God’s saving mission
Christmas message from NALC Bishop Dan Selbo

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth.”
— John 1:1, 14 ESV

As I look back on the events of this past year and as I consider the year ahead in light of the calling we have in Jesus, I am continually reminded that our calling and our life together, as the Church, are intimately connected to the mission God has been carrying out from the time this world began.

From the opening pages of Scripture and throughout the entire biblical witness, there is nothing more clearly captured and conveyed than the mission God was planning and intending and, ultimately, fulfilling in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God’s plan from the beginning of time was to save the world in Jesus. God’s purpose, from before the foundations of the world were laid, was to save the world in His Son.

This saving mission began at the very moment Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. From that moment on, everything changed. Our sin had

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separated us eternally from God. Our failure to trust had led to a fallen, forsaken and finite future.

And yet, in spite of our unfaithfulness, God remained faithful. Along with the curses of pain in childbearing, toil and sweat from the ground and the curse that the serpent would eat dust and crawl on its belly all the days of its life, came a saving and a life-giving promise: “I will put enmity between you and the woman,” God said, “and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15 NIV84).

Hidden in a verse that often goes unnoticed is the hiddenness of God and His eternal plan to save the world in His Son. Sin would not stop it. Suffering could not deny it. And rebellion and rejection would not stand in its way. But it would come at a cost. It would be gained only by a price. And it would lead and be won, finally and forever, in a cross.

God’s saving mission was being carried out in Jesus when the very One who was there at the beginning, and who was and who is and who will always be God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, took on human flesh and became one of us. It is the event we celebrate each Christmas. It is the action of God we remember each year when we read and recall the birth of our Lord.

The apostle Paul says it well in his letter to the church in Galatia: “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5 NIV84).

God was on a mission to save the world in Jesus. God was carrying out His mission when Jesus took on human flesh. “When the time had fully come,” the apostle tells us, that’s when it happened. When God’s timing was right, Jesus entered our world to make right what had gone so very wrong.

Jesus was “born under the law, to redeem those under the law.” In the irony of God’s saving plan, our only hope was pinned on Christ. If He failed in His mission, it would all be over for us. If He gave into sin, like us, we would have no hope. But Jesus never sinned. He never lost sight of who He is and why He was here. All the way through life and all the way to His death, He was faithful to His Father and He fulfilled the law, so that you and I might be “bought back” and “redeemed” in Him.

God’s saving mission began in God’s heart from the beginning of time. And then, at a certain moment in time, God became one of us, in Jesus, that we might become one with Him. It is the story of the Gospel. It is the Good News that, in Christ, we have been saved. There is nothing we need to accomplish or to do when it comes to our relationship with God. In Jesus, God’s saving work is finished. In Christ, God’s saving plan is done.

There is, however, more to be done and more to be accomplished for His saving plan to be known. And that’s where our work begins and where the calling of our Lord Jesus leads. “Go into the world and make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And, surely, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

We call it the Great Commission. It is the work we have been given until our Lord returns. We have been saved in Jesus. We have been made right in Christ. But the world will never know unless it hears.

Again, the apostle’s words are to the point. The Good News that was hidden for so long, the mystery of the Gospel that was finally and fully revealed to us in Jesus is now the message we are called to share. “God’s intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known (to the world) according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:10-11).

As I reflect on this past year and on the unprecedented events and experiences we have faced, I cannot help but wonder if we are not now entering a time when the opportunity for proclaiming the saving message of the Gospel is as great as we have ever known.

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People are concerned about the future and uncertain about what lies ahead. Jobs have been eliminated. Businesses have been destroyed. Individuals and families have lost loved ones to the virus. Even in the Church, many are afraid that things may never return to the same “normal” we have known.

As much as I would like, I cannot promise you that they will. I can, however, say with confidence that wherever the future leads and whatever the months and years ahead might bring, that, in the hands of the God who took on our humanity and who carried our sin to the cross, it will all be lasting and forever and good because of Christ.

Until our Lord returns, we have a job to do, and it is clear. Who do you know who does not know Jesus? Your calling is to live and to speak in ways that they will, through you, see Him. Who do you have in your life that does not have Christ in theirs? They will never know what they are missing if we, in the Church, fail to speak.

