

Christmas Message from Bishop

Dear Pastors, Congregations, Partners in Ministry, Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Greetings in the Name of our God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as we look forward to the celebration of our Lord’s birth at Christmas and His glorious return when the Father will call us all home to be with Him forever!

Thank you for your good and faithful ministry and for your partnership in the work of the Gospel. It is my deepest and most sincere desire and prayer that this Christmas season will be one in which the love shown to us so clearly in the birth of God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, will be at the center of the proclamation we offer and the witness we give to the world.

With every passing year, rather than the story of our Lord’s birth becoming more familiar, I find myself being struck more intensely by its significance. The divine became human. The infinite became finite. The eternal became temporal. Not only that, but our broken relationship with God was repaired. It was restored in the person and work of Jesus, put back together and made right when Jesus became one of us and walked the path of the cross.

I am not yet convinced that we can fully understand all of what that means. I am convinced that we can be assured of what has been done for us in Jesus. That’s the good news. That’s what Christmas is all about. And that’s why we need to speak with clarity



The Nativity by Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556)
Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

and conviction of the love revealed to us in Jesus Christ, so that the world for which He gave His life might come to believe.

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One of the most basic and fundamental needs we have in this life is to be loved. From the moment we are born until the day when we leave this world, to love and to be loved is central to how we were created. It's basic to what our life on this earth is all about. It keeps us going. It tells us that we matter. It says to us that we belong and that our lives on this earth really count.

When God came into this world in the person of Jesus, it was God's way of declaring that we are loved and will always be loved by Him. It's the very reason Jesus was born as a baby. It's the motivation in the heart of God behind the entire Christmas event.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." Christmas is God's declaration that we do matter, that our lives on this earth really do count, and that no matter what else might happen in this life, there is always and forever a reason to live.

One of my seminary professors was Dr. Gerhard Forde. He was a good teacher. He kept the focus of his lectures on Jesus. No matter what direction the theological conversation went, he continually brought it back to Christ.

One of the books he wrote was titled, *Where God Meets Man*. The subtitle was, "Luther's Down-To-Earth Approach to the Gospel." It was a study about how the story of Jesus is the story of God coming down to earth to give us what we need. And He did it, not by sending someone else on His behalf, but by becoming what we need in Himself.

I would imagine that if you were to think back on all the Christmas gifts you have received over the years, the ones that would stand out the most would be the ones with the most personal touch. Christmas is the story of God's love for us. It's the story of God's individual and personal love for you and for me. And it's not love wrapped in a package. It's love found in a person. It's not a gift placed under a tree, waiting to be opened when the time is right. It's love placed in a manger, working to make right a relationship that had gone wrong.

"You will call His name Jesus," the angel said, "for He will save His people from their sins." And so, it was. And so, He did. And so, we celebrate that good news again this year.

Where does God meet man? He meets us in our sin. He comes to us where we are. He forgives us and He loves us, and He promises to never leave.

As I consider the turmoil in which our world is currently found, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the tension among nations that seems to be increasing with each passing day, as well as the division that exists within our own nations, to say nothing of the brokenness found in many homes and communities throughout North America and beyond, I cannot help but believe that the answer to this world's turmoil was offered to us in the coming of Jesus.

Our task, as His followers, is to point the world toward Him. Beginning in our families and our churches, from there into the relationships we have with our neighbors and co-workers and in our schools, and from there into the surrounding communities and beyond. There is no better remedy to the troubles we face in this life than to face those troubles with the remedy given to us 2,000 years ago in the person and work of Christ.

Will we ever fully comprehend what that saving event was all about? Probably not, at least not this side of the grave. But that doesn't matter, because it does not depend upon how much we understand, but solely upon what He has done.

God's love, down to earth. That's what you have been given. Where God meets man. In our sin. At Christmas. In Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your faithful witness. Thank you for the partnership we share in Christ. Thank you for the love you share and the witness you offer, pointing people to the love of God revealed to us in Jesus.

It continues to be a joy and an honor to serve as your bishop. Know that my prayers are with each of you. Have a blessed and a love-filled Christmas!

