

Fulfilling our ministry and mission, through ecumenical and inter-Lutheran efforts

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

— Ephesians 4:1-6 (RSV)



Participants at the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum in Bishoftu, Ethiopia.

With these scriptural words quoted in the *Initial Statement on the Ecumenical and Inter-Lutheran Commitment of the North American Lutheran Church*, approved at the 2011 NALC Convocation, we acknowledged the goal for which our Lord prayed at the Last Supper, as He said, “Holy Father keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ... The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (*John 17:11, 22-23 RSV*).

And more than acknowledging our Lord’s prayer, we committed ourselves to working together within the Kingdom for unity in the Body of Christ that, increasingly, the world would see that “There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.”



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Without a doubt, many of us became negative toward ecumenical and inter-Lutheran efforts, due to what has been referred to as “least-common denominator ecumenism,” meaning false ecumenism based on misrepresentation and a desire to further ecumenical relationships, regardless of the cost to biblical and confessional positions. For this reason, some fail to see the

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value in our ongoing efforts to develop and strengthen ecumenical and inter-Lutheran relationships, both here in North America and abroad. Some question the time, energy and expense of ecumenical and inter-Lutheran conversations, consultations and gatherings.

While some point to our Core Value of being Congregationally Focused as pointing us away from

such external relationship building, our NALC Constitution, approved by the Constituting Convocation in 2010, directs us outwardly, stating, “the NALC shall participate in inter-Lutheran, ecumenical, and inter-religious relationships as a *part of its ministry and mission*” (NALC Constitution 13.01, *emphasis added*).

Although the life, health and well-being of our congregations are always our primary focus, as NALC staff, we heed the instructions of our initial ecumenical statement and the NALC Constitution by initiating, organizing and participating in ecumenical and inter-Lutheran endeavors, as stated in the Initial Statement, “in accordance with our commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.”

The statement continues, “Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will lead us into such ecumenical and inter-Lutheran endeavors in faithfulness to the Great Commission of our Lord ... We believe that all ecumenical and inter-Lutheran relationships should have as their goal the mission of Christ and His Church ‘that the world may believe ... that the world may know’ (John 17:21, 23).”

You will be seeing news and information about three such NALC efforts that have as their aim the developing of relationships in accordance with our commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, but always to further mission in general and specifically our obedience to the Lord’s



Participants at the International Lutheran Council Conference in Antwerp, Belgium.

command to “Go ... make disciples ... baptize ... teach” (Matthew 28:19-20).

While more information will be shared elsewhere, it seems worthwhile to provide a brief glimpse into the following recent activities as they fulfill our ecumenical and inter-Lutheran commitments.

The formation of the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum was initiated by the NALC and several other mission and reform movements in Scandinavia and Germany.

At the invitation of the NALC, the first Global Forum took place in August of 2015, in conjunction with Lutheran Week in Dallas, Texas. The Global Forum also met during the 2016 Lutheran Week in Anaheim, Calif., and in 2017 in Nashville, Tenn. The forum met Sept. 4-6 in Bishoftu, Ethiopia, with 43 participants in attendance — more than doubling previous participation. There were 15 nations represented at this forum, present, as stated in the mission statement, “to provide support and encouragement for those who are working for the reform and renewal of the Church throughout the world in accordance with the witness of the Holy Scriptures and as affirmed in the Lutheran Confessions.”

The forum also exists to “engage in biblical and theological reflection and will stimulate strategies

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that will carry out the mission Christ gave to His Church — namely, to make disciples of all nations.”

Two keynote presenters at the Global Forum addressed mission and discipleship within the East African context and in North America.

It was also decided to prepare the *Bishoftu Letter to the Lutheran Churches*, based on the Global Forum’s Affirmation of Faith. The letter is a call to faithfulness to the Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a call to commitment to God’s Word; a call to obedience to Jesus Christ. It is a call to all

Lutheran churches in the world to “work for reformation within the Body of Christ ... through repentance ... through submission and obedience to Christ, conforming our lives and our communities to His will ... through the Holy Spirit working toward the amendment of life ... through refocusing — turning us back to the mission Christ gave to his Church.”

Clearly, the work of the Global Forum is closely related to the goals and mission of the NALC and well worth our investment. The *Bishoftu Letter to the Lutheran Churches* was released on Reformation Day (Oct. 31). Translations into other languages will be released in the future.

