part of the process of repentance. Our lives begin to change. Forgiven for impatience, we become more patient. Forgiven for our anger, we become gentle. Forgiven for our greed, we become generous. Forgiven for selfishness, we focus on the needs of others. Forgiven for disobeying God and making excuses, we begin to obey God, not because we have to, but because we want to.

The courage to confess, the assurance of forgiveness and the power to live a transformed life all come from the same source, the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. The answers do not come from within us but are transcendent and come to us from the Holy Spirit of Christ. Often that is where we end our preparation, taking

ADVENT-

Make ready
the way of Lord.



care of ourselves. But John the Baptist reminds us of our need to be a witness to Christ in this world. We are called to point to Jesus with our words and deeds. We must find ways to tell people who we are! We are followers of Christ, disciples of Jesus, who have only one purpose for living, to point people to Jesus. This is the greater goal of Advent — to share our hope and expectation.

Jesus is the only hope for the world. He is the only way, the only truth and the only life. We live with the constant expectation that He is coming again in power and glory and that one day every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

There is no greater love for others than to share the truth of Jesus with them. This is the message of hope that the world so desperately needs: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth" (*John 1:14 ESV*).

The biography of John the Baptist is not nearly as important as the biography of God. It too is a series of just six words — "*For God so loved the world.*"

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The most powerful and important biography of all time: God loves us so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus. Through Him we receive unfathomable grace, infinite love and life in Him that is eternal.

In the midst of our Christmas preparation we often forget that there is a message that desperately needs to be proclaimed! We must use this as a time to point to Jesus! The amazement of the Incarnation will one day be overshadowed by His coming in glory and power. In the meantime, we live in the reality of His presence among us now in the Word read and proclaimed, in the water and the Word of Baptism, and in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

He is here leading His Church, guiding our congregations in mission and ministry. He is Emmanuel, God with us, inspiring us through His example of servant leadership and obedience to the will of His Father. In obedience to His Father's will, He endured the agony of the cross and died the death we deserve. He paid the price of our forgiveness so that our sins might be washed away in Baptism, and the relationship with Jesus by faith in Him secured for all eternity in His glorious resurrection.

He is with us to strengthen us for our witness to this world. John the Baptist knew that he was nobody compared to this special somebody. In a world where leaders want to point to themselves, the number of members, the size of their campus, the number of books sold, honors received, interviews given, and endorsements requested, John shows the nature of leadership in the Church — point to Christ.

Unfortunately, there are many teachers and leaders, even in the Church, who believe they are greater and wiser than Jesus. Mohammed taught that he was a greater prophet than Jesus. The founder of the Mormon church, Joseph Smith, taught that his revelation was more authoritative than the teachings of Jesus. There is a long list of messianic pretenders and founders of sects and cults in North American culture, and throughout the world, who believe that Jesus must decrease so that they might increase.

In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (*John 1:29*). He told his own followers, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (*John 3:30*). John knew that Jesus was not one among many. He was the one and only. You should follow no religious leader who puts himself above Jesus or points to his own accomplishments. We must follow the example of John the Baptist and boldly point to Jesus with all we have and are, even in a world that despises Him and may hate us for proclaiming Him.

My point in talking about the power of a few words is that a few words are all you need to witness to Jesus. You do not have to preach a sermon, teach a course in theology or be able to attract a crowd. With a few words you can point to Jesus. Your decorations can point to Jesus. What you wear can point to Jesus. How you spend your time and what you do can point to Jesus.

Don't be surprised that the world does not know how to celebrate Christmas appropriately. How can it unless people of faith are even more committed to pointing to Jesus?

As we celebrate the Eucharist we hear another group of six profound words that make the grace of Jesus Christ real and tangible — “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” In those words, Jesus is saying that this is the best way to prepare your heart for Christmas and receive power for an effective witness. What we receive is what we proclaim.

The ministry and message of John the Baptist could be summarized in these six words: *Christ's the Word; John's the voice.*

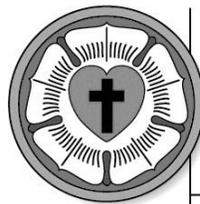
The implications of this Advent season for our own life is similar: *Christ's the Word; you're His voice!* May your witness to the world be strengthened this Advent season and throughout this new Church Year.

With you following Christ Jesus,

Bishop John Bradosky

North American Lutheran Seminary begins search for new president

The Board of Regents of the North American Lutheran Seminary and the Presidential Search Committee invite applications for the position of president of the North American Lutheran Seminary in Ambridge, Pa. The position description is available on the NALC website.



NALS

North American Lutheran Seminary

The NALS presidency offers the exciting opportunity to lead an ambitious theological school well-positioned to achieve its next level of success through a continued commitment to academic rigor, student-centered success, the Great Commission and strong articulation of the Core Values of the North American Lutheran Church.

