

MARK CHAVEZ STEPS DOWN AS NALC GENERAL SECRETARY

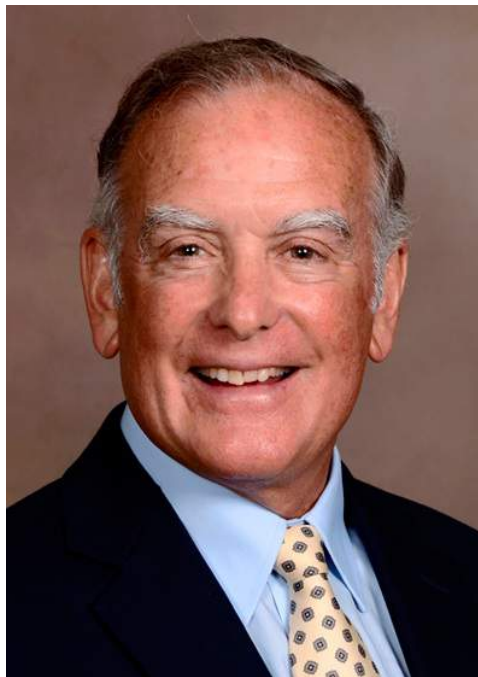
The Rev. Mark Chavez has resigned as general secretary of the North American Lutheran Church effective April 30.

Having sensed a call from the Lord to return to parish ministry, Pastor Chavez will be stepping away from his role as general secretary to serve as a full-time interim pastor for Reformation Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, his home congregation.

Pastor Chavez, who lives in Landisville, Pennsylvania, has served as general secretary since Sept. 15, 2011. He was appointed by Bishop John Bradosky. He was reappointed to the role by Bishop Dan Selbo in 2019.

Throughout those years, Pastor Chavez has played a critical part in the growth and development of the NALC and has been instrumental in shaping and giving direction to the church body the NALC has become.

“It truly has been a joy to serve with Pastor Chavez. His knowledge of our shared history, his pastoral and leadership skills, along with his love for the Lord Jesus and His Church are among the many reasons why his years of service have been such a gift,” said Bishop Selbo. “I have been personally blessed by his



Pastor Mark Chavez

partnership on our staff, inspired by his faithful and dedicated work and have enjoyed serving with him as a colleague in ministry.”

“His years of service have left a positive and an indelible mark on our church body, for which I am deeply grateful. On behalf of our entire denomination, I wish him God’s richest blessings in his new call,” Bishop Selbo said.

Pastor Chavez served as the director of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) for nearly six years prior to accepting the call to be the NALC’s general secretary. He also served as vice president and

director of the WordAlone Network from 2000 to 2009.

Pastor Chavez was involved in the renewal movement among Lutherans for many years. He was a participant in the first “Call to Faithfulness” theological conference in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1990, one of the first gatherings to call attention to the drift from Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions occurring in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Continued from Page 1

Pastor Chavez signed the *9.5 Theses* in 1995, which were an attempt to call for public discussion of this theological drift.

He was called as director of the WordAlone Network in 2000 and served in that position until 2009. He was also one of the leaders involved in forming Solid Rock Lutherans in 2003, a coalition of confessing Lutherans and precursor to Lutheran CORE.

Pastor Chavez is also a leader in the Common Ground Christian Network (formerly the Association for Church Renewal), an organization of leaders of the renewing and confessing movements in the historic mainline churches. Through this network, he brings connections to the renewal movements in the mainline denominations that have worked for decades to keep churches from moving away from the Bible and traditional Christian teaching as norms for their faith and life.

“It has been a great joy and privilege to serve the NALC. The officers, committees, staff and the many volunteers and leaders across our church body are a fabulous team of dedicated believers. What a blessing to work with such dear sisters and brothers

in Christ. I am very thankful that I will still be able to work with them all, albeit in a different capacity,” Pastor Chavez said.

“Bishop Paull Spring made a deep impression upon me in many ways, but one stands out. He could have served as a bishop in the ELCA until his retirement. Instead, he chose to leave the office to serve as an associate pastor in a congregation before retiring. He embodied the NALC’s Congregationally Focused Core Value and modeled servant leadership,” Pastor Chavez said. “After serving more than 20 years in non-parish positions, I am thankful to be able to follow Paull’s example and return to parish ministry before I retire.”

“We are sad that Pastor Chavez will be leaving our staff, and will miss his daily involvement in our vision, but are excited for where the Lord is leading him in this next season of ministry. We thank God for his years of service, and we wish him God’s continued blessings as he continues to serve our Lord Jesus in his new role,” said the Rev. Andrew Ames Fuller, NALC director of communications.

If you have any questions about this transition, you may contact Pastor Chavez at mchavez@thenalc.org.

NALC SEEKING NEW GENERAL SECRETARY

Following the announcement of Pastor Mark Chavez’s resignation as general secretary and his return to parish ministry, Bishop Selbo has engaged the Executive Council in a review of the current job description and the beginning of a search process to find the NALC’s next general secretary.

The NALC Constitution allows a broad range of freedom in the selection process, as well as in the overall duties.

Article 9.05 states: “A General Secretary shall be appointed by the Bishop, and confirmed by the Executive Council, to carry out the ministry of the NALC. The General Secretary shall be accountable to the Bishop.”

Article 9.06 states: “The General Secretary shall be a full-time staff position and shall function as the chief operating officer of the NALC, managing its day-to-day administrative functions. The Bishop, with the concurrence of the Executive Council, shall develop a job description for the General Secretary.”

The selection process will include the identification of candidates, review of resumes, conversations and interviews with potential candidates, with a final selection to be made prior to the 2021 Mission Convocation in August.

Continued on Page 19

CHANGES IN NALC AND NALS STAFF

March saw transitions in support staff for both the North American Lutheran Church and North American Lutheran Seminary.

Maddie Benson finished her service for the NALC on March 10. Maddie began as the NALC receptionist in the former Ohio office in May 2016. She moved to her current role as communications specialist, working as an assistant to the Rev. Andrew Ames Fuller, director of communications, when he joined the staff in March 2018.

Maddie will be working with her husband, Aaron, in leading Yellow Tent Nomads, an outdoor adventure media company they started. She will also be starting graduate school to earn a master of public administration degree, concentrating in non-profit management.

“We will all miss Maddie’s dedicated work, wide-ranging skills, as well as her kind and willing demeanor serving the NALC,” said Deacon Ames Fuller. “We are thrilled to bless her and Aaron on their new adventure!”

Ariel Wicker will be the NALC’s new communications specialist. She brings communications and administrative experience from the local church, as well as the non-profit sector.