The International Lutheran Council’s (ILC) Conference took place September 25-28 in Antwerp, Belgium. The Rev. John Bradosky, NALC bishop, and I were present as invited guests. The conference focused on the theme, “Ecumenism and Ecclesiology.” Lectures and responses were offered on the theme. The days began and ended with Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in the beautiful and historic churches of Antwerp.

We also observed the commemoration of the first martyrs of the Lutheran Reformation. Two monks who had studied with Martin Luther in Wittenberg returned to their Augustinian monastery in Antwerp, bringing the new Lutheran ideas to the “Low



Participants in the meeting between the NALC and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops were, from left, Pastor David Wendel, Father Alfred Baca, Bishop John Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, Bishop Joseph Bambera and Father Ronald Roberson.

Countries,” until they were burned at the stake in Brussels, Belgium, on July 1, 1523.

What else happened during the conference? Among other things, a resolution was presented and passed in response to the Lutheran World Federation’s action discontinuing annual meetings with representatives of ILC, affirming the desire and willingness of the ILC to continue meeting for the sake of conversation, clarification and exchange of information.

Also approved at the conference was a resolution indicating support for the proposed formation of a formal ecumenical dialogue between the ILC and the Roman Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Informal conversations have taken place since 2014, but this proposal will elevate discussions to the level of a bilateral dialogue.

Celebrated at the conference was the reception of new members and official observers, largely as the result of the incorporation of the ILC as a council independent of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and their change in bylaws allowing for associate memberships and observer status “with exception” — meaning church bodies, movements or individuals may join as official observers, taking

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exception to certain articles of the ILC Constitution. As a Lutheran body committed to the truth and authority of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, it is a blessing and an opportunity for the NALC to be present and in conversation with like-minded Lutherans from around the world.

A meeting with representatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops took place Oct. 10, in Chicago, Ill. Present from the USCCB were the Most Rev. Joseph Bambera, bishop of Scranton and the chair of the USCCB Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; the Rev. Alfred Baca, executive director of the Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; and the Rev. Ronald Roberson, CSP, associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Representing the NALC were the Rev. John Bradosky, bishop; the Rev. Mark Chavez, general secretary; and myself.

Although we have been meeting annually with the USCCB ecumenical officer for a brief conversation and update, this is the first time we have met for a significant consultation. While updates were shared regarding our ministry, the primary focus of the meeting was the presentation of the resolution approved by the 2018 NALC Convocation inviting the USCCB to enter into a formal ecumenical

consultation with the expressed purpose of “fostering conversation and cooperation in all areas appropriate and possible but especially with regard to missionary discipleship, the promotion and defense of a biblical understanding of marriage, the sanctity of all human life, the confusion in our culture regarding gender and God’s creation of humanity as male and female, and the defense and promotion of religious liberty.”

The NALC resolution was well received by these representatives and stimulated considerable conversation regarding the NALC’s Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative, the Roman Catholic emphasis on “missionary discipleship,” begun by Pope John Paul II and most recently furthered by Pope Francis’ exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel.”

The Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs gathered for its regular meeting after our consultation, and they shared that they would be bringing our resolution to the group as a whole. We are awaiting their response. At the least, it appears we will continue with this more significant annual meeting and conversation. A biannual consultation similar to those we have with other bodies is also possible.

In summary, exciting things are happening as we engage in ecumenical and inter-Lutheran conversations *as part of our ministry and mission!*

NALC pastor to lead trip to Holy Land

Pastor Bassam Abdallah will be leading a trip to the Holy Land May 13-26, 2019. This is a unique opportunity to visit the Holy Land with a native of Jerusalem.

“It is my true desire to bring as many Christians as possible to see the sights of the Holy Land. The Old City of Jerusalem is where I was born and raised. I would like to see all Christians see the biblical sights I grew up with. Standing in the same places where Jesus and His disciples stood makes the pages of the Bible come alive,” he said.

Trip participants will visit biblical sights in Jordan and Israel. Stand on Mount Nebo where Moses stood and viewed the Promised Land. Affirm

baptismal vows at the Jordan River. Visit Jarash, the biblical city of Gerasa, one of the most important and best preserved Roman cities in the Middle East (a city of the Decapolis). Visit the palace of Herod in Sabastia, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, where Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist. Visit the Tombs of the Patriarchs in Hebron and the Oak Tree of Abraham. Drink from the same well the Samaritan woman was drawing water from when Jesus asked her for a drink of water. Visit Petra, one of the wonders of the world.

More information is available at thenalc.org or by contacting Pastor Abdallah at revbja@gmail.com or (219) 808-1420.

