



Basic biographical information (marital status, children/grandchildren, education, hobbies, etc.):

Hi! My name is Amy Claire Schifrin. I was born in Queens, NY and grew up on Long Island. For as long as I can remember I have been interested in music, literature, nature, and athletics (field hockey, judo, hiking, and modern dance). My first vocational aspiration, however, at the tender age of 4, was to be a Texas Ranger. (It must have been all those Westerns that were popular in that era.)

Both my bachelor's (Arizona State) and first master's degrees (Northwestern University) were in music, composition and theory, and I taught music theory and piano at Mesa College for a few years before being called to serve as a Lay Campus Minister and Director of Music at the University Lutheran Center at Iowa State. I then attended seminary at Luther Northwestern and received my M.Div. in 1984. I was ordained that summer under the auspices of the ELCC (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada) and was called to a three-point parish in central Saskatchewan. I returned to the U.S. after that first call and served in parish, campus, and seminary ministries until I was called to serve as president of the NALS. In the middle of those years I earned my Ph.D. in Liturgical Studies and Homiletics from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA in 2006.

I have a beautiful and wondrous family, two sons, Rev. Hans Tolpingrud and Nils Tolpingrud, a daughter-in-law, Anne (married to Hans), and a granddaughter, Zyska, who is ten months old. I also have two sweet dogs, both Border Collie/Flat-coated Retriever mixes, who love everyone they meet. I was married (1983) and I am divorced (1990), and have remained single these last twenty-nine years.

As for my life of faith, I first heard a call to lead a holy life as a young child in the synagogue. My family members were all Conservative or Orthodox Jews. I remember hearing the sound of the shofar, and it was a call to faithfulness, to obedience, and to joy. I could not have known that it would have led to hearing the gospel in my teenage years, to reading a New Testament, or to being baptized. But that is what happened.

1. Describe how you experience God active in your daily life.

Everything in this life leads me into prayer. Sometimes it's the beauty of a mountain sunrise or the stillness that comes when the stars shine bright. Sometimes it's the brutal pain of the city aflame in violence or the nightly news report of innocent villagers cut down by a bloodthirsty regime. Sometimes it's the laughter of the teenagers on my street and sometimes it's the inmates at the county jail, guys who've lived rough lives, but who weep when I place the body of Christ in their hands and say, "for you."

God, Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit, makes himself know to us explicitly in Word and Sacrament. In giving us this disciplined life, this life that is lived in the rhythms of prayer, night and day, day and night, Sunday after Sunday, he gives us eyes to see and ears to hear his presence all around us, so that we both experience and become vessels of his mercy, his unending kindness, his never-ending love. That's what I experience: the receiving and giving of God's love every day.

2. List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you.

Just as Scripture and liturgy have many layers of meaning, so do we human beings. We stand up in church to read the appointed text, but at the same time, God is reading our hearts. Given that multi-layered complexity, I have three verses/passages that read my heart and set me aright year after year.

1. "Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad" The Great Shema, "Hear, O Israel, The LORD, our God, the LORD is one." Deuteronomy 6:4 It was the first verse of scripture I learned to pray, the first one that shaped my heart. It is, in essence, the first commandment given here to the assembly in doxological form, that we might hear, believe, trust, and obey.

2. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascent to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me..." Psalm 139:7-12 are the verses I have prayed more than other in all of scripture. I tend to live in the Psalter, but these verses in particular, "even the darkness is not dark to thee..." have drawn me out of death into life and have shaped not only my faith as an individual, but my life as a pastor entrusted with the care of souls. These verses have taught me to walk with and not run from the messy places that come to us in pastoral ministry.

3. "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself." John 12:32 Every fall I ask my new homiletics students to tell me their favorite Scripture verses. I do so, because its important for every preacher to know what is at the center of their faith. Otherwise, they will end up ignoring the appointed lessons for the day and simply be preaching their same favorite texts over and over again. I think every preacher needs to have more than one sermon in their back pocket. The texts that are closest to our hearts will always be in conversation with the appointed texts. That's a good thing, but we have to be able to listen to each text as it comes to us. Anyway, this is the text that I'm always in conversation with because I can close my eyes and see it so clearly.

3. In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of Bishop of the North American Lutheran Church?

Since I have never served as a Bishop, that would be hard to know. I understand the role of Bishop to be that of the Guardian of the Apostolic Faith. A bishop is a shepherd, an overseer, one who bears responsibility for the health of the flock, for the household of faith, serving as a pastor to the pastors and congregations under his or her care. Within that framework I know that I am capable of teaching the Apostolic faith, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, forgiving sins, administering the sacraments, stewarding an institutional budget, creating an atmosphere in which staff are valued both for who they are as people and for the gifts that they can contribute, judging doctrine, finding commonality with those who may think differently than I do in order to work together for the good of the whole, and delighting in the life of the church as we come together around the table of the LORD with thanksgiving and praise.