“Ariel has some big shoes to fill, but we are all so excited to bring such a talented and passionate communicator into the NALC,” said Ames Fuller. “We are looking forward to supporting the 2020 Vision with renewed energy.”

Shannon Ames Fuller, administrative assistant at the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS), finished her role at the seminary on March 12. She is married to Deacon Andrew Ames Fuller, NALC director of communications. They are preparing for the birth of their first child.

Shannon began her position at the NALS as assistant to the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin in May 2019. She served



Ariel Wicker



Patty Forrest



Maddie Benson



Shannon Ames Fuller

as a bridge during the Rev. Dr. Eric Riesen’s first year as seminary president.

“It is always difficult to say goodbye to good and faithful coworkers. We will all greatly miss the administrative gifts that Shannon Ames Fuller brought to the NALS. Personally, she was a huge help to me in my first year as seminary president,” said President Riesen.

Patty Forrest will serve as the new administrative coordinator for the seminary. Forrest brings a wealth of administrative experience in higher education.

Continued on Page 4

CONGREGATIONS RATIFY NALC CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

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

Congregations voted 225-22 in favor of amendments to the constitution that move the North American Lutheran Church from meeting annually for its convocation to meeting every other year. These amendments also direct the Executive Council to provide quarterly updates to pastors and congregations.

Congregations voted 243-4 in favor of amendments that 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.

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.

253 congregations submitted votes. 222 votes were needed for a quorum.

The deadline for voting on ratification was Feb. 8 – six months after the convocation. Some congregations voted after the deadline and were not counted in the totals.

“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 explained in a letter to congregations on the ratification process.

Information on the ratification process – including the exact text of the amendments – is available at thenalc.org/ratificationprocess.

CHANGES IN STAFF

Continued from Page 3

She previously served at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

“We are grateful that the Holy Spirit led us to find such a qualified person to fill this role,” said Riesen. “As always, please remember the faculty, students, and staff of the NALS in your prayers.”

There are a few changes to these two positions. The communications specialist will now also devote time to the seminary, serving as the communications lead for the NALS. The NALS administrative coordinator will now give administrative support to the NALC candidacy process. Both positions are based at the NALS offices at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania where the NALS is headquartered.

For questions or requests regarding communications, contact communications@thenalc.org.

For questions or requests regarding candidacy, contact candidacy@thenalc.org.

If you would like to wish our outgoing staff well, you may email Maddie at maddie@yellowtentnomads.com or Shannon at srames12@gmail.com.

NALC PASTORS' CONFERENCE TO FEATURE BENNE AND NESTINGEN

The NALC Pastors' Conference will be held May 4-6 at the Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.

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. The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen and Dr. Robert Benne will be the featured speakers.

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

The conference will include discussion of several significant topics regarding the office of ministry. There will be discussion of "ordination under special circumstances," a proposal for an NALC diaconate, and online celebrations of Holy Communion.

Other conference highlights include appointments with NALC staff, meeting of the NALC Ministerium,



Robert Benne



James Nestingen

Holy Communion service with the renewal of ordination vows and blessing of oil, dedicated time of networking and encouragement with fellow pastors.

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



Those who attend the NALC Pastors' Conference will be able to take in some of the sights of San Antonio during free time including the city's famous River Walk. The conference is being held at a hotel located on the River Walk.

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 are asked to register so adequate arrangements can be made.

The registration fee is \$75. Registration fees are waived for NALC seminary students.

The hotel provides breakfast and evening appetizers each day for its guests.

The conference begins at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, May 4, and concludes at noon on Thursday, May 6.

To register, make hotel reservations or for more information, please go to thenalc.org/pastors-conference-2021.

REMINDED, ENCOURAGED AND ASSURED

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

— *Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV*

The season of Lent and the COVID-19 pandemic have a lot in common. They remind us we are not in control. They confirm the fact that life is a gift, and it is not always fair in what it gives. And they each have the ability, if we are fortunate, to bring us to our knees and, ultimately, point us to the One true vaccine we need.

As I have been reflecting on the events of this past year, as well as on some of the events in my own family, it has become evident, once again, that the Lenten season points to a harsh reality. In the background of these 40 days is not only the impending road to Calvary and the planned and purposed death of Christ, but also the inevitability of what is facing us all.

This past month, that inevitability became a reality once again. After having lived with us for more than two and a half years, my father-in-law, Mary's father, was called home to the Lord. He lived a long life — 90 years old when he died. He lived a blessed life — three children, eight grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. And he lived a faithful life — baptized as a child, he raised his children in the Christian faith, lived out his vocation with integrity, and remained active in the church until he could no longer attend.

In many ways, his death was no different than that of our other parents. My father died 10 years ago, after



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

having lived and served as a pastor in the Lutheran church. My mom died five years ago. She was a faithful servant, a loving and dedicated wife, and she and my father raised their six children in the Christian faith. Mary's mother died four years ago. Like her father, her mom had a strong Christian faith and gave her life in service of her family and her Lord. When she died, Mary's father lived on his own in their home in Arizona. For a while, it worked just fine. After a while, it no longer worked. It was then that he moved to California to live with us.

His death, in many ways, was similar to that of our other parents, with one notable difference. He was our last living parent. He was the one person left in our family line from the generation ahead of us. When he died, there was no one left. That previous generation had all moved on. All of a sudden, we became the next in line.

Ash Wednesday was different for us this year. We held a service in my father-in-law's bedroom. He was in a hospice bed. Only a few short days left to live. We read Scripture. We offered prayers. We imposed ashes and recited those sobering words: "From dust you came and to dust you shall return." "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." So real. So imminent. So final in this life. Thankfully, those sobering words are not the final word.

Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6

Following one of the great faith chapters in the Bible are found the verses at the beginning of Hebrews 12 that speak of the hope we have in Jesus and of the calling we share in His name. The writer paints the picture of a stadium in which the runners are in a race and the stands are filled with spectators cheering them on. The spectators are those who have gone before us. They have run the race faithfully. They have given the race their all. They are now in heaven, having crossed the finish line in this life, and they are cheering on those of us who are left and who are still running and who need to continue running until the race is complete.

The writer also offers us some advice. He says that while we are still running, we need to “throw off everything that slows us down.” We are to get rid of “every sin that entangles.” If we are honest, there are many tangling sins that need to be dealt with in our lives and there is much added weight that we all are carrying, some of it for far too long. Lent is a time to be honest about our sin and to come clean with the entangled mess we have become. It is a time to give our burdens to Jesus and to stop running as if we can carry it ourselves, because we cannot.