NALC Pastors' Conference to focus on discipleship from Catholic perspective

The 2019 NALC Pastors' Conference will explore discipleship from a Roman Catholic perspective. The conference will be held Feb. 19-21 at the Crowne Plaza Orlando Universal Boulevard Hotel in Orlando, Fla.

Featured speakers are the Rev. Stephen Pullis and the Rev. Charles Zlock.

Father Pullis is director of evangelization, catechesis and schools for the Archdiocese of Detroit. He will offer two presentations on the Archdiocese's "Unleash the Gospel Initiative."

Father Zlock is the pastor of the Church of St. Monica in Berwyn, Pa. His two presentations are "Building a Parish Community of Disciples" and "How Do You Preach for Discipleship and Reach People in the Pews?"

The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen will return to the Pastors' Conference to offer his annual text study of the lectionary texts for Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

The Rev. John Bradosky, bishop of the NALC, will lead a meeting of the NALC Ministerium on Thursday. The meeting will be preceded by a service of Holy Communion, including the renewal of ordination vows and the blessing of anointing oil for use in congregations.

Afternoon and evenings are free time with no scheduled events. There will be opportunities on Tuesday afternoon for meetings with NALC staff and insurance and benefits representatives.

All NALC pastors are strongly encouraged to attend the conference, and congregations are asked to support their pastor's attendance financially.

Registration is \$100 per person until Dec. 31 and \$125 beginning Jan. 1. A discounted hotel rate is available at the hotel. To register or for more information go to thenalc.org.



James Nestingen



Stephen Pullis



Charles Zlock

Although this conference is designed for NALC pastors and seminarians, other NALC leaders are welcome, as are non-NALC pastors and seminarians. Clergy spouses are welcome and encouraged to attend, but they must register so that adequate arrangements for seating and meals may be made.

Lutheran Week videos, photos and reports are available online

Videos, reports, photos and presentations from the 2018 Lutheran Week — which included the annual NALC Convocation, Mission Festival, Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology, Life-to-Life Discipleship Training, Women of the NALC Annual Gathering and Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium — are available on the NALC website in the Lutheran Week Archive.

The Lutheran Week Archive includes videos and resources from all of the NALC's Convocations and other events since 2010.

Books containing the lectures from the annual Braaten-Benne Lectures in Theology from 2010 through 2017 are available at alpb.org.

Pastor James Puotyual to serve Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia

By Pastor James Puotyual

My wife, Nyandit Rika, and I will be serving as NALC Global Workers in the refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia, beginning in January 2019. I will be working with Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Church of South Sudan. We will be living in the southern part of Ethiopia.

We already know the Gambella area because we were born there. We know the Ethiopian people, their society and much of the economy.

On June 4, 2017, I left Minnesota to fly to Gambella, Ethiopia, near the South Sudan border. I was in Gambella for five days. After I arrived, two of my uncles arrived by bus. It was a two-day journey for them to reach that destination. While in Gambella, I also met with several relatives who came together to make arrangements for the funeral of my cousin, Dobiel Yual, who passed away on May 28, 2017.

It was a great joy for me to visit a refugee camp near Gambella. I visited houses of many families I know from the village. I ministered to the people there by sharing the love of God through Jesus Christ and conducting a Bible study. Some of the people at the refugee camp are not Christians and the texts focused on the need for the love of God. Many people there love God a lot and love to see people from America. The Sudanese deacon in the village washed my feet while I was at the refugee camp.

On June 21, I worshiped at a Presbyterian church called Bethel in the morning. Then we drove for two hours to Kuergeng, Ethiopia, and worshiped at the church in the nearby village of Kuthong, where my cousin is the chief leader. I grew up there. Members from the congregation told me they have a large number of people who want to be baptized. So, I baptized many people there.



Pastor James Puotyual and his wife, Nyandit Rika, will be serving as NALC Global Workers in the refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia.

A lot of people were excited to see me because I have been in America for about 24 years. While there, I gave medicine that was donated for the people. The people have a great need for medication, so I made a list of medicines that are needed for the children. We met with elders and deacons from the village of Kuthong (a town of approximately 300 people). They talked with me about the medicine I had brought along from America and hoped that it will work in the village and refugee camp.

They shared that two years ago, 32 people in that village died from simple diseases, and we were doing a good thing by bringing medicine along. They explained that they don't have any wells and people have to go to the river to collect water. We shared a meal together and drank cow's milk.