I have also had days when everything has gone wrong and I have felt like an abject failure, but I have still gotten up the next morning and gone to work. More than anything, my hope is in God, and I trust that he is leading us in the way that we should go.

4. What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

I've often jokingly said, that everything I know, I know because I am a music theorist. But really, it is no joke. Music theory is the study of the intricate structures and forms that lie behind the beauty of the melodies, harmonies and rhythms that fill our hearts with delight. Behind every piece of beautiful music, from every century, there is a structure that can be analyzed, a hidden foundation that undergirds the way our hearts are moved, our sorrows are released, our loneliness is overcome whether we're singing along with the country station on a long road trip, or at a box seat at our favorite opera, or in our congregation singing a hymn at our grandma's funeral, tears streaming down our cheeks.

So, I know, that whatever ministry I am called to, I am called to pay attention to the details, the structure, so that those whom I am called to serve can experience the beautiful mercy of God. I imagine some of the details will be different in the Office of Bishop than they would be from that of a seminary president or a parish pastor, but knowing that a bishop is responsible for creating and overseeing a healthy and vibrant structure, one in which all the details are taken care of, that would require pretty much the same set of skills. And on any given day, I hope that God would bless me with joy as I quietly go about my daily tasks.

5. What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? List them in descending order beginning with the highest priority.

1. Creation of a Healthy and Suitable Structure: When the NALC was formed, we had 17 congregations and a structure was established that would work well for 125 congregations. We are now over 400 congregations, thanks be to God, and we need to order our household in a way that we can stay connected and communicate with each other, and provide resources and adequate support for congregations, especially those in transition. We need a central office where national staff and support staff can work together on a regular if not daily basis to oversee the work of our church, including international missions, ecumenical relationships, and our national boards and commissions, as well as work in concert with our executive council. Then, given the size and rate of growth of the NALC, we urgently need to make the constitutional changes necessary to establish 4 or 5 regional bishop's offices so that all of the work of supporting congregations and overseeing and placing clergy can be accomplished not only in a timely manner, but by ecclesial leaders who are connected to the culture and geography of the regions in which they are called to serve. A system that includes both a national bishop and staff and regional bishops would give to the NALC an opportunity to have the checks and balances that are so badly needed for health and open communication. It would also have the potential to multiply our support for new congregational starts.

2. Theological Education, Integrity and Character: If we want our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be true and bold, then we need those who can preach, teach, administer the sacraments, care for the hurting, the lost, the lonely, the infirm, and reach out to those who do not yet know how much God really loves them, in a manner that embodies the goodness and mercy of God. We need to form our NALC pastors and other church leaders in such a way that they not only know church history, theology, biblical languages, and liturgical practices in their heads, but in their very bones. They need to know the Great Tradition of the church through the ages as well as the people they are called to serve, as well as their own hearts. To accomplish this priority, we need to support the NALS, our denominational seminary, and with great fervor pray for a new generation of pastoral candidates at the same time that each one of us does everything we can to encourage those in whom we may see the spark of someone who has the makings of a pastor's heart.

Seminarians need to know what it means to trust God with their lives. So much of that formation will come through a life of daily prayer and the regular reception of the sacraments. But just as little children learn what it means to trust God by first having trustworthy parents and guardians, so seminarians, need to be surrounded by trustworthy mentors and teachers so that they learn the shape of integrity and character that is necessary for the pastoral office. That's why we want to NALS, as our denominational seminary, who is overseen by a Board of Regents comprised of members of the NALC to be the place for pastoral formation. We need to grow our faculty, staff, and student body so that we can continue to form pastoral candidates who will serve as living witnesses to God's goodness in all of our congregations.

3. Moving from Anger to Invitation: I've never met a man, who when asked, "Why did you marry your wife," responded, "I married her because she sounded angry all the time." And I've never met a woman

who married a man for that same reason. Many of us who left our former church body still carry some anger in our hearts and that anger sneaks out in the tone of our written and spoken works. Sometimes it's an echo of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers..." Sometimes, in posts on social media, it reaches horribly toxic levels. This is not who we want to be or how we want to be known as the Church of Jesus Christ. Having the best confessional Lutheran theology around will become irrelevant if we cannot communicate it in a manner consistent to the rubric of "loving your neighbor as yourself." (Mt 22:38)

Such angry and demeaning language connects us to the loss of civility that infects our society, as well as to the demonization of those with whom we disagree that has become the hallmark of partisan politics. If we want to be more than an insular association for those who agree in their disagreement with what they see as the misguided direction of the wider culture, but truly find a way to be an agent of change for any and all individuals within that wider culture, then our tone must truly be one of humility and patience, unpretentiousness and perseverance. "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Mt7:16a) I pray that the fruits of all of us in the NALC will be signs of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) so that within this particular expression of the household of faith we don't require everyone we meet to pass a "litmus test" on theological or political issues before we engage them reverently, respectfully, and with the dignity accorded to all those whom God has made.