We are to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” In other words, there is a purpose to this life. There is a plan that God is working to carry out through us as it unfolds. He has chosen us. He has placed us in the race. And we are to keep on running until the finish line has been crossed, not knowing when and where it will happen and how much time we might have left.

Through it all, we are to keep our eyes on Jesus. We are to fix our gaze upon Christ. He has already run the race ahead of us and for us. As a result, we are the victors. The gold medal will one day be ours. Until then, the calling is to run and to not become distracted. Keep looking to Jesus. Never stop trusting in Him. And know that in Him, you will have all you need to finish the race.

As I consider this passage, the recent events in our family, the season of Lent, and what is happening in our world today, I am *reminded* and *encouraged* and *assured* of some important life-truths.

The *reminder* is clear. Life on this earth is brief. “Threescore and ten” the psalmist writes. “If we are fortunate fourscore ... Yet they are soon gone, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). The apostle James tells us that life is like “a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14 NIV).

It all happens so quickly. Children grow up and become parents. Parents become grandparents and the end is not far off. Lent reminds us of the importance of every day, and of using every day for things that will ultimately last. We are to store up for ourselves, Jesus says, “treasures in heaven,” and not get caught up in living for things that will soon be gone (Matthew 6:19-20). The Christian life is not a short sprint. It is a long run in the same direction. At the same time, it is made up of a finite number of days, each one with our eyes on Jesus. Every moment, trusting in Him.

The *encouragement* of the Lenten season is certain. We are not alone in this life. There is a great “cloud of witnesses” who have gone before us. The heroes of the faith have paved the way — not perfectly but perfected in Jesus. Not without fault but faultless because of the unblemished Lamb.

The word translated as “witness” is the English equivalent for “martyr.” We have many examples to follow. There are many who have given their lives so that the faith we now have might not die. Until we die, we share the same calling. Until our Lord calls us home, we are the ones called to live and serve as examples for others — with our eyes on Jesus, with our gaze upon Christ. We cannot do it alone, but we are not alone. God is with us. Christ has gone before us. His Spirit is alive and with us every day.

The *assurance* of the season of Lent is that we are on the winning side. Before the verses at the beginning of Hebrews 12 come a long list of verses, naming an even longer list of those who have now received the ultimate prize. As I read the verses in chapter 11 and remember the stories of their lives, I cannot help but wonder how they did it. I have never faced the kind of faith challenges in my life that many of them faced in theirs. And yet they did what they did because they were assured of the prize given to them in the

Continued on Page 8

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR POSITIONS TO BE ELECTED AT 2021 CONVOCATION

The NALC Nominating Committee is seeking the names of candidates for nomination to serve in positions to be elected at the 2021 NALC Mission Convocation Aug. 4-6 in Corpus Christi, Texas.

The convocation will elect one lay person and one pastor to the NALC Executive Council and two members of the Court of Adjudication – all to four-year terms.

The Executive Council functions as the board of directors for the NALC, providing leadership for the church between annual convocations. The council normally meets in person on a quarterly basis.

The Court of Adjudication hears appeals from disciplinary decisions; resolves questions of interpretation of NALC governing documents; and decides claims that a person or entity has violated these governing documents.

Both pastors and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication. The Nominating Committee is seeking nominees with legal experience.

Congregations are encouraged to nominate individuals for any of the open positions. Please confirm that individuals are willing and able to serve prior to submitting their names.

Those who feel called to serve in any of these positions are asked to contact the leaders of their congregation to inform them of their openness to serving.

All nominations should be submitted by May 4. This will give the committee the time necessary to compile biographical information on the candidates and comply with the constitutional requirements to provide this information to NALC members.

Nominees will be asked to complete the Nominee Biographical Form and to provide a photo for publication with the biographical information.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position and nomination and biographical forms are available at thenalc.org/nominate.

Questions may be directed to the Nominating Committee at nominations@thenalc.org.

BISHOP'S MESSAGE

Continued from Page 7

promise and confirmed and waiting for them because of the precious blood of Christ poured out for them and for us on the cross.

There is no promise of an earthly gain for those whose lives are lived in Jesus. There is no assurance of an earthly reward for those whose lives are given to Christ. But there is the assurance of the Kingdom that has been won in Jesus and there is the certainty of the hope that is ours in Christ.

Last month, my father-in-law's earthly life came to an end. It was a clear reminder of life's brevity and of the importance of using every day we have for Jesus.

This month, a new life began. Our oldest daughter gave birth to their second child. She was our third grandchild – a reminder that God finds tremendous joy in giving life.

I needed to hear that reminder, now that my generation (in our family) is next in line. Sooner than later, it will be your generation too, if it is not already happened. But be *reminded*, be *encouraged* and be *assured* that God is in control. The final word has already been spoken. On a cross. From an empty tomb. For us.

NALC DISASTER RESPONSE NEEDS YOUR HELP IN RESPONDING TO DAMAGE CAUSED BY COLD IN TEXAS

The Texas frigid weather event in February caused millions of homes to flood due to pipes bursting.

NALC Disaster Response is assisting our congregations, their members and people in communities of Fort Worth, Arlington and Irving, Texas.

San Miguel Lutheran Church in Fort Worth had 12 inches of water in their entire church building.

All Saints Lutheran Church in Arlington was flooded in their sanctuary, fellowship hall and preschool.

Your prayers and support are needed.

NALC Disaster Response is also scheduling volunteers for several disaster areas including: Pensacola, Florida, for long-term recovery efforts following Hurricane Sally; damage caused by wildfires in Berry Creek, California; and hurricane damage on Oak Island, North Carolina.



Pastor Juan Portillo showing the 12 inches of water that flooded San Miguel Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

If you cannot volunteer, please collect gift cards and Bibles for us to distribute to those who don't know the love of Jesus.

Stuff the Truck events are being scheduled to fill our regional warehouses. All of the warehouses need health kits, flood buckets, Bibles, school kits, baby items, quilts and gift cards. Watch for the next Stuff the Truck near you or schedule an event today.

For more information on any of the above requests, please contact Mary Bates, disaster coordinator, at disasterresponse@thenalc.org or 740-509-1132.

To give online or for more information on NALC Disaster Response including how to make disaster kits, go to thenalc.org/disaster.

Donations may be mailed to: North American Lutheran Church; PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please clearly indicate on your check that your gift is for NALC Disaster Response.



Flood damage at All Saints Lutheran Church in Arlington, Texas.

PASTORAL SUPPORT

2020 Vision: A denomination in which every congregation receives regular and consistent pastoral support.

Goal: Pastoral support for every congregation by the end of 2021.

One component of the NALC *Vision 2020* strategy that will impact congregations as much or more than any other will be the intention to ensure every congregation will receive regular and consistent pastoral support.