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On June 22, we had a memorial service for my cousin, Dobiel. I spoke at the funeral and said goodbye to my cousin. I told the people who love him that it is our prayer that we will all see him on resurrection day. I also talked about real love coming from Jesus Christ who gave everything, even His life, for you and for me and for all to have freedom in the Gospel. Jesus said, "There is no greater love than for a man to give up everything and lay down His life for His friends."



We flew back to Gambella where I stayed for about three weeks and visited people — friends in the government. While there, I was taken to churches to meet many people. I told them, "I am thinking about all of you and pray for you and your leadership in the Lutheran Church of South Sudan. And, I hope to see you soon."

During my trip, I also visited the refugee camps around Gambella. The whole area was in crisis because of the impact of war and climate change. The rains had not come at all last year, and they were late and light this year. A substantial number of people in town began to experience hunger, and the pastor preached about the need to pray for and serve those in need. People in the refugee camps around Gambella are suffering a lot from hunger. Almost everyone in the area is suffering.

At least 500 people died on July 8, 2016, after the soldiers turned on each other in the capital of Juba, South Sudan. A 10-year-old boy lost his father, mother and sister on that day and he was left with nothing. The United Nations took the boy to a refugee camp and began his schooling. That boy is very lucky. I know about thousands of other civilians who were killed on Dec. 13, 2013, in Juba because of their ethnicity. More than three million people have been forced to flee their homes to neighboring countries. Half a million people are still sheltered in

United Nations compounds, and hundreds of thousands in refugee camps.

During my internship in Des Moines, Iowa, I visited with a young South Sudanese woman on a Sunday after worship at her new home. She is the mother of four children. She is among the refugees I now know in America. She came to the Sudanese worship service at Trinity Lutheran Church on the Day of Pentecost, where I was the Sunday preacher. Her heart was heavy with sadness. She lost three beautiful daughters, and two of her nephews were killed in the war in South Sudan. She asks, and so do I, that we keep those who remain in camps in our prayers. It is not easy to lose loved ones. Sudanese people are suffering a lot because of war and famine. It is not easy to try to make a new life in a new country, such as the United States. It is terrible to lose those whose lives you value more than your own. Her brother and sister-in-law's entire family died in the war in South Sudan.

Finally, I would like to thank the people of the North American Lutheran Church for their support and generosity.

For more information or to learn how you can support Pastor James and Nyandit as NALC Global Workers, please visit thenalc.org/gcs.

NALC Global Worker in Belarus

By Pastor Valery Hryhoryk

Dear brothers and sisters, greetings in the name of the Lord. Fall has come. This year, September has been very warm. We thank the Lord for the beautiful weather and sunshine. This is somewhat unusual. I do not remember such warm weather in the fall. Autumn is a time of harvest, and this year has been very fruitful. There are a lot of apples on the apple trees and people are calling this year an “Apple Year.”

The Lord has been good to us and below is a report of the good spiritual harvest.



Summer Bible camp at Dolsha

The central event of this summer was, of course, our annual summer Bible camp that took place in our traditional location, Dolsha (25 km away from Vitebsk city). The weather scared us a little in the beginning, as it rained heavily.

As you remember, we have a tent camp and the possibility of the children being in the rain was not a good one. So, we prayed, and the Lord answered with a brilliant idea to rent a big tent so that we could put many small tents inside the big one. And we did that! Praise the Lord! There was just one place in Vitebsk that rented out large enough tents and there was only one left, because, as it turned out, such tents are in high demand during the summer season.

A youth team from Slovakia came to help. This has become a good tradition. They brought a water football and helped with the games and outdoor activities. The camp was a blessing! Over 50 people attended the event. The number is increasing every year, and we have developed a good reputation in the local community.

Our Bible camps are evangelistic in nature and we try to reach out to the new children. This year we had 10 new children who had never heard the Gospel and prayed to God for the first time in their lives. There is a video available to watch at eemn.org/partners/belarus.

Praise the Lord for our summer Bible camp! We also give thanks for the supporters who made it happen.

This year we were able to renovate a small house at the campsite in Dolsha to use as a kitchen and warehouse. The building was built after World War II and is very old. We replaced the roof and put siding around the house. Now it looks very nice. Thank you, Lord!

Good Book Publishers

Three new books were printed this year. The book ministry is very needed for the growing Russian-speaking Lutheran church. Through our Christian book ministry, we seek to equip Christians, and others who are interested, with a background of information and knowledge that will give them confidence in their faith in Jesus Christ and the ability to inform and correct others who do not believe.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue with this important ministry. Please join us in giving thanks to the Lord for this and also pray for the distribution of the books.