“How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone speaking the name of Christ?” (Romans 10:14).

The answer is, they can’t. The truth is, they never will. But they can and they will if you are willing to share.

As we come to the close of what has been, for many of us, the most challenging year in which we have lived, let us not forget that the “hopes and fears of all the years” are met in the One who became one of us in the person of Jesus. And let us never forget that, in Him, we have been called and claimed and commissioned to share the Good News we have come to know until that final day when He returns.

In that calling and claim and commission, I commit this past year and this coming year to God’s saving mission. I ask and I pray that you will renew your commitment to that same work. We are a saved people in Jesus. We have a secure present and future in Christ. And we have a message this world desperately needs to hear.

Now is the time for us, as the Church, in spite of the uncertainty of the days ahead, to live each day by faith, to trust in what God has accomplished in Christ and to speak the name of the One alone in whom we have life.
NALC 2020 Vision

This past August, at our annual Mission Convocation, I was privileged to present a 2020 Vision for our future in the North American Lutheran Church. The vision had not only received support from our staff and elected leaders as it was being developed but was also overwhelmingly supported in a resolution adopted by the convocation.

Three commitments were made by the more than 400 delegates in attendance.

1. To endorse, with great thanksgiving, the direction that the 2020 Vision sets for the entire NALC for the next four years;

2. To commit to fervent daily prayer and action for the 2020 Vision to come to life in and among us;

3. To encourage collaboration of all disciples, congregations and entities of the NALC in implementing the 2020 Vision.

The resolution closed with a call for reports on the progress of the 2020 Vision to be provided annually, and for regular updates on where and how it is coming to life within our church body. It is to this final request from the convocation that this article and subsequent articles in this publication will be offered.

Beginning in January, the NALC News will feature articles each month highlighting two of the 10 components of the vision. The purpose of the articles will be to communicate what is happening in each of the 10 areas of commitment we have made, along with encouraging you to be praying for and considering ways in which you, your congregation and mission district might become actively involved.

The vision is not designed to be implemented from the continental staff level, although the leaders for each of the 10 components are members of our continental staff. Rather, the intent is to provide direction and focus to the commitments we are making together as a denomination.

As you will see as we present more detail in the coming months, the 10 components of the vision are aggressive. Even though they do not offer a new direction for our future — they continue to build upon our Core Values and the Great Commission and the Great Commandments of our Lord — they do, nonetheless, challenge us to move into the future in new ways, building upon where we have been and reaching farther than we ever have before.

I personally believe that the timing of this vision is not coincidental. Given the events of this past year and the uncertainty of the year ahead, people in our world and our communities are searching. They are open to possibilities they never would have considered less than one year ago.

In spite of the many challenges our pastors and churches are facing, God is not challenged by the pandemic. His Word is going out farther and faster, through technology, than ever before. As a result, we have an opportunity, like never before, to impact the lives of people who, until this past year, believed they had everything they needed in life. They are now realizing there is more to life than what they had thought. They just do not know where to look.

We know where to look — and His name is Jesus. We know what needs to be seen and found, and it came to us as a gift, long ago, in a manger, in the person of the newborn Christ.

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Jonathan Gowin is NALC Global Worker in Gambia

Jonathan (Jon) Gowin is a new NALC global worker in Gambia. Jon grew up in Gambia and neighboring Senegal, West Africa, as the son of missionaries.

After earning a degree in theology and missions and a second degree in agriculture education, he returned to Gambia and served as an agriculture missionary for 10 years.

In January 2021, Jon and his family will return to Gambia to serve with Bethany Gateways. As a Bethany Gateways missionary, he will be working with Indigenous Mission of West Africa (IMWA), a Gambian-based mission that is actively engaged in evangelizing and discipling upcountry where the needs are greatest.

Jon will be involved in various aspects of IMWA’s mission and church work, including evangelistic outreaches, discipleship programs and missions training.

He is also studying online to earn a Master of Divinity from the North American Lutheran Seminary and is pursuing ordination with the NALC.

Jon is fond of saying, “The best ones to reach Gambians are Gambians themselves,” because they don’t need to adjust to the culture, learn the language, etc. Gambian Christians have caught the vision for home missions, and Jon is privileged to join with them in doing the work of the Great Commission.