The NALS is the seminary of the North American Lutheran Church and is yoked with Trinity School for Ministry. Applications are entirely confidential, reviewed by the Presidential Search Committee

only, and should be submitted no later than Feb. 15, 2019. The next president will assume office on or around July 1, 2019.

Questions about the position should be addressed to Dr. Roy Schwarz, chair of the NALS Board of Regents, at 540-678-8748.

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin has been serving as both NALS president and a faculty member since 2014. She will continue as full-time seminary faculty.

Maurice Lee to serve seminary as interim director of partnerships and recruitment

The Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee will serve as interim director of partnerships and recruitment for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Dr. Lee's presence and work this year is vital for the seminary's ability to expand its work throughout North America.

This part-time position will run from Oct. 15, 2018, to Aug. 31, 2019. The interim director will manage and establish new undergraduate and seminary partnerships for the NALS.

Dr. Lee currently serves as pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran

Church on the campus of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Calif. Prince of Peace is the first campus ministry in the NALC.

Dr. Lee also serves as an adjunct faculty member for the NALS in its systematic theology department.

"I'm very much looking forward to working more closely with the staff of the NALS and with partner institutions across North America, present and future, for the sake of training Gospel-filled, Scripture-shaped, worship-spirited, Christ-following servants of the Church," Dr. Lee said.



Maurice Lee

Small and rural church ministry

By Pastor Brad Hales

Director of Domestic Mission

There is a prevailing attitude in some quarters that if a church doesn't have many people at worship, receive an adequate sum of offerings, or isn't saturated with daily programming, then it is not viable as a center for mission.

Some believe that if a congregation is aging and struggling to do ministry in a community that is declining, then it has little hope for the future.

Sadly, these thoughts and opinions are based on worldly standards rather than what the Holy Spirit is doing.

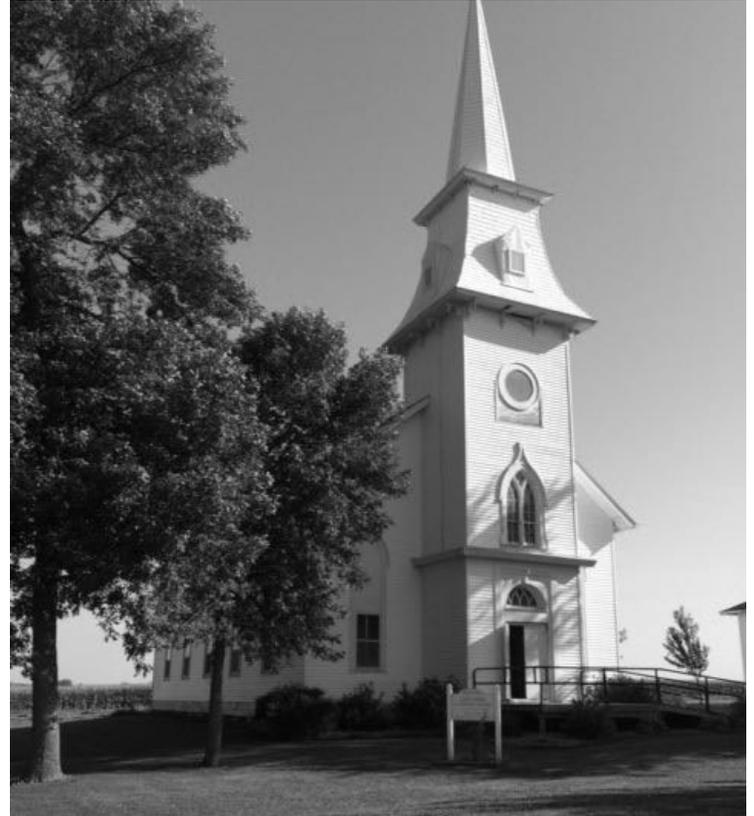
The small and rural church is the backbone of the Christian community in the United States. Whether these congregations are found in tiny towns, the middle of farmland, residential enclaves in suburbia or nestled within bustling cities, groups of dedicated individuals gather in mission, centered in Word and Sacrament, seeking ways to build relationships and reach out to their neighbors.

It would be too simplistic to look back at the past, lamenting and being discouraged at the differences in our congregations today from the congregations of yesterday. Dwelling on what was is neither healthy nor productive.

We have a God who wants to equip and empower us to make Jesus known now and in the future.

Small is not bad! As seen through the words of the prophet in Micah 5:2, the smallness of Bethlehem didn't seem to bother the Lord: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler of Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

Instead of allowing negativity and pessimism to consume the congregation and cause it to think it is not good enough, a new way of thinking must emerge and take hold.