New NALC global workers in Bangladesh and Myanmar

Two of the newest NALC global workers, Swapon Sarker in Bangladesh and the Rev. Martin Lalthangliana in Myanmar, are a part of Awakening Lives to World Mission (ALWM).

Their ministries, like other global workers, highlight why the NALC uses “global workers” to describe these vital kingdom building relationships. These are not “sister church” or “companion synod” relationships that sometimes consist simply of a picture and a paragraph. Rather, these people and their ministries are grounded in Jesus’ call to go and make disciples of all the nations: of every tongue, tribe, people, and language!

Swapon Sarker is the Founding Chairman of the Bangladesh Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC). Bangladesh is 90 percent Islam, with less than 0.3 percent Christian. Swapon is in his early 30s, and supports himself by teaching math and chemistry, often supplementing ministry from his small salary.

Swapon wrote: “I am a Lutheran Christian by birth. My father is a Lutheran pastor. My parents taught me a lot from the Bible since my childhood. It was from that I first came to know about Jesus Christ. Although at that time I did not understand deeply about Jesus Christ but I believed in Jesus that He



Swapon Sarker, NALC global worker in Bangladesh

alone is the Savior of all people. My regular Bible reading and prayer life began when I studied at a Lutheran Mission boarding school. From that time, my desire for the kingdom of God has grown! I have been involved in Sunday school, youth ministry and with the Church Synod board for a long time. At present I have been preaching the Gospel and serving the Lord and as founding chairman since we formed in 2016.”



Members of the Vuiya Tribe Church in Bangladesh

There are some other pastors and leaders including his father, a Lutheran pastor, who came to Christ a generation ago through the work of three small European Lutheran Mission societies that no longer work in this country. BELC organized in 2016 to renew the focus on evangelism and mission that had been lost in the midst of leadership fighting in their former small church body.

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All together there are currently 10 BELC congregations, totaling about 300 members, including 70 new converts post pandemic! The congregations are small, with about half planted in villages of tribal people that are poor and often marginalized by the Bengali majority. But Swapon Sarker and the leaders of BELC are focused on preaching the Gospel and making disciples on the front lines.



Participants in the Bangladesh Evangelical Lutheran Church leadership seminar pose with Pastor Bill Moberly.

ALWM Director Bill Moberly visited seven of the congregations in early November, and saw first hand the fruit of their ministry. He also led a two-day seminar for 20 of the leaders. He saw a genuine openness to the Gospel, and great opportunity for changing lives for eternity by preaching Christ, as well as improving lives here and now. There is a pressing need to train leaders, as well as equip evangelists with the tools to do ministry.

One of the young men echoed many when he told Pastor Moberly, “I am so full from this teaching, and yet still so hungry. I wish this was five days rather than two! When will you be coming back?”

The need includes training resources and seminars, as well as simple tools like a few bicycles and motorbikes so they can preach in two churches daily rather than one!

At the request of several village leaders, ALWM plans to purchase sewing machines and establish



Myanmar Bible School committee members pose with Pastor Bill Moberly.

sewing businesses for the tribal churches who pick rice for a living—seasonal at best and pays less than \$7 a day during harvest time.

ALWM and the NALC are working on the front lines in Bangladesh through Swapon Sarker and BELC. For more information about how your congregation can be directly involved, visit alwm.org/Bangladesh or contact Pastor Moberly at pastorbill@alwm.org.

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The Rev. Martin Lalthangliana is a Lutheran pastor, and is the president of the Lutheran Church of Myanmar. Formerly known as Burma, Myanmar is nearly 80 percent Buddhist, and less than five percent Evangelical Christian. The first Protestant missionaries came to this country in 1807, and the first residential missionary was Adoniram Judson, a well-known Baptist missionary.

A generation ago, in searching for the grace of God that is at the heart of the Gospel, some Baptist leaders came across some writings of Martin Luther. As they studied, they also discovered that his preaching, teaching, and experience launched the Protestant Reformation! So, more than 25 years ago, a group of like-minded leaders from three congregations prepared to start a Lutheran church. This group officially initiated the work in 1995 and began to contact many Lutheran leaders around the world for partnership and cooperation. The

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executive committee then met on Jan. 5, 2000, and unanimously decided to form the Lutheran Church of Myanmar (LCM).