**Jonathan Gowin is a global worker of the North American Lutheran Church. To learn more or partner in ministry, visit thenalc.org/partners/jonathan-gowin.**

NALC 2020 Vision

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As our 2020 Vision is lifted up in the coming months, I ask you to commit yourself to the same commitments made by the convocation last August: thankfulness for the direction we have been given; daily prayer for the vision to become reality; collaboration in implementing what God has set before us. It is in and through our thankfulness and prayer and action that God will work to carry out His vision to grow His kingdom, to the glory of His Son.
It’s the most wonderful time of the year — to move?

The North American Lutheran Church has maintained an office at the New Brighton, Minnesota, branch of U.S. Bank for 10 years. Before the NALC — from 2000 to 2010 — Lutheran CORE and WordAlone Ministries were the tenants in Suite 220.

As they say, all good things must come to an end. In October, U.S. Bank informed the NALC that its New Brighton branch will be closing at the end of the year.

We were blessed to make the right contacts quickly and found a new, similar space within two weeks. The new location is less than one-quarter mile from our current location. The new address for the NALC office is 2655 Innsbruck Drive, Suite A; New Brighton, MN 55112-9304. The phone numbers are not changing.

Since we will no longer have quick and easy access to banking services, we request that all donations to the NALC be sent to the lockbox processing center that was set up a few years ago.

Here are the guidelines for sending gifts for all funds of the NALC. Please share this information with your treasurer and financial staff members. Many congregations and individuals are currently using the process and we now encourage everyone to do so.

Instructions for Donations

All gifts for the North American Lutheran Church should be sent to the following address:

North American Lutheran Church
PO Box 860565
Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565

To ensure timely and accurate processing, here are some guidelines for how checks should be written: Checks should be payable to “North American Lutheran Church” or “NALC.” Do not include a fund name (such as NALS or Great Commission Fund) on the payee line.

Use the memo line to indicate a specific fund. If you leave the memo line blank, your gift will be deposited to the Operating (General) Fund.

Specific fund options are:
+ Amy C. Schifrin Scholarship Fund
+ Disaster Response Fund
+ General Theological Education
+ Great Commission Fund
+ John Bradysky Fund for Life-to-Life Discipleship
+ North American Lutheran Seminary
+ Seminarian Scholarships
+ Women of the NALC
+ Women of the NALC Mission Bank

Information about these funds is available on our website, thenalc.org/donate.

It is more efficient for us if you use a separate check for each fund. Multiple checks for the various funds may be sent in the same envelope to save postage. If you send a single check with allocations for multiple funds, please complete the Donation Allocation Form found at thenalc.org/donate and enclose it with your check.

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NALC Pastors’ Conference Rescheduled for May 4-6

The NALC Pastors’ Conference has been rescheduled for May 4-6 in San Antonio, Texas.

The conference was scheduled for February, but it was moved back because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The theme of this year’s pastors’ conference is “Keeping the Main Things the Main Things” and will focus on the scope of Lutheranism and sacramental theology. Dr. James Nestingen and Dr. Robert Benne will be the featured speakers.

The conference will include the annual meeting of the NALC Ministerium.

New Office

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All correspondence sent to the lockbox with checks is scanned and available for review by NALC staff.

You may also give online at thenalc.org/donate.

Please note that if you are sending correspondence without a check or a check for payment of travel reimbursements, candidacy application fees or other non-donation items, those payments should be mailed to the Innsbruck Drive address. The lockbox processing is for donations only.

Please contact Anne Gleason, financial administrator, or Joan Corniea, financial assistant, at 888-551-7254 or 651-633-6004 with any questions regarding this process.

Our Lord calls us to be good stewards of all He entrusts to our hands, and the NALC places a high value on enabling congregations to use their donations efficiently and effectively in support of the wider church.