Thankfully, we know that most congregations are receiving such pastoral support, but we also realize that we are in a transitional time in North America facing new realities.

Attendance and involvement in smaller congregations in many places continues to decline, meaning more congregations may not be able to afford a full-time, full-compensation pastor.

At the same time, seminary enrollment may not keep pace with the number of “baby-boom” pastors who are retiring — meaning the shortage of clergy may increase in years to come.

Add to that our commitment to planting new house churches and mission congregations, and now is the time to be considering creative, innovative paths to be able to provide “regular and consistent pastoral support.”

Without including every aspect of this important *Vision 2020* component, let us summarize by saying we are looking at every possibility and avenue to provide this support.

It will increasingly include active ordained pastors serving multiple congregations together with development of multi-location parishes; involvement



of retired and semi-retired pastors serving in part-time and short-term situations; partnerships with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) and Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) parishes when possible; encouragement of bi-vocational and so-called “tent-making” ministries, especially to enable church-planting.

This will also dovetail with other *Vision 2020* components which emphasize planting new missions as well as increasing the number of seminarians preparing for ordained ministry in the NALC.

Two very important new strategies being developed are the result of the work of the NALC Commission on Theology and Doctrine and their Church and Ministry Task Force, together with the impetus of this vision component. This will result in the development of what is being described as “Ordination Under Special Circumstances” (OUSC) and the formation of a NALC diaconate.

The OUSC process — while not intended to be an alternative path to ordination for most pastoral candidates — is a shortened, focused path toward ordination for those for whom the traditional, usual four years of seminary education and pastoral formation would not be reasonable.

Candidates for OUSC may be retired persons or persons already in a settled career, often already preaching regularly in their congregation. The process will allow for specific, online course of study, with mentoring and formation leading to approval and ordination halfway through the course of study, with the expectation and requirement of completion of online studies, with oversight and involvement of a mentor and collegial cohort.

Continued on Page 12

CONTINUING EDUCATION

2020 Vision: A continuing education emphasis that supports the ongoing development of all NALC pastors and lay leaders.

Goal: Expansion, coordination and promotion of available NALC continuing education opportunities, beginning in 2021.

The immediate goal of this *Vision 2020* component is the expansion and promotion of continuing education opportunities available within the NALC for all leaders, whether clergy or lay persons.

This strategy will include, but not be limited to encouraging all NALC pastors to participate in at least one continuing education opportunity each year; offering varied courses including preaching, discipleship, stewardship, etc. to all pastors; coordinate in offering online courses and training to all our Lutheran and ecumenical partners in North America and internationally; continue to develop the annual NALC Pastors' Conference and Lutheran Week for continuing education; encourage pastoral self-care; develop ongoing support for first-call and experienced pastors, and encourage greater awareness and support for clergy compensation, benefits and continuing education, including sabbaticals.

Because addressing this vision component involves the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) Board of Regents, candidacy, call process, clergy compensation, Life-to-Life Discipleship Team, mission district deans, ongoing continuing education, ecumenical and inter-Lutheran relations here and abroad, as well as newly forming plans for Ordination Under Special Circumstances and a NALC diaconate, there is a need for a representative group to facilitate communication and cooperation regarding continuing education and re-formation of pastors and laity in the NALC to develop processes and



procedures that are consistent, faithful and contribute to the biblical, theological and confessional integrity of the NALC. To that end, a new Task Force for Continuing Education and Re-Formation (TFCER) is being formed and will meet quarterly.

The ongoing meetings of the TFCER group will facilitate communication, coordination and cooperation between the various subgroups, addressing and fulfilling the several aspects of this vision point.

The TFCER will assist in developing and coordinating the many continuing education and re-formation activities of the NALC with these goals:

- A. Ensuring consistency with regard to expectations appropriate to form of ministry and educational offering.
- B. Assessing and developing educational and formative courses and experiences that meet the needs of the NALC – larger church, mission districts and congregations – especially with regard to the pastors' conference and Lutheran Week offerings.
- C. Receiving and providing input regarding courses, degrees and programs offered through the NALS.
- D. Providing input regarding the development of international global theological education opportunities and networks.
- E. Providing communication throughout the NALC with regard to courses, seminars, workshops being offered in person or online.
- F. Cooperation between the various theological education and formation sub-groups.

Continued on Page 12

2020 VISION: PASTORAL SUPPORT

Continued from Page 10

This process will honor our commitment to our chief Lutheran confessional document, Augsburg Confession Article XIV, which states, “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly preach or teach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call” (Book of Concord, Tappert, p. 36).

Also instrumental in providing regular and consistent pastoral support for congregations will be the development of a NALC diaconate. The Church and Ministry Task Force has been working toward this for several years, but the *Vision 2020* strategy has moved this forward as a necessity. The goal has been to develop a diaconate that is biblical, useful and necessary as well as ecumenically and historically recognizable.

Deacons will be available to serve in any number of capacities, including but not limited to assisting house churches and mission congregations, serving as pulpit supply or interims within mission districts, serving as teachers, worship leaders, musicians or even as seminary professors.

The process of preparation for deacons will include involvement in a diaconal community for formation and support, as well as ongoing mutual encouragement and educational development.

Realizing some NALC congregations have existing “deacons” serving in a number of congregational roles, there will be a distinction made between NALC deacons and congregational deacons. NALC deacons will serve under the authority of the office of the bishop and extensions of the bishop’s office (including deans), whereas congregational deacons continue to serve within the congregation.

The OUSC and diaconate proposals are included in a document, *Expanded Options for NALC Pastoral*

Support. This document, together with the two proposals, will be discussed at the NALC Pastors’ Conference in early May, prior to being presented to the Commission for Theology and Doctrine at its May meeting. If agreeable, it will then be forwarded to the NALC Executive Council for approval at its July meeting.

At this time, each program — Ordination Under Special Circumstances and the NALC diaconate — will be administered by coordinators.

If you are interested in being considered as a coordinator for one of these programs, please contact Pastor David Wendel at dwendel@thenalc.org.

This vision component is led by Pastor David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. If you’d like to learn more, contact him at dwendel@thenalc.org or visit thenalc.org/vision.

2020 VISION: CONTINUING EDUCATION

Continued from Page 11

In the near future, we anticipate development of a comprehensive online listing of NALC educational opportunities and experiences, readily accessible and available to all who may be interested. At this time, those who would like to suggest possible topics, courses or needs which might be addressed as NALC continuing education are encouraged to send them to Pastor David Wendel at dwendel@thenalc.org.

This vision component is led by Pastor David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. If you’d like to learn more, contact him at dwendel@thenalc.org or visit thenalc.org/vision.