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ELSA conference in Saldus, Lithuania

Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship (BLMF) is a member of European Lutheran Sunday School Association (ELSA).

ELSA is a network of Lutheran Sunday schools in Europe established in Smolenice, Slovakia, on Nov. 10, 1996. The association is made up of organizations, parts of organizations or sections of churches who, in allegiance to Holy Scripture and the evangelical Lutheran Confessions, gather children for Sunday schools and youth activities.

Our team consisted of three people: myself, Ludmila and Evgeniy. We shared new ideas with the children and got excited for new opportunities to serve children and youth.

Our team traveled to the conference by car and Good Book Publishers' books were delivered for distribution in Ukraine through Pastor Alexander Gross and to Latvia through the Latvian church and Sunday school. Praise the Lord we were not stopped at the border! Please give thanks with us for this wonderful opportunity and for the financial blessing to be able to attend the ELSA conference.

Charity ministry

We were able to help one family install a heating system in their home before the winter. The head of the family is disabled. He cannot see well and is on a small pension from the state.

Winters in our part of the country can be very cold — 30 degrees below zero Celsius (minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit). It was very good to be able to help these people, as their family is very poor. Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity.

Music ministry

We are very grateful to those who voted for our song, "100 Stones." It was selected to play on the radio. The song is based on the well-known book, *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. It is about stones, representing our sins and Jesus as the one



European Lutheran Sunday School Association

who can take them way. Praise the Lord! 1.5 million people now hear the song and hopefully will think about their relationship with God! Please pray for the song to be a useful tool in the Lord's hands.

We also have a change in our music group. Evgeniy moved to live in Minsk, therefore, we are looking for a new solo guitarist. Please pray with us for a new team member to join the music ministry.

New education opportunities

Please pray for the seminar that will take place at the end of October. The theme of the seminar will be Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*. Please pray for this event as we plan to reach people who are new to the Christian faith. Also, pray for a wall of protection around the seminar.

Our teacher will be Valery Volodin, a seminary teacher from St. Petersburg.

Please, continue to pray for the registration of the garage congregation in Vitebsk. We are getting the necessary papers ready again. The registration is needed in order to be more visible in society and for the good image of the Lutheran Church. Please pray for the process, and also for the congregation itself as it functions without registration.

Dear brothers and sisters, our faithful ministry supporters, we give thanks to God for your faithfulness and love for the mission. Without you our ministry could not be possible! May the Lord richly bless you and keep you.

Panzos in Democratic Republic of Congo

By Pastor Didi Panzo

A regional women's seminar of the Confessional Lutheran Church of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) took place in Tshela, Kongo Central Province, July 30 to Aug. 5. It was organized by Serafina Panzo, NALC Global Worker, and the women's department of the Lutheran Church in Congo. The seminar theme was "The Fear of God," from Psalm 111:10.

About 400 women gathered in Tshela for a seminar on women's role as mothers, community activists and social change agents who are called to serve in the vineyard of our Lord Jesus. In order to do so, women must present themselves as a living testimony before their family, community, church and nation. Women must respect their own bodies, avoiding all kinds of lifestyles that lead to sin. Women, as wives, must respect their husbands. Most importantly, they are to be good managers of their homes, including teaching their children the fear of the Lord.

Female delegates, from different districts, who attended the seminar for the first time were amazed by the gathering and were empowered to work toward the development of the church.

It is hoped that many of the things learned at this seminar will change the lives of the participants and the way they think about their role as women. They were taught that they are social, Christian agents of change in their communities. They, in turn, thanked those who had organized the seminar. They asked that this kind of event be repeated.

The seminar lasted a full week and ended with an evening celebration, with over 20 choirs participating in sacred music making. On Sunday, the last day, the seminar concluded with a communion service. Here, some of the women were commissioned to diaconal service. To God be the glory.

Orphanage visit

One of the local orphanages here in Boma is run by a group of Roman Catholic nuns. I had the



opportunity to meet the director of the orphanage, with whom I exchanged some thoughts.

One of the difficulties she shared with me is the large number of orphans on the street. Their space is very limited at the orphanage, as the state requires that they house only one child per bed. That allows them to host only 35 children of varying ages.

The orphanage to which we donate clothes and food has a capacity of 80 orphans from very poor conditions. Taking care of orphans isn't an easy task. It requires a good number of workers and a hygienic facility that can hold beds. Please pray that God will raise up other organizations that can partner with existing orphanages to bring children off the streets to live with dignity.