NALS Reads

Critical Conversations
Engaging Theology and Culture

The Meaning of Protestant Theology

by Philip Cary

5 Sessions on Zoom | Fourth Tuesday starting Jan 26
Register online at thenalc.org/nalsreads

About the Book

Philip Cary’s The Meaning of Protestant Theology opens by asking “Why Protestantism?” as opposed to Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or post-Christian spirituality. The author’s aim is to show how Martin Luther conceived the Gospel as “the word of God that gives us Christ” — and so Protestantism’s gift to the whole Church. Another way to look at it might be this: Now more than ever, the Church and the world need the insight — offered especially by the Lutheran tradition — that God Christ, Spirit, Word, Sacraments. Kingdom are all relentlessly external, that they come from outside us to do what they do in us, and that only in this way can they deliver and transform us. The Meaning of Protestant Theology develops that insight rigorously and accessibly.

About the Facilitator

Maurice Lee is the pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Santa Barbara, California, a lecturer in theology for the North American Lutheran Seminary, and a member of the NALC’s Commission on Theology and Doctrine. He was educated at Wheaton College, the California Institute of Technology, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Yale University, and did postdoctoral work at Harvard University and taught at Westmont College before becoming involved with the NALC. He lives with his family in Lompoc, California.
Christmas is best understood in light of Easter. Christmas answers the question, “Who is the One whom God raised from the dead?” He is the One whom God sent into the world, “born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). He is divine wisdom incarnate, the Word made flesh. He was “despised and rejected” (Isaiah 53:3) abandoned by friend and foe and suffered a cruel death. He drank the cup of suffering dry. Given all this, “Merry Christmas” sounds a bit shallow.

The Good News is that humanity’s rejection and resistance could not stop God’s incarnate Word at work. The Incarnation is a divine incantation. In Christ, God casts a “good spell” on earth. Christ reenchants our disenchanted world in which it’s “always winter and never Christmas.”

Many of you will recognize the above quotation from C.S. Lewis’ book, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. After the cruel murder of the Christ figure, Aslan, the children are distraught. Their hope is gone, the story has ended badly, the evil witch has won. But, when Aslan is raised, he tells the children:

*The Witch knew Deep Magic, there is magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward.*

Christmas is deeper magic from before the dawn of time. In this small Child, born in weakness, lies hidden the power and wisdom of God. Nothing in all creation will ultimately defeat this Child. Therefore, nothing can separate you from God’s kingdom, God’s love and God’s forgiveness given in Christ.

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**Seminary Update**

**Rev. Dr. Eric Riesen**
NALS President

Because this is true, I wish you a merry and magical Christmas and a blessed new year! I also thank you for your prayers and gifts for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

*Almighty God, You made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of His glory. Amen.*
Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute (LCBI) is a Lutheran high school in Outlook, Saskatchewan. The school’s 100-year motto is “We Would See Jesus.”

LCBI’s holistic academics and campus life programs come down to three goals in growing the whole student: excellent learning, personal faith and caring relationships.

The LCBI robotics program helps students learn to think like engineers. Teams design, build and code robots to compete in a team-team alliance format. Robots are built from a reusable platform, powered by Android technology, and can be coded using a variety of Java-based programming.

In any sport, we use our minds — our creativity, imagination, and critical thinking — as much as we use our muscles. Our robotics program represents the potential to add robotics to traditional sports. Robotics is a sport where every student can go pro.

In every game we play, we set out to make ourselves a collaborative teammate, a respected competitor and a stronger person. In this year’s challenge called “Ultimate Goal,” teams will develop strategy and build robots based on advanced engineering principles to compete in tournaments, building 21st century life skills and earning achievements for their robot design, community outreach and other team accomplishments.

So far each team has constructed and programmed a base robot that moves remotely. The next phase is to add specific components and associated programming to execute this year’s challenge which is to pickup five rubber rings from random locations and either place them or launch them into shelf like goals. This emulates automated warehousing and gaming ideas.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused pauses in all high schools programs, our students continue to seek out strategy and components while we pause on meeting together in person.

In order to cover the costs of hosting two teams at LCBI, this year’s challenge is sponsored by Qualcomm. Additional grant support comes from the collective’s sponsors: AEGGS, Innovate SK, Fining Canada, Boeing, General Motors and John Deere. Many thanks also go to a local supporter, Home Hardware, for an equipment donation.

Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute is a recognized ministry of the North American Lutheran Church. To learn more or partner with them in ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/lutheran-collegiate-bible-institute.
John Robert Crawford was ordained on Dec. 6 at Faith Lutheran Church in Faith, North Carolina, where he is called to serve as pastor.