INDIA TRANSFORMED

Please join India Transformed for our monthly, "Live Updates from India with our founder John Peter" on the first Thursday of each month at 8 p.m. ET.

We will share stories of how God is miraculously moving through India and transforming lives through our community transformation centers, women's empowerment program and children's ministry.

Due to the rise of Christian persecution taking place in India, all attendees must pre-register to attend so we can verify your status. This is open to all NALC members. Register in advance for this webinar at <http://bit.ly/3bJMOWe>.

Despite the pandemic, NALC supporters made 2020 a tremendous year! We are humbled and honored by your faithfulness and the trust you place in us to be good stewards with your generous donations. You have brought so much joy to the children, women and communities we serve in India that it warms our hearts.

Highlights of 2020 include:

+ Caring for 469 Dalit children and bringing them hope and joy.

+ Teaching 180 women in the ARISE! Program with employable skills.

+ Training over 60 community transformation workers to reach 2,350 families with the Good News expanding the private school to add grades 11 and 12 to increase enrollment by 500 students.

+ Purchasing property to build a Christian college to serve marginalized people.

These opportunities happened because of your ongoing support, which is the basis of our community of devoted supporters. This promises to be another exciting year ahead as we develop a mission training center on the new Christian college campus.

Thank you for partnering with us as we continue to deliver hope through faith to vulnerable children, women and communities. Because of your partnership, we are celebrating 32 years of ministry work in India.

India Transformed is an NALC Ministry Partner. To learn more or to partner in ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/india-transformed.

TSM OFFERS RETREAT FOR THOSE CONSIDERING ORDAINED MINISTRY

Trinity School for Ministry (TSM) is hosting "The Call," a retreat aimed at young adults who are listening for the call of the Lord and considering whether that vocation might be to full-time ministry June 24-27 in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

The weekend will include talks on what a vocation is, how to discern God's call, what formation for ministry looks like, the cultivation of the spiritual life, and participating in the mission of God. The

backbone of the retreat will be the Liturgy of the Hours, with time for one-on-one spiritual direction as we seek to listen together to what the Lord is saying.

The Seminary Center of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) is located at TSM. Although the retreat is designed for those in the Anglican tradition, Lutherans are also welcome to attend.

Continued on Page 23

CREDO: CONFSSIONAL RENEWAL EMBRACING DISCIPLESHIP OUTREACH

By Pastor Phillip Gagnon

Well, it's probably about time I wrote something about this topic since it's been a year from when I accepted the call to serve in this position, one that I am honoured to serve in.

When I was younger, before I met my lovely, beautiful, mostly correct about everything wife, Patricia, I was involved in all sorts of thinking, wishing, exploring in the area of the occult and eventually found myself after leaving the army at age 20, living with a family that were involved in Scientology in Vancouver, British Columbia. A very interesting three months. A lovely family, to be sure, slightly odd, one might say as they were very sincere people despite being involved with a very "odd" cult.

In time, in the summer of 1984, I met my wife who invited me to her church and there I met Pastor Mike. Mike and I spent at least two or three mornings a week having coffee together as he answered my questions, becoming my friend in the meantime.

That fall and early winter we spent many afternoons and evenings building a cabin on the shore of Lakelse Lake outside of Terrace, British Columbia, and on Aug. 31, 1985, Mike officiated at our wedding.

I tell this story because it was in the relationship Mike and I had, that Mike began discipling me, caring for me, loving me as a friend, indeed, a brother in Christ.

In every relationship I've been in subsequent to Mike and then in my pastoral ministry, I've learned to simply accept the person I'm with, love them and accept them as a person for whom Jesus lived, died and rose.



Phillip Gagnon

In the midst of our loving each other and accepting each other, the Spirit weaves into the times together moments of sharing the Gospel in word and not only in action.

The author Greg Finke describes quite well the model, if you will, of loving people into the Kingdom. Other authors write along the same lines, sometimes being focused more on the disciple becoming more mature in their own inner life, while others on the encounter with our neighbours who need to hear and know the Gospel in authentic acceptance and love for them. People don't like being seen as a notch on the Gospel belt or a project.

Accordingly, the NALC's Life-to-Life Discipleship Team has been listening and trying to come up with a process that weaves together the gifts that various models of discipling offer that is conversant with our Lutheran way of seeing this world the Lord has bestowed in our care.

We've acknowledged the need for disciples of Jesus Christ to be faithful in worship, prayer, devotions, outreach and love for neighbours. To this end, the CREDO – "C" (Confessional), "R" (Renewal), "E" (Embracing), "D" (Discipleship), "O" (Outreach) – initiative was created.

Now a "discipleship guide" process of equipping disciples to be mature (not perfect by any means!), informed people of God that are better able to walk alongside others is almost completed.

Though we hope to launch this training process this month, we will be listening and learning from our first cohort (of around 20 people) on how we can refine our process.

Continued on Page 15

Continued from Page 14

The reality is, and I think you would agree, that we have many hues of Lutherans in the NALC and so various perspectives on how discipleship could be accomplished. And so, we are at one time listening, but also asking for understanding the task that has been required of us.

The discipleship guide process or model is not a mandatory thing, nor a “one size fits all” way. Rather it is offered as a beginning, a springboard to intentionally focus on discipleship within congregations and then outward into the world.

This is why I reflect upon my story with Mike. In John 15:14, Jesus says to His disciples “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

Intentional friendship implies intimacy, focus and, of course, intention. Discipleship demands, as a consequence of following the Master, intimacy with Him in prayer, love and devotion and all else that a follower needs to be about.

Love between spouses shouldn't demand the nailing down of everything required for the relationship, but ought to flow organically from that love. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 ESV). St. John writes, and then follows with an admonition of “whoever loves God must also love his brother.” How then do we love each other and our neighbour according to the two greatest commandments? Perhaps, in acceptance, welcoming, compassion and sharing the Gospel of grace and mercy?

“Jesus said ... ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21-22 ESV).

This is where I think of our engaging in “incarnational apologetics” in this world. We are sent — incarnated, if you will — as little Christs (as Luther once said), into this world. Embodying Jesus' love and compassion by the Spirit, to be ambassadors, letters written on hearts of flesh, not stone, of God's love to a broken, confused and dark world. As we move and live in this

world, we are called — sent in fact — commanded to proclaim the Good News, to “apologize” — “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15 ESV).

To do so effectively requires our knowing who we are, what we believe, but especially in whom we live and breathe by the power and purpose of the Holy Spirit. And so, we pray and hope that sisters and brothers in Christ will prayerfully endeavor — whether it be through the discipleship program being developed or other tools in the congregational toolbox — intentionally befriend their neighbours and learn how to be effective proclaimers of the Gospel for the sake of Christ and His command to love the world as He first loved us.