Since that time the Lutheran Church of Myanmar has grown to eight congregations, two preaching stations, three free education centers, two children's homes and a small seminary. There are seven ordained pastors and a total of 26 synod and local church workers who oversee about 2,000 members all over the country with a prospect of rapid growth in membership and mission expansion.

Martin Lalthangliana is the son of one of the founders, with a moving testimony of his call to ministry. After the accidental death of his older brother, who had planned to go to India and become a pastor, he sought the Lord for answers in his grief. He was also in anguish by his own life choices, much like the prodigal son. "The answer I received from God is very simple—He chose me instead of my brother to follow and serve Him, and to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every corner of the country. I realized that I'm a sinner who needed repentance and I surrender myself to Jesus in response to His calling. Since then I have followed Jesus and submitted my life to sharing the life-changing gospel to the people of Myanmar."

With a vision to reach every province, the pandemic intervened, followed by a military coup on Feb. 1, 2021. The recent political instability has a serious impact on the life and ministries of churches,



**Mary and Martin Lalthangliana
NALC global workers in Myanmar**

pastors, members, and the holistic mission undertaken by LCM in different parts of the country. While the global pandemic in 2020 has slowed down and affected the socio-economy of the country, this military coup has crippled and pushed the country on the brink of total ruin.

Myanmar is currently facing a lot of political challenges and internal conflicts. Civil war is happening in many different parts of the country. Our church members in Kalay region and Shan state are leaving their own houses to take refuge in border areas. And churches in Tahan, and the Aung Tha Pyay mission center in Shan state are being used as a shelter for nearly 50 IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) families and refugees. We need prayers for the IDPs and refugees in our shelters and people who are suffering due to civil wars, and support for our church members. But the mission and ministry of LCM continues to move on, and we are doing evangelism, training, education and relief work within our ability and resources that we have in hand.

For more information about how you can partner with Pastor Martin and the Lutheran Church of Myanmar, visit alwm.org/Myanmar or contact Pastor Moberly at pastorbill@alwm.org.



Children at the Orphan Home in Myanmar

Golden Jubilee Generosity

How Black Forest Lutheran Church turned 50 Years into a \$50,000 visionary gift

By Deacon Andrew Ames Fuller

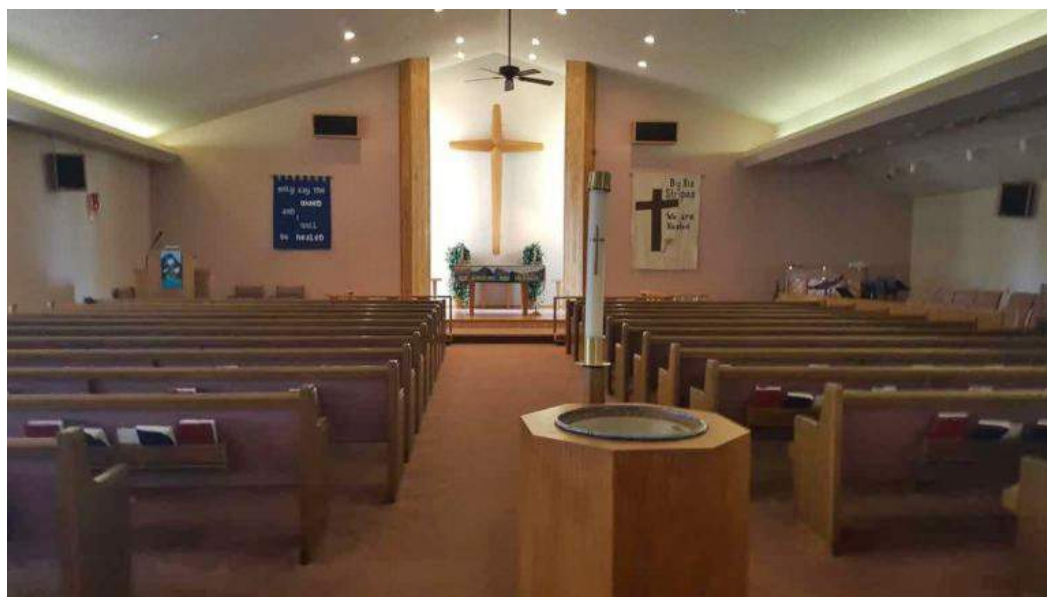
As Pastor Ken Hohag looked out over the congregation of Black Forest Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, he couldn't help but feel a deep sense of pride and nostalgia. The church was abuzz with excitement, not just for the Sunday service but for a momentous occasion that lay ahead—the 50th anniversary of the congregation. Fifty years of faith, community, and service were not just a milestone but a testament to God's grace and the steadfast devotion of the church members.