We also had the opportunity to donate a few dresses that came from Colorado Springs, Colo.

Team from the WMPL visited us in Boma

It was a pleasure to have with us Pastor Paul Gossman, executive director of World Mission Prayer League (WMPL), and Gloria Sauck, our colleague who is a missionary in Kenya, working with the Kenya Eyes Society.

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Mission trip to Kenya

By Jessica Carlson

In June, nine members of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Auburn, Ind., went on a mission trip to Nairobi, Kenya. We went to partner with our church's missionary, Kathleen Lutz, who has served in Kenya for the last nine years.

Up to this point, no group from St. Mark's or family members had visited her and seen firsthand the work she is doing in Africa.

Our trip was planned to include serving meals and leading children's programming at several schools in the slum areas of Nairobi, completing some painting at the schools, assisting with a Bible study with HIV-positive women in a village outside of Nairobi and visiting several homes in the slums in small groups to lead devotionals and prayer and give gifts of food.

We knew what we were going to be doing and planned for it, but our experience went far beyond those plans. We connected with the staff of Heart to Heart Ministries in Nairobi, led by Deaconess Mary Eliaiika Oruko. We became instant friends and by the end of the week joked with each other like old friends.

On one of our work days, a small group walked several miles through the congested, noisy streets of the Kibara slum in Nairobi and followed our guide down a dirt alley that also acted as the drainage ditch for the area. We weaved around the makeshift metal homes with clotheslines strung out their doors and clothes blowing lightly in the breeze. Soon we ducked into a narrow, dark, open air hallway and walked past several doorways with fabric hung for a front door. At the end of the hall, we reached Regina's home and entered it.

The first room was small and contained cooking and houseware items. It was very dark with pinpricks of light coming through small holes in the



metal roof and gaps in the walls of the house at the corners. The second and last room was even lower than the first and contained a low couch, a long table, some shelves and a bed that was concealed from view by a white sheet hanging from the ceiling. It was dark in this room as well.

Our guide found Regina in the bed and woke her, while we set the food we brought with us on the table. Regina sat up and we lined the room, half of us sitting on the couch and half of us sitting on the bed as she told us her story. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she told us in Swahili, through our translator, about her seven children who had all died and how she now was sick from the conditions of sleeping on the cold and wet floor.

Her husband, who had been Muslim, had passed away some time ago. While she practiced Islam during his life, she does not now. She cares for her six grandchildren, does not have a job due to her care-taking duties (though last year she had her own business, she had to give it up to care for her last dying child), has no food in the house and lost her electricity because she could not pay the \$4 monthly bill. When we met with her, she was three months behind in rent (which was \$39 a month) and her landlord was coming by frequently, demanding payment and losing patience.

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She explained that when it rains water runs down the alley, through the building's hallway and into the bedroom/living room of her home. It floods badly several times a year and yet she has lived in this home for 20 years. Even though she is 53 years old, she looked like and carried herself as if she were much, much older. Life has worn her down bit by bit. It was while she was sharing that I realized I had a waterproof jacket in my bag. At that moment, it felt like the least I could do was to offer it to her. Maybe it would keep the rain from falling on her as she slept on the floor. Maybe one of her grandchildren could use it when walking the several miles to school. Her life was filled with burdens and stress that I will likely never personally experience.

When she was done sharing her story with us, one of our team members began to share about how we are never alone and how God is always near to us, even through the difficulties in life. As our team member spoke from her heart, tears streamed down Regina's cheeks. After finishing with a prayer, we took a few pictures, thanked Regina for allowing us to come to her home and walked out the narrow doorway.

Regina followed us out and when we reached the sunny courtyard, she spoke to us through the translator. She said, "Please come again and bring the Word of God to me." We smiled through our own tears, hugged her and left. A piece of my heart is still with her, and I wonder if she will survive the hard life she has. I wonder what will happen to her six grandchildren. These are the mission trip moments that change us forever.

We organize a mission trip, thinking that we go to help disadvantaged people who have nothing. Instead they help us remember what is most important and that our relationships with God must be central to everything we do. After that we must use our lives to share His love with everyone we meet. It is humbling to watch people whose only clothes are likely the ones they are wearing, eat the one meal they will eat for the day and know they fight to survive each day, and do it with such grace and joy.

For some of us, it was our first experience with true poverty. All of us were reminded just how much

abundance we have in North America and realized exactly what hunger, suffering and deprivation look like on a human face. All of us were humbled by the graciousness, love and acceptance we experienced from the Kenyans we met, especially the children. We will never forget it and will use our shared experience to continue to love and reach our community for Jesus.