Becoming effective does not mean perfect, by any means, as if we could anyway. Each person when they get married begins at the same place, they learn as they walk together what this marriage thing is all about. There are ups and downs, failures and successes, but, nonetheless, hopefully couples continue on because of a promise made, kept and witnessed in their love for each other.

So it is with us. As we walk with Jesus, in prayer, reading the Word and devotions, etc., we are called to love our neighbour throughout our lives wherever they are, as we learn more, and rely upon the mutual edification of the saints as we learn from and support each other.

Soon the Life-to-Life Discipleship Team will launch our offering to this journey we are on together in service to Christ. Please consider it, take from it what you will that may aid you in your walk, refine it according to your context. But, whatever you do, remember the great commandments to love God and your neighbour, and begin. *Pax et amor* — peace and love.

Pastor Phillip Gagnon is the assistant to the bishop for domestic mission and discipleship. You may contact him at pgagnon@thenalc.org.

TRANSFIGURATION LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSION UPDATE

By Pastor Pedro Portillo

The last 15 months our merciful God has blessed Transfiguration Lutheran Church – Iglesia Luterana La Transfiguracion – in Irving, Texas, in many ways.

Our call to bring Word and Sacrament to many people in the midst of COVID-19 has been a special challenge. But I want to let you know that I was blessed because I already received the COVID-19 vaccine. God saved me from this mortal pandemic, and I am so glad for His mercy and blessing in the midst of many people who still are suffering in our communities.

Transfiguration Lutheran Church has not had a regular worship space since the beginning of 2019. Since then, my ministry has been very dynamic every weekend. I do house church ministry in my area. I celebrate Baptisms as well as Communion and confirmation.

I do a lot of quinceañeras (15th birthday celebrations for young women) and weddings in hotels and ballrooms around the cities where they live. We are one of the only ministries in our area that do this as many other religious bodies in the area do not allow these kinds of ministry. They perform their ministries



inside of their buildings and only for registered members.

I have had many phone calls for people who are sick asking for anointings and pastoral care for unchurched people from our neighborhood. I have been busy doing funeral services for those unchurched people who call me and are referred to me by some people who have my telephone number. In the last 12 months the local funeral home has been calling me regularly to do some funeral services with limitations from the COVID-19 regulations.

During the pandemic, our mission church has been present in different places in Dallas county as well as other neighboring cities in northern Texas. My experience as a local pastor has been a great benefit

Continued on Page 17

Continued from Page 16

for unchurched people and for others who are afraid to participate in any social religious community event because of the pandemic.

Most of those who we serve are those who have two jobs, including on weekends. They are rejected when they go to any church for help. No religious community is willing to help them. They cannot baptize their children, do first Communion, confirmation and weddings because they are not acting as affiliated members in any congregation.

I want to bless the NALC for allowing us to do house church ministry in our communities. The pandemic has been changing the traditional ways of doing ministry. Many church buildings have been closed in

the last 15 months. Some pastors are doing Zoom worship services and others have been able to open their buildings with few members' participation. This situation has created chaos for many members and pastors. Their church buildings are not full anymore. This is a big challenge to organizations of a religious body community who are leading the community with their mission statement and restricted church rules.

I want to thank my church partners for their financial support. Without their prayers and financial assistance, it would not be possible to do this kind of ministry.

To learn more or to partner with this GCS Ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/iglesia-luterana-la-transfiguracion-irving.

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Please copy and share this newsletter widely.

UPDATE FROM KEVIN AND SARAH PFISTER IN BULGARIA

By Kevin and Sarah Pfister

It is with thankful hearts that we are able to say that we made it safely back to the United States in December with negative COVID-19 tests on both ends. We are in the U.S. as a short furlough with time to rest, regroup and take care of some things before we head back to Bulgaria for the spring.

We have had a wonderful time with our family these past few weeks. While we are not able to see many of you in person due to the virus situation, it has been a blessing to see those of you that we can during this time. We do hope that we are able to connect with more of you either in person or virtually in the coming weeks while we are stateside.

We have continued to be amazed at how God is working. Even in the midst of a pandemic, we have much to be thankful for.

Specifically, we wanted to share the story of our friend, "R," who we met shortly before our flight to the states, and how God has been working in her life.

R attended our church's Reformation event at the end of October. While seemingly shy in her demeanor, she asked wonderful questions during the discussion and we invited her to return for Sunday services and to join us for our church's weekly prayer and Bible study on Wednesday nights.

To our pleasant surprise, she accepted both invitations and has faithfully been attending on Sundays and Wednesdays ever since. As we got to know R, we learned that she had some past experiences with a church in Bulgaria that had turned sour and thus she had not been to church in a long time. We also learned that her husband had passed away from an illness earlier in the fall even though he was only around 40 years old.



Much to our delight, we learned that she is a music teacher at a local kindergarten and we quickly bonded with her over our love of music and teaching. She even shared with us several Christian children's resources that she and her husband had created over the years.

We only had about a month getting to know R before leaving for furlough, and even in that short time, we were amazed at how we saw God building in our new shy and lonely friend more confidence, joy and openness both to us and the church.

Additionally, since we knew that we would be gone for several months on furlough, we had been anxious about who would lead the musical part of Sunday services during our absence. In faith, we approached R only days before our flight asking if she would be willing to use her musical gifts as a pianist to lead each Sunday. Without missing a beat she wholeheartedly accepted.

Over the past month, our pastor has been helping her in this new role and we just learned this past week that she has expressed her desire to become an

Continued on Page 19

Continued from Page 18

official member of the church! We are so excited by R's growing faith, her hunger to learn and take this next step. As of right now, R is one of two people that will be going through the church's membership process this spring which is a wonderful way to see how God is working in our small but growing congregation.

Ways you can pray for us include:

Praying for R: We thank God for how He is working in her heart and her willingness to serve our congregation with her musical gifts. Please pray that she would continue to seek after Him and grow in her relationship with Him. We ask too for prayers as she goes through the membership process and seeks to be an active member of our congregation. Please pray that she would continue to feel welcomed by our congregation and that we would be faithful witnesses of God's love towards her as she joins our church family.