The Rev. Eric J. Steward was ordained on Nov. 15 at Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Lucas, Ohio, where he is called to serve as pastor.

John King was ordained on Nov. 1 at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Salem, Oregon. He is called as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Enterprise, Oregon.
“Canoeing the Mountains”
Great Commission Society
ONLINE BOOK DISCUSSION

The NALC Great Commission Society (GCS) Mission Connectors Team is about encouraging congregations and mission districts to make relational mission connections.

The vision of the NALC is that every congregation is in relationship with at least one local, one domestic and one global mission partnership. Our team helps by preparing mission-focused resources and training, being available to coach leaders and teams and by calling every mission district and mission region at least once a year. The purpose of these calls is to pray with the leaders, to hear how the Holy Spirit is moving in their district, and to encourage them as they serve God’s kingdom.

In our most recent calls, people have shared the joys and frustrations of being Mission Driven during a global pandemic. We’ve rejoiced with people in their flexibility, innovation and commitment to sharing the Gospel. We prayed with them as they shared frustrations and struggles in discerning, trialing and adapting to what ministry and mission look like today.

In response, we’re engaging with an excellent resource and offering a book discussion on Canoeing the Mountains by Tod Bolsinger.

Bolsinger explains that the explorers Lewis and Clark had to adapt in their journey when they expected the Pacific Ocean and instead found the Rocky Mountains.

The year 2020 has brought many unexpected things and the question remains as healing continues: will we embrace the opportunities that God has laid before us?

In Canoeing the Mountains, Bolsinger offers “a combination of illuminating insights and practical tools to help you reimagine what effective leadership looks like in our rapidly changing world.”

Join the GCS Mission Connectors Team on Thursdays from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. ET, Jan. 8 through Feb. 11.

This virtual small group will be asking questions about your current reality, God’s intended future, and looking at action steps for all of us as disciples to move in that direction in our calls.

To register or for more information go to Airtable.com/shr4qqMkUoWgXOpWR.
Malawi Orphan Care Project (MOCP) partners with Kanyenyeva Ministries (KM), a Malawian non-profit organization, to help feed and educate orphans in Malawi.

MOCP also assists KM in starting businesses in Malawi which financially support the feeding program and education.

One of the businesses, Kanyenyeva Wala, a registered Days for Girls enterprise, enables the women of the village to sew and sell washable, reusable sanitary kits using the Days for Girls (DFG) copyrighted patterns and logo. These kits are available for the school-aged girls who are registered at Kanyenyeva and are also given to the women who work within the project.

DFG kits are truly life-changing for the school-aged girls who receive them. “Days for Girls” literally refers to “School Days for Girls.” Currently, girls who menstruate without access to sanitary supplies are forced to skip school. They subsequently fall behind in their studies and are often forced to drop out of school and then into a forced under-aged marriage.

Recently, all the Days for Girls initiatives in Malawi formed a cohort to work with the first lady of the country. She has a foundation which she recently launched, and she specifically arranged to work with Days for Girls in Malawi to provide training and materials to girls.

Yamikani Chikoti, the manager of the orphan project, was part of a team that went to train and provide materials at Chief Teleza Kachindamoto’s area as part of the initiative. Chief Kachindamoto works to educate girls and has ended over 2,600 under-aged and forced marriages in her area.

Kanyenyeva Wala has also been in touch with Days for Girls in South Africa and is one of the pillars and contact points for the South Africa office.

Malawi Orphan Care Project is a recognized ministry of the North American Lutheran Church. To learn more or partner with them in ministry thenalc.org/partners/malawi-orphan-care-project.
Congregations consider whether to ratify NALC constitutional amendments

The congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are considering whether to ratify amendments to the NALC Constitution that were approved by the 2020 NALC Mission Convocation.

“One of the NALC’s four Core Values is Congregationally Focused. Congregational participation is a cornerstone of the North American Lutheran Church’s governance. By requiring congregational ratification of certain key decisions, the NALC ensures that its members are aware of and broadly support those decisions. Participation in the ratification process is an important right and responsibility,” the Executive Council states in a letter to congregations on the ratification process.