Panzos

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Their visit was inspiring as they were able to experience Congolese Lutheran worship. Paul shared the Gospel on the Sunday they arrived with both the church leaders and the women's group.

During their week-long visit, we visited the projects and programs of our partners, such as a partner who is working with blind farmers, health centers in the city and poor areas, orphanages and a theological school.

The WMPL visit encouraged members of the church that they have brothers and sisters around the globe who care for them. We encourage this kind of visit for any church or partner who wants to experience the reality of life in the DRC. Blessed be the name of our God.

Prayer Needs

1. Pray for peace during this pre-election period.
2. Pray for our safety.
3. Pray as we are searching for a new place to live.
4. Pray for provision for many of our programs:
 - + The theological school needs a library.
 - + An adequate place to gather orphans for after-school programming and feeding.
 - + Help for a micro-project reaching women who are victims of domestic violence.
5. Pray for the governance of the DRC and good change following the presidential election.

Living as servants of Christ

Dear Disciples of Jesus,

The recent lectionary Gospel text (Mark 10:35-45), in which James and John approach Jesus asking to sit at His right and left when He enters His glory and the resultant anger and division expressed by the other 10 disciples, reminded me of dynamics that are not uncommon — even in our congregations.

Jesus pointed to the cross multiple times, preparing His followers for His impending death and resurrection. When the disciples tried to insert their vision for the future, Jesus kept pointing them in the direction of the cross. So it was with Peter and the Sons of Thunder.

Jesus called the disciples together and reminded them that things are different in His kingdom. It is not a matter of power and authority, status or position. It is not a matter of oppressing, manipulating and abusing others in order to get our own way. It is not about our way at all.

Following Jesus is about the way of the cross. Walking with Jesus is about being a slave of the Gospel and a servant to all for the sake of Christ. Yet, how easy it is to follow the ways of the world and turn leadership into the arbitrary use and abuse of power and authority.

We keep pointing to Jesus as we care for others and as we experience life together in this community of faith. We let the Scriptures reveal Him clearly and completely. When we struggle to find our security in the things of the world we must keep turning back to the cross and the eternal promises that only Jesus can fulfill — forgiveness, new life now and eternal life with Him forever.

In this kingdom of heaven economy, Jesus both embodied and proclaimed, greatness is in being a servant, notoriety is in loving. The One with the right to be served by all becomes a servant, and the One who owns all life gives His life away for the sake of those He loves. The world needs the witness of the cross and Christlike servant leadership, not more of what the world already offers.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

We are all giving our lives away. We are spending our lives each day. The question is for what cause and for what purpose? We who follow Jesus must be giving our lives away as servants of Christ. As His disciples, we are called to take up the cross and follow Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death — we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a person, He bids him come and die. ... But if we lose our lives in His service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, pages 89, 91). This is Christ’s call in our individual lives and in our life together.

While it may be difficult for us to admit, we are just like James and John. They are not only the Sons of Thunder, they are the sons of entitlement. Trying to usurp leadership, power and authority, trying to make themselves greater, trying to seize control, they create controversy and division.

Have you noticed that it is not the strong and confident who seek to control, dominate, exploit or manipulate others for their own advantage, but it is those who are weak, fragile and often broken from abuse in their own lives. Their efforts are doomed to fail because even when they succeed in getting their own way, they destroy others in the process.

Many wise people have observed how it is the insecure, fragile self that seeks to control,

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dominate, exploit and manipulate others for its own advantage. Human experience tells us that such efforts are doomed to fail, because when they “succeed” they destroy others in the process. In the kingdom of heaven to which we belong, there is no need to chase any of the counterfeit notions of greatness. Following Jesus, we love and serve others for their good rather than our own glory.

James and John had a flawed vision for the future. They desired to be on equal footing with Jesus. They wanted to be next to Him. They did not want to be under Jesus. This is the critical issue of our own day. We think we are entitled to be the equals of Jesus. Faith in Jesus does not consist of becoming His equal but of being under Him. Remember the Roman Centurion. True faith in Christ is being under Him, following Him.

We ascribe all power, honor and authority to Christ and to Christ alone. We do that by following Him, ascribing to His Word the ultimate authority for matters of faith and life. We rely on the power of His grace that comes to us through Word and Sacrament. Embracing that cross is never a way to play it safe, avoiding conflict or confrontation. It is only by standing, confronting, engaging, witnessing, risking that we take up the cross of Christ.