Praying for our music program: While our music education program was closed in December due to the lockdown in Bulgaria, it was able to start up again in January. We praise God that all of our families have returned to the program and that they are able to meet in person once again. We also thank God for our colleague who has continued to run the program in our absence. We ask for prayers as we begin a new virtual beginner violin program, which hopefully will move to be in person come spring. We pray that this program would continue to be a blessing to the community in Ruse and that we would continue to shine the light of Christ through our relationships with those in the program

Praying for our health: As we have shared a bit in the past, we continue to be in the process of working through some health concerns that we are both facing. This is one of our top priorities while we are in the U.S. We ask for your prayers in finding the right doctors, receiving wise counsel, and for discernment as we sort through possible diagnoses and treatment options. Having the time to work through some of these health concerns is a wonderful blessing so that as we heal we can be more effective in our ministry work going forward.



Kevin and Sarah Pfister are NALC global workers in Bulgaria. For additional information or to partner in ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/kevin-sarah-pfister.

SEARCH FOR NEW GENERAL SECRETARY

Continued from Page 2

If you would like to nominate someone or request to be considered for the position, please send resumes to Bishop Dan Selbo at dselbo@thenalc.org.

Resumes and nominations must be submitted by April 30.

“Between now and the time of the final selection, let us all be praying for God's guidance in the process and for the candidate of His choosing to be lifted up and confirmed in our midst, as we seek to follow the Spirit's lead and to give honor to our Lord as we serve together in His Church,” Bishop Selbo said.

IS IT REALLY BLACK AND WHITE? GOSPEL IN THE FACE OF CHAOS AND DIVISION

*By the Rev. Dr. Victor Belton
and the Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee*

On Feb. 11, the Rev. Dr. Victor Belton and the Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee joined several dozen pastors and lay members of the NALC Atlantic Mission Region (AMR) in a conversation regarding the current unrest in our nation and our church over race relations, the “original sin” of racism, and its impact on life and ministry in the United States.

Under the leadership of the Rev. David McGettigan, AMR dean, and the capable moderation of the Rev. K. Craig Moorman, Belton and Lee helped the participants to explore four points of impact.

First, both setting the foundation for the discussion and pointing to the framework giving it shape, Belton repeatedly asked the questions: “We are Christian, aren’t we?” “We are Lutherans, aren’t we?” If this is so, Belton and Lee affirmed, then, according to our confessions, the Scriptures, the Word of God, are the sole rule and norm for our faith and life. And this goes too for our notions of who and what human beings are, that is, our anthropology. The Bible sees all humankind as having one source: the creative hand of God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — in whose image we are formed. Discrimination on the basis of racial differences is, for Lutheran members of the Body of Christ, simply to embrace falsehood, to reject the truth that we are one, made and meant to be joined to Christ, the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:20).

Second, Belton and Lee discussed the need for believers to hear the voice of the Father, as opposed to the other voices — wolves’ voices — clamoring for our attention and allegiance. Our culture is steeped in self-obsession and self-accumulation, but, as Lee noted, a key Lutheran insight is that everything good for us and good about us human beings originates *extra nos*, outside us, coming from the God who created us and loves us. Culture, family, friends,



Victor Belton



Maurice Lee

philosophies, ideologies, social and natural sciences, all claim to be able to tell us what we are, where we are going, how we should act. But Jesus said: “A stranger they [his sheep] will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:5 ESV). “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Third, was thinking about the inescapable spiritual dimension. At root, racism is not a problem that can be solved by finances, legislation, politics, or bloodshed, because the forces sowing division and hatred are not mere flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). Ironically, Belton observed, “powers and principalities do not care about race. The enemy would love to have us all deceived and keeping him company in hell.” As unfashionable as it may be, Lee remarked, this biblical and theological language — of unseen “powers and principalities” and “spiritual warfare” — gets us closer to the reality than can pop psychology or sociology, reductionist economic or class-conflict explanations, or glib talk of “systemic” - isms. Fundamental to Christian thinking about spiritual warfare is the realization that the victory belongs to Christ, and that, having been given a

Continued on Page 21

glimpse of that final truth, we may struggle in the present, with the strength God gives, on behalf of our fellow human beings made in His image.

Fourth, Belton and Lee suggested potential actions for participants in order to be agents of change and voices of justice among family and friends and in congregations. These included: (1) intentionally making new friends of different races and cultures; (2) reading material from the perspective of the “other;” (3) listening to new authors and artists; and even (4) pressing and calling for congregational and denominational leaders to consider making behavioral and policy changes in light of our Christian and Lutheran understanding.

In our thinking about race, as Belton pointed out, it is easy to find ourselves, and certainly to find our society, in the position of the unfortunate rustic described by Martin Luther in his *Table Talk*: “The world is like a drunken peasant. If you lift him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off again on the other side. One can’t help him, no matter how one tries. He wants to be the devil’s” (#630, 1533; *Luther’s Works*, vol. 54, p. 111). Extremes on both sides fail to come to grips with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and give open season for the devil’s work. But we are not of the devil. We are drawn through the waters of Baptism and saved alive for the kingdom of our Father. We will seek to represent Him in all that we say and do.

The “conversational theology” that Belton and Lee were enjoying in the main presentation continued with questions from participants. Several of these brought up current matters of concern, like critical race theory, intersectionality and cancel culture. But painting with a broad brush can be unhelpful, as Belton reminded us, recalling Paul’s experience in a riot in Ephesus: “Some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together” (Acts 19:32). Just because people walked in a Black Lives Matter rally does not mean that they have a thorough understanding of the entire formal Marxist, deconstructionist philosophy of the group. They may have been there simply to support the fact that *black*

lives matter, which is a true statement on its face. Again, it can be tempting in our time to ignore the spiritual dimension for the sake of being culturally relevant – and theologically irrelevant.

The Church has had to deal with issues of accommodation to cultural pressures from the beginning. Paul “called out” Peter for refusing to associate in public with believing Gentiles, and so behaving “not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Galatians 2:14 ESV). But the question, having to do with culture, tradition, and heritage, is not a simple one. It was likely not easy for Peter or indeed for Paul to buck those conventions. It was not easy for the new Church, and it will not be easy for us.

Another question was asked regarding how we are to address our brothers and sisters in Christ who support particular ideological or political positions which stand at cross-purposes with the Gospel. As Belton reminded us: “We are Christians, are we not?” We begin prayerfully, listening to concerns, asking questions that may help shed the light of Christ on the issues in question. We are called to be patient, kind, forgiving and long-suffering with compassion for the pain our brothers and sisters have experienced. We resist the urge to fix people and their philosophy on our own resources, and we appeal to God to put us and keep us in the saddle, for otherwise we will simply fall out.

Belton and Lee provided a reading list pointing to articles, books and videos that might help participants to think from the perspective of the Gospel and to walk in the shoes of the “other.” The presentation was recorded and is available on the AMR website – Atlantic-NALC.org – for all to review and to incorporate in further study and discussion.

Reprinted from “The Atlantic Vine” – the newsletter of the NALC’s Atlantic Mission Region.