Amendments approved by a convocation must be ratified within six months of the conclusion of the convocation by a two-thirds majority of NALC congregations voting on the amendments. At least half of NALC congregations must vote on whether or not to ratify the amendments for the ratification vote to be valid.

The deadline for voting on ratification is Feb. 8, 2021 — six months after the convocation. However, the Executive Council is encouraging congregations to vote on ratification as soon as possible.

The proposed amendments to the NALC Constitution would move the North American Lutheran Church from meeting annually for its convocation to meeting every other year.

The proposed amendments also direct the Executive Council to provide quarterly updates to pastors and congregations.

Proposed amendments also clarify the process by which the Executive Council apportions additional lay delegates to the convocation so that there is approximately an equal number of lay and clergy delegates.

The Executive Council proposed the shift to biennial convocations to be able to focus the time and resources of NALC staff, mission districts and congregations on achieving the NALC’s 2020 Vision goals for renewal and growth.

Annual convocations create substantial expenses each year both for congregations and for the NALC Operating Budget. Congregations incur both registration and travel expenses to send delegates. The NALC has significant costs in planning a convocation and subsidizing registration fees.

The constitution mentions “annual” convocations in many places, so many of the proposed amendments delete the word “annual.” The word “annual” is sometimes replaced with the word “biennial.”

The constitution will continue to allow “special convocations” to be called if necessary. A special convocation could be called if an additional meeting of the NALC were needed at any time.

The election cycle for members of the Executive Council and Court of Adjudication is tied to annual convocations, so there are proposed amendments to add flexibility to elections.

Information on the ratification process — including the exact text of the proposed amendments — is available at thenalc.org/ratificationprocess.
The fourth annual NALC Life Conference will be held on Thursday, Jan. 28, at Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Virginia, from noon until 5 p.m.

The event is free and will begin with a free lunch. It will conclude with a communion service led by the Rev. Mark Chavez, NALC general secretary.

This year's conference will be very special. Our keynote speaker will be Christie Gillette, director of Word of Hope for Lutherans for Life.

Chrissie earned a doctorate in clinical psychology from Spalding University and completed her psychology residency as an officer in the United States Air Force. She served four years of active duty and another four as inactive reserve.

God blessed her with a range of counseling experiences in settings such as a domestic violence shelter, the suicide crisis hotline, military mental health clinics and a Christian counseling agency. Transitioning from an emphasis on psychology to theology, Chrissie attended the Distance Deaconess Program at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She graduated in 2018 and was commissioned as a deaconess with Lutherans for Life.

In her position as the Word of Hope director, Chrissie answers the hotline calls and emails. Understanding both the secular worldview and the Christ-Centered perspective, she listens without personal judgment while also responding in Christian truth and love. Motivated by compassion, she often goes above and beyond to connect people with local services and natural supports.

Beyond her typical hotline responsibilities, Chrissie writes articles, publicly speaks, and leads Bible studies on a range of topics related to life issues.

Valuing a Christ-Centered lifestyle, Chrissie serves her neighbors through acts of mercy. Each year, she opens her heart and home to exchange students from around the world. Among her church family, she regularly visits people who are hospitalized or shut-in, and enjoys the fellowship while creating crafts with members in her home.

Within the rural and small-town community, she gifts numerous people with produce from her garden, home-cooked dishes, or crocheted newborn-baby blankets. Truly, to know Chrissie is to know her as your loving sister in Christ.

No registration required. But please email Rebecka V.A. Frontz at rebeckaandrae@yahoo.com if you will be attending the lunch so we can get a head count.

For those interested, the following day, Friday, Jan. 29, we will be attending the March for Life in Washington, D.C. The usual prayer service before the march has been cancelled due to COVID-19, but the march is on! We will be meeting up with other Lutherans at 12th and Madison Streets at noon. If you need help on the day of the march you may call Pastor Dennis Di Mauro.

Pastor Di Mauro is also selling either baby blue or pink hats for $10 each. The hats will be worn for the March for Life.

Orders can be made by contacting Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at 703-568-3346 or dennisdimaurow@yahoo.com. You may also send a check payable to “Trinity Lutheran Church” (with “NALC Life” in the memo) to 276 Cleveland Street, Warrenton, VA 20186. Be sure to indicate whether you want a pink or a blue hat.