The small and rural church is viable and vital in making disciples for Jesus Christ. The goal of a new study from the North American Lutheran Church called, *A Future of Hope: The Small and Rural Church*, is to offer encouragement to these congregations, helping them to realize that they are a fundamental and foundational part of today's larger Church community. These congregations do have the ability to form relationships, serve and empower/equip individuals to do ministry in their daily lives.

When it comes to the small and rural church, these congregations today represent a future of hope. The Holy Spirit can work within any size group for the saving, grace-filled message Christ proclaimed.

Come and experience how these congregations can grow and witness even more by deepening their relationships with Jesus, one another and the community.

We invite you to use this new resource for Small and Rural Church Ministry available online at thenalc.org/futureofhope.

Abortion survivor to speak at NALC Life Conference

The third annual NALC Life Conference will be held on Thursday, Jan. 17, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va. The event is free and will begin at noon with a free lunch and conclude at 5 p.m. with a Communion service led by Bishop John Bradosky.

The keynote speaker will be Melissa Ohden, the survivor of a failed saline infusion abortion.

Believing she was less than five months pregnant with Melissa in 1977, her birth-mother attempted to abort her. Miraculously, the abortion did not succeed in ending Melissa's life. Although the doctors initially believed that she would not live past her infancy, and if she did, she would suffer from multiple disabilities throughout her lifetime, she was adopted into a loving home as an infant. She not only survived, but thrived.

As Melissa will be sharing with us, her life — her story — is so much more than one of survival. Melissa's testimony speaks to the beauty of God's grace in our lives, about the power of love, about hope and healing in the midst of grief and loss, and about the transformational power of forgiveness and in answering God's call for our lives.

Melissa's perspective as an abortion survivor who has had contact with numerous members of her biological family, as a mother, highlights the intergenerational impact of abortion on families and communities. Fulfilling the purpose that she believes God set out for her when He saved her from the certain death of the abortion attempt, Melissa is truly a voice for the voiceless.

There is no registration required. But please email Pastor Dennis at dennisdimauro@yahoo.com if you will be attending the lunch to enable meal planning.

The following day, Friday, Jan. 18, those who are interested may attend the National Prayer Service and participate in the 2019 March for Life.



Youth and Family Ministry Update

By Gary and Laurie Pecuch

We have been posting a video in the NALC Youth Workers Facebook Group every Wednesday. Consider joining the Facebook group and checking out the videos posted this autumn. Average length is about four minutes.

Remember to tune in to the monthly webinars on the second Tuesday of each month at 2 p.m. ET. This year we are focusing on Old Testament Bible lessons.

The remaining youth ministry online course schedule is:

January — Setting up a Safeguarding System in Your Congregation

February — Models of Ministry

March — Developing Spiritual Disciplines

April — Basic Faith Skills Training

An all-NALC NEXUS Institute week is on the calendar for July 7-12, 2019. Held at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa, NEXUS is designed to give deep-thinking high schoolers a chance to learn about theology, service and ask questions of faith. It is a great experience and free from the time you arrive to the time you depart.

Gary and Laurie Pecuch serve the NALC as youth ministry coaches. They provide a variety of resources for NALC congregations free of charge through faithwebbing.com. You may contact them at families@thenalc.org.



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NALC News moving to electronic delivery

Readers are encouraged to sign up to receive email notice of NALC News

The North American Lutheran Church is moving to all-electronic distribution of the *NALC News*.

The *NALC News* is currently published online as a PDF document which may be downloaded from the NALC website and read online or printed.

Congregations are encouraged to print copies of the *NALC News* and make them available for their members.

A limited number of copies are printed and mailed to church members and supporters by the NALC. The delivery of the *NALC News* by postal mail will be eliminated by the end of 2018.

“As a church dedicated to a lean structure and faithful stewardship of finances, leaders of the NALC regularly look for opportunities to adjust the budget in order to better support our mission. One of the ways we can reduce expenses is by shifting to an all-electronic delivery of the *NALC News*,” explained Andrew Fuller, NALC Director of Communications.

The 2018 NALC Convocation approved a budget for 2019 that calls for phasing out the printing and mailing of the *NALC News*.

All those on the NALC’s email list receive an email when each issue of the *NALC News* is posted to the NALC website. Please contact the NALC office if you would like to be added to the email list.

There are three options for anyone receiving the *NALC News* by postal mail:

1. Email your name and email address to nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org to be moved to the electronic mailing list.
2. Contact your pastor or church office to see if they could provide you with a printed copy of the newsletter. Please have the pastor or church notify the NALC office if they will provide this service.
3. If you do not have access to email, please call 651-633-6004 or 888-551-7254 (U.S. toll free) to discuss alternatives.