When we must address unpopular issues we do not hide from them. Instead, we speak the truth in love, applying what we have learned because we count the wisdom of the Scriptures as far superior to human wisdom.

Tragically in our day, Christians have become so passive that they believe that passivity is a faithful response. Instead, when we know something is wrong we must speak out, take a stand, and offer a witness. We break the passivity and silence and address the issue without crucifying one another.

Jesus used the controversy created by James and John and their audacity, presumption and exaggerated self-importance to teach all of the disciples critical lessons regarding the cross and servant leadership that formed and shaped their lives and the New Testament Church following Pentecost.

In the book of Acts, we see the nature of the Christian community they formed following Pentecost. It is helpful instruction for our life together. Their community was a place where new disciples could be nurtured and grow in their faith. This is the community described for us in Acts 2:42-47, a community that nurtured the 3,000 new believers following Pentecost.

Consider these seven key ingredients to that disciple-nurturing community:

1. As the disciples devoted themselves to the teaching of Jesus, those in the Church devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles.
2. As the disciples shared fellowship with Jesus and one another, they led the Church to do the same. Their fellowship was focused on sharing meals together and praying together.
3. They expected Jesus to act, and He did. As they experienced the miraculous when they were with Jesus, that same miraculous power was manifest in the Church when they went out to do ministry in His name.
4. The Christian community cared for one another. They loved one another the way Jesus loved His first followers and gave His life for them. They gave up possessions as a way to care for the needs of fellow disciples. They cared so much that they shared everything, every care, every concern, every joy, every sorrow — everything.
5. They gathered together regularly. They worshiped together. They had a mutual sense of obligation to be together, to support one another and to share their faith in Jesus.
6. Their love and commitment spread from the worship center into their homes. They manifested the love they experienced in Christ through the love they had for one another. Their community was marked with joy and sincerity in their hearts.
7. The world was watching how they lived and treated one another, and the Christian community became a witness that captivated many others. The way they lived in community with each other drew people to Christ.

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The disciples had experienced this love and community as they followed Christ. Christianity is not just a statement of faith, a body of knowledge, an experience. It is not a matter of being a member of an organization or institution. It is more than theologies and liturgies, vestments, or strategies, structures and constitutions. It is about one thing — rather, one person — Jesus Christ. It is about following Christ, believing Christ, serving others in Christ and abiding in Christ.

Servanthood is a matter of taking up the cross. It is only in a community committed to loving and serving that disciples can be nurtured in their faith, grow spiritually and experience transformation. That transformation is desperately needed in our own day and time.

The fastest growing religion in our world is the cult of “self.” There are increasing numbers of people who believe that we will save ourselves and that all the answers are within us. Many of the avowed atheists and agnostics I have met are caught up in the worship of self and the seductive attraction to promises of “self-salvation.”

The witness of true Christian community can have a profound impact on their lives and countless others. Unfortunately, many within the Body of Christ believe that they are entitled to receive the benefits of such community but share no personal responsibility for offering this community to others.

I often remind couples in pre-marital counseling that marriage is not a matter of *finding* the right person but a matter of *being* the right person. The goal is not finding the right Christian community but offering others all that loving, faithful servant leadership provides. Following Jesus, we offer ourselves to create this community. No one else can do it for us. It may seem overwhelming, but it is precisely what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus. When everyone is committed to doing it, and not merely feeling entitled to receive it, the results will not only transform the culture of our congregations but the entire community around us.

So, may it be with us.

Bishop John Bradosky

Youth and Family Ministry

By Gary and Laurie Pecuch

For this month we thought we would highlight some resources and events for consideration. If you have any questions about the items below feel free to contact us.

+ Every Wednesday through November is Video Wednesday. Gary and Laurie will be posting a brief video clip from *faithwebbing.com*.

+ High School/Young Adult Theological Retreat: Dec. 6-7 in the Carolinas Mission District. Nope, no one is expecting you to travel that far, but they are willing to share their materials if you would like to start a similar event in your Mission District.

+ The Carolinas Mission District youth are doing a joint Group Workcamp mission trip next summer. They are going to Elkview, W.Va., July 14-20. The NALC youth will work on crews together. They'd love to have other NALC churches from around the country join them.

+ 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.

+ All congregations received an email with an opportunity to take the Fall 2018 NALC Youth Ministry Survey. Need one? Contact Gary and Laurie. They will be surveying congregations through Nov. 30.

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.