NALC pastors and members are encouraged to join the NALC Life Ministries board for this very special event.

You can learn more about NALC Life Ministries at thenalc.org/lifeministries.
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Seminary partners with Lutheran Bible Translators in building project

A seminary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) — the Lutheran church in Ethiopia — has partnered with Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) in an exciting project, a building to benefit both the work of the seminary and LBT.

Both the seminary and LBT are ministry partners of the NALC. The EECMY is in a full communion relationship with the NALC.

Mekane Yesus Seminary happens to be located on a valuable piece of real estate in a prime business district in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. The desirable location provides the opportunity to construct a multi-function building that will not only serve the needs of the seminary and LBT but also accommodate some income-generating commercially leased retail space. When complete, the six-floor building is projected to generate a minimum income of $225,000 per year.

In the words of Dr. Bruk Ayele Asale, president of Mekane Yesus Seminary, the project is a real “game changer” for the seminary and the Ethiopian Lutheran church as a whole.

In years past, the seminary had been heavily dependent upon churches in Europe and North America. As those church bodies have declined, so has the support. The need for long-term self-sustainability is great.

Lutheran Bible Translators is excited about this project because it provides a new and vibrant hub for translation work throughout Ethiopia and beyond. They had hopes of starting with 25 students. When they opened, more than 25 were eager to enroll.

The project is under the leadership and initiative of Mekane Yesus Seminary and its board, with the full endorsement of the EECMY church body’s leadership. A team called the “Mekane Yesus Seminary Advancement Team” has been convened by the seminary to work with Lutheran Bible Translators, seeing the project through to successful completion. Numerous people have been a part of this project: teachers, missionaries, alumni, business savvy patrons and students.

Construction began in April of 2020. It has been on schedule and within budget — a symbol of hope.
Despite the global pandemic, the construction quality is very good. It is anticipated that construction will be complete in the fall of 2021.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the largest body of Lutheran Christians in the world. They outnumber all Lutherans in North America combined. They now number about 10 million people, over 50 percent larger than a decade ago. The church is growing by over 40,000 per month and making plans for tripling in size within the next decade. They desperately need well-trained leaders grounded in God’s Word as there is currently only one trained pastor for every 2,000+ members.

In the words of the Rev. Teshome Amenu, general secretary of the EECKMY, “The seminary is like the central nervous system of the EECKMY.” Training centers are like the backbone for the church’s missional movement. By investing in the seminary and Lutheran Bible Translators, it impacts the entire EECKMY, people from many different ethnic groups, generations and even the world.

The total cost of the project is $3.6 million. By the grace of God, two thirds of the expense, $2.4 million, has already been raised or pledged by major lead donors. Only $1.2 million — one third of the total cost — has yet to be raised. It is hoped that the goal will be met by October 2021. Two or three additional revenue-generating buildings are anticipated to follow.

When complete, the project will significantly help raise up future pastors, evangelists and translators. The seminary will be moving forward with their goal of self-sustainability. The global evangelical Lutheran Christian movement will be strengthened. God’s kingdom will be advanced, reaching countless people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The NALC members on the Seminary Advancement Team see this project as an interesting example of sharing in one of the goals of the NALC. One of the hopes in forming the NALC was that we would be a mission people, but also that all mission projects wouldn’t have to be run through or directed by a central NALC office. Rather we would encourage people and groups to share in new and helpful ministries beyond traditional boundaries.

This project is doing that. This project isn’t being run as an official project of the NALC. Although it needs to be quickly added that the Seminary Advancement Team is working diligently to keep the NALC leadership informed, and deeply appreciates the support and guidance the NALC leadership is sharing. But NALC members are partnering with Lutheran Bible Translators, members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and member of the Mekane Yesus Church in exciting ways. New avenues of ministry are being developed to support the sharing of the Gospel in Ethiopia.

Prayerful support is greatly appreciated. If you would like more information about this project, or would like to share in this project, please contact either Pastor John Conrad at jtcswede@gmail.com or Pastor Mark Braaten at mbraaten@oslctyler.org, who are NALC pastors working with this project.

Lutheran Bible Translators is a recognized ministry of the NALC. You can learn more about their ministry lbt.org. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is a full communion partner of the NALC. You can learn more about the EECKMY at eecmy.org. You can learn more about the Mekane Yesus Seminary at mekaneyesusseminary.org.
Preaching Good News in a Mask?