LET EASTER SUNDAY BE “REFRESHMENT SUNDAY”

Due to COVID-19, I started a YouTube channel and post a weekly sermon for those who may be interested and either unable to worship in person or want an additional meditation on the lessons for the day.

On the Fourth Sunday in Lent, I mentioned that historically (pre-Vatican II) that Sunday was known as *Laetare Sunday*, a momentary break in the austere season of Lent.

The word *Laetare* means “rejoice” and comes from the first words of the liturgical introit, from Isaiah 66:10, “Rejoice, O Jerusalem!”

In the midst of the Lenten season of self-denial, somber reflection and repentance, the Church provided this Sunday respite as rest stop along the way — nourishment to be able to continue on in Lent, with Holy Week and Easter off on the horizon.

For this reason, the traditional Gospel reading in the one-year lectionary was from John 6:1-15, the account of Jesus feeding the multitude with just five barley loaves and two fish, as the feast of Passover was at hand. The message was: here is Jesus, this Sunday, feeding His people for the journey ahead.

Swedish pastor Carl Olof Rosenius (1816-1868), said “Christ has planted His Table like an oasis along our pathway, in order that when we become discouraged and wounded because of our false steps, stumbling, and falling, we may then enter there and be refreshed with the living Bread of Life” (quoted in the *For All the Saints* prayer book, Vol. 1, p. 889).

Of course, *Laetare* or Refreshment Sunday, as it was commonly known, is now past, even though most pastors and congregations no longer observe it as such. Still, the notion of a Sunday which is an oasis along our pathway, in order that when we become



MINISTRY MATTERS

REV. DR. DAVID WENDEL
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP
FOR MINISTRY AND ECUMENISM

discouraged and wounded, we may be refreshed with the living Bread of Life, would be a welcome observance in the midst of this past year of closed church buildings, forced isolation and distancing and, yes, in many places, the inability to receive the Lord’s Supper regularly — which Ignatius of Antioch referred to as the “medicine of immortality.”

Many have indeed become discouraged and wounded because of the pandemic, the toxic political machinations and the heightened division and disunity throughout North America.

In a time when the Church and disciples of Christ have been most needed, proclaiming light and life through the Word made flesh to dwell among us, in many places, our witness has been silenced, literally, as if our proclamation has been covered with a mask!

This is not a comment for or against wearing masks, rather, it points to the fact that regardless of the wonderful, innovative online preaching and worship which has been offered to fill the void, still, there has been a void as pulpits and churches have been empty for too long, and are still in some areas. Could this have been Satan at work, if not causing the pandemic, then at least making use of it to muffle, if not silence, preaching of the living Bread of Life to a world hungry for hope and promise?

Continued on Page 23

Continued from Page 22

The point is, now is the time for the Body of Christ to rise up and celebrate Easter Sunday and, indeed, every Sunday as *Laetare* or Refreshment Sunday!

However your congregation and household is able to celebrate Easter, let's not let it pass without a big, noticeable, powerful observance!

If your congregation is able to have in-person, in-church-building worship, shake off the morbid dust of the pandemic, pull out all the stops for an Easter worship that rocks the rafters! Keep it going throughout the seven Sundays of Easter! Blanket your neighborhood with yard signs which announce your Easter services and invite others to come and join you for Easter — as Resurrection/Refreshment Sunday! Use this opportunity to provide light and joy to your congregation and community, that people are invited to “enter and be refreshed with the living Bread of Life,” for Jesus is truly our living Lord!

If your congregation is still experiencing some restrictions to worship and public gatherings, have a Zoom meeting to discuss how you can still celebrate Easter as a joyful, hope-filled observance of the resurrection! Print hundreds of Easter greeting fliers which can be taken into members' neighborhoods and stuck in door-handles, simply proclaiming “Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!”

CONGREGATIONAL ANNUAL REPORTS

Congregational leaders and pastors are reminded to complete their annual reports to the NALC.

Information gleaned from the reports is very helpful for the NALC's long-range planning and for how best to support congregations in their ministries.

You can download a preview version of the report or complete your congregation's report at thenalc.org/congregationalreport.

If your Easter worship will have to happen via the internet, then ask every member to send out an email invitation to every person in their computer address book, asking them to share the joy and hope of Easter!

While I'm not sure there are places where worship isn't at least available in-person or on the internet, if you are still locked down and unable to gather with a community, then make your home a visible proclamation of the good news of Easter Sunday! Put signs in your front yard, or in your windows that say, “Christ is Risen!” Erect a cross in front of your house and put a bright white drape on the cross-bar, so that those living in darkness will at least see it and ask, “What is that all about?” And maybe — just maybe — Jesus and His resurrection will cross their minds and give them a moment of joy and peace.

Let's not let this Easter pass us by with a whimper or a whisper! However we can celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, let's do it on Easter Sunday — and every Sunday of the seven weeks of Easter and every Sunday of the year as every Sunday is to be Refreshment Sunday — a celebration of the resurrection, a time for rejoicing and renewal, regardless of our “false steps, stumbling and falling!”

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

CALL RETREAT

Continued from Page 13

The NALS is participating in the retreat and sent information on it to NALC congregations.

Dr. David Yeago, a faculty member of both the NALS and TSM, is one of several featured speakers.

There is no cost to attend the retreat, and meals for the weekend are included. Registrants only need to cover their transportation and their housing for the weekend.

For more information go to tsm.edu/thecall.

YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

By Laurie Pecuch

Nexus is planning an in-person event for July 11-17 at Grandview College in Des Moines, Iowa. The event is a theological experience for high school students. The only cost for the event is transportation to and from Des Moines. Space is limited. For more information visit grandview.edu/NEXUS. You can also send specific questions to Kate Faas at kfaas@grandview.edu.

Monthly Webinars: The monthly webinars continue on the second Tuesday of each month at 2 p.m. ET. We will wrap up our "Trot Through the New Testament" by May. Most folks view the event via Facebook Live. Also note that all of the webinars are subdivided into shorter clips and placed on the faithwebbing.com website. Need access? Contact us at families@thenalc.org.



Sets of books: We gifted a set of our books, *Faith Webbing* and *What's In Your Bag?* to each NALC congregation. If you are unable to locate the set, let us know and we will be happy to send out another set.

Resources to share: Have a resource to share? Make us aware of it and we will help to promote your creation. Otherwise, we're around. Feel free to contact us.

Laurie Pecuch serves the NALC as a youth ministry coach. You may contact her at families@thenalc.org.

June 7-11, 2021 InterTerm Course



Confessing Christ Today

What Does it Mean to be Christ Centered in the 21st Century?

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