6. What challenges do you see facing the NALC?

- Inadequate denominational structure
- An aging clergy population (over half of our clergy are 60+ years of age)
- A lack of understanding about the range of diversity within the NALC (while we all may agree on some things, cultural, ecclesial, and geographical differences still exist and have not yet been addressed in a way that will help unify us)
- Our over-identification with political agendae (It didn't help our former denomination and it won't help us.)
- A need for greater biblical and theological study at the parish level
- Transparency and honesty, especially when things don't go as planned; humility when things go exceedingly well (i.e. giving glory to God)

7. Describe how the four Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as Bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations.

The four Core Values are not the guide for the ministry of the Bishop, nor of the NALC. They are short-hand, the memorable sound bites that help us communicate the centrality of God, Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit. The witness of Jesus Christ to the Father's love for the world, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to be our Advocate and Guide, that's what is central. Jesus Christ, crucified and Risen and who is attested to in the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers and the Confessional documents of the sixteenth-century is what needs to guide a bishop. A part of the role of the Bishop is to teach the content of the Apostolic Faith that lies behind the short-hand of the four Core Values. The short-hand is our creation (and a very good one)but the Bishop's role is not just to stay on the surface of the Core Values, it to teach their content in greater depth.

Frankly, I would want to do "a bit" of writing and teaching (pastoral and mission-district gatherings) on the history, theology, homiletic and liturgical practices, and pastoral and missionary dimensions that lie behind the Core Values and can grow from such a deepening of faith and knowledge.

8. What tangible actions can the NALC, its Mission Districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-centered and mission-driven church?

I would want to know what our congregations are doing or not doing now to fully answer this question. Are folks attending worship? Are congregations offering Word and Sacrament worship weekly? What percentage of folks in a given congregation are engaged in weekly or monthly Bible study, small group ministry, and social ministry outreach? How many members have left their homes for a week or two and engaged in a short-term mission project? Are people who live with family members praying with their families daily? Are people who live alone finding a way to connect to others with some sort of daily prayer? Have you started a small group gathering for prayer or study in a public setting such as a local coffee shop? How are you teaching the children in your church and in your neighborhood? What is your vision of "who is my neighbor"?

Have you set down as pastor and church council, and asked these questions in your particular context? That's the information I would want. That's the conversation I would want to engage in.

9. What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

I do not understand discipleship as a strategy but as the growth of the baptized in a life in which obedience and joy are a unified experience. Discipleship is born from a trust that nothing in this universe, neither height nor depth, nor principalities nor powers...nothing is greater than God's love for those whom he has made. Disciples are born at the font, as they are brought forth from the baptismal waters with the promise of the One who says, "You are mine. You are mine forever." A disciple is one in whom faith has been created, and who seeks to live out his or her trust in this holy and eternal One. In the Great Tradition of the church, we call the shape of this disciplined life, obedience. You can call catechizing the baptized a strategy, but really, I prefer to simply call it God's will. For only by hearing God's promise, and being bound to God's promise, and then experiencing God's promise through a trustworthy community will people know the joy of discipleship. Only through obedience will a person come to trust in a love so great that they would sell all they have to follow him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Discipleship has become a big buzz-word in the church in recent years, but folks have made it to mean many different things, and they've created all kind of "canned" programs to make it happen, which is as foolish as telling someone, "Just follow these steps and you'll fall in love." The bulk of these programs are myopic, anti-sacramental, and rest in a theology based in the false notion that human beings can choose their own salvation.

The best direction that NALC can take is to be the church, trusting in God, our maker, redeemer, and sanctifier, our advocate and judge, our king and our shepherd, who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. Be the church: preach the truth of God's eternal care for his people, his love stronger than death; baptize in the name of the Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit, and feed the baptized so that will have the strength to go out into the world as vessels pure and clear, transparent in their love for God and neighbor, honest about their own shortcomings and failures, and filled with hope, that he who is one with the Father, is yet calling all people to find shelter in his merciful embrace.

10. What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC?

See #9.

To answer the question as to why I didn't previously accept the nomination, I was still in the discernment process when the deadline for the Bishop's nomination occurred because our seminary's presidential search was still in its process, and I let that concern guide my decision at the time. The seminary has not yet found the next president. However, I did not feel good about removing my name because I understand the call process to be the work of the Holy Spirit, and whether or not I am called to serve as Bishop, I believe I am called to be in that process to which people within this church have continued to nominate me.