And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.” — Luke 2:10 RSV

Recently, one of my granddaughters refused to take off her COVID-19 mask. Her mother asked her why and she replied, “It keeps my face warm!” I told her she is the only person I’ve met who wanted to keep her coronavirus mask on.

Most of us are tired of restrictions, shut-downs and, yes, wearing masks! It doesn’t mean we won’t do it, but it does make communication, verbal and non-verbal, more difficult. I can’t count the number of times my Starbucks barista has gotten my coffee wrong. Masks muffle our words, soften our voices and hinder lip-reading, which is so much a part of human speech and communication. And all I wanted was a plain black coffee!

As pastors have wrestled with all the challenges related to restricted, in-person worship and questions about preaching via the internet, it also causes us to think about the preaching task.

For those who preach every Sunday, not being able to step into the pulpit to preach the Good News to a gathered congregation is, at best, strange and, at worst, a dereliction of our call and duty as ministers of the Word.

Preaching online sermons is the best we can do, sometimes, given our current reality. Let’s pray it never replaces the powerful, moving experience of the Word of God being preached to hearers hungry for the Living Bread, the Word of life come down from heaven, to give life to the world (John 6).

Still, having our mouths covered and our speech muffled by masks gives us an opportunity to consider at least two things as we hope and pray for a return to in-person services of the Word.

First, we are reminded of the high task of preaching entrusted to Ministers of the Word. In Romans 10:15, St. Paul asserts, “As it is written, ‘How

beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news’” (ESV). Martin Luther states in his explanation to the Third Commandment in the Small Catechism, “We should so fear and love God as not to despise His Word and the preaching of the Gospel, but deem it holy, and willingly hear and learn it.”

Wilhelm Loehe, the great German Lutheran confessional pastor and writer in the 1800s, in his book on the evangelical pastor, wrote, “The minister is a ‘pastor’ (shepherd) and ‘teacher.’ This shows us that it is the end and aim of the holy office to shepherd the sheep, to lead them into the green pastures of God’s love and eternal life. But the designation ... also shows that the principle means given them by God for the accomplishment of their work is the Divine Word ... In fact, the pastor has no official means except the Word ... It is all through the Word. By it the Lord made the world, and through it He renews and sanctifies it. And the servants of the Lord accomplish everything that belongs to their office through that Word.”

Is it possible that preachers and congregations forget how powerful the Word of God is unto salvation (Romans 1:16)? It is possible that baptized Christians sometimes become lukewarm toward the Word, written, read and preached, “neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some” (Hebrews 10:25 ESV)?

Of course, it’s possible! And it happens all the time. In this time when we are restricted from gathering in our churches to hear and heed the Gospel of God, we are thankful we have preachers preaching on the internet. But let us pray that this will lead to a

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renewed appreciation and hungering for the preached Word of God!

Second, perhaps the strained communication caused by mask wearing and social distancing will bring about a resurgence of commitment to preaching the Word clearly, distinctly and powerfully!

Most will admit that the art of preaching has been in some decline in recent years. In some places, it has become a few cute stories while in other places it is a moralistic talk.

In some congregations, sermons are more “churchy chats” rather than public proclamation of the “good news of a great joy which has come to all the people!” While good preaching can happen through a variety of styles and forms, nothing can take the place of prayerful, thoughtful preparation and heartfelt, genuine sharing of the Gospel aimed straight at the heart of those who may be hurting, lonely, doubting and in need of God’s great message of forgiveness and mercy!

Let’s pray that the pandemic will lead to a renewal of faithful, clear preaching of the Good News that is for all people. Let’s pray that God will inspire and enliven preachers and their preaching. Let’s pray that every heart and life will hunger and thirst for the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, born at Bethlehem, born to be Emmanuel — God with us — Savior and Lord!

**Pastor David Wendel is the assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. You may contact him at dwendel@thenalc.org.**

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

1 Timothy 1:15

**The North American Lutheran Seminary joins Christians of all times and places in offering thanks to God for the inexpressible gift of his Son for the salvation of the world. We wish all of our friends and supporters a blessed Advent, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year.**