Black Forest Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado

Pastor Hohag, a seasoned shepherd of his flock, had been contemplating a meaningful way to commemorate this golden jubilee. The North American Lutheran Church's 20/20 Vision presented an ideal opportunity. This strategic plan was not just a roadmap for the future but a reaffirmation of the core values that had guided the church since its inception.

However, the rollout of this vision, especially its financial component, posed a unique challenge. Pastor Hohag knew that the success of this initiative hinged on aligning it with the congregation's spirit and heritage. Inspired by a colleague who had utilized their 40th anniversary as an opportunity to give back, Pastor Hohag brought forth a bold proposal to the church council.



The idea was simple yet profound—to donate \$1,000 for every year of the church's existence to the NALC. This gift of \$50,000 would not only be a symbol of gratitude for the past 50 years but also a seed for the growth and outreach envisioned in the 20/20 Vision. The council, moved by this gesture, embraced the idea, and the congregation overwhelmingly

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voted in favor at its annual meeting. This decision was a reflection of what Pastor Hohag always believed—that stewardship and gratitude are the cornerstones of a vibrant faith community.

Implementing the 20/20 Vision also meant considering the congregation's ongoing commitments and future needs. One such need was a new playground, a project dear to many in the church. The 20/20 Vision's three-year timeline provided the flexibility required for thoughtful planning and execution.

Pastor Hohag also recognized the importance of involving everyone in this journey. The stewardship team was entrusted with the task of not just reaching the financial goal but also fostering a deeper connection among the congregation members with the broader mission of the NALC. This approach wasn't just about numbers; it was about people seeing and celebrating what God was doing through their church and the NALC.

Black Forest Lutheran Church had always been a congregation with a heart for missions. Their ongoing support for an NALC missionary in Congo and participation in mission trips were testament to this. As Pastor Hohag prepared to roll out the 20/20 Vision, he was mindful not to inundate his congregation with too many initiatives at once. It was crucial to strike a balance between their current missionary endeavors and the new commitments they were about to undertake.

Another vital aspect of this journey was identifying and conversing with individuals who could make significant personal contributions. These conversations were not just about soliciting funds but about sharing the vision and inviting participation in a cause that transcended their local community.

As the church neared its 50th-anniversary celebrations, the atmosphere was one of eager anticipation. The congregation was not only preparing to look back on half a century of faith and fellowship but also to step forward into a future filled with hope and promise, anchored in the vision they had collectively embraced.



Pastor Ken Hohag

The fundraising strategy, interwoven with the church's significant milestone, proved to be a resounding success. It was not just about the money raised but about the sense of unity and purpose it fostered within the congregation. Pastor Hohag often reflected on this journey as a reaffirmation of his belief in what it means to be a church—a community that not only looks inward in gratitude but outward in generous service.

As he stood at the pulpit on the day of the anniversary, Pastor Hohag's heart was full. He looked out at the faces in the pews—faces that told stories of years spent in worship, service, and community. This anniversary was more than a celebration of the past; it was a commitment to the future—a future built on faith, hope, and the unwavering belief in God's plan for Black Forest Lutheran Church and the wider NALC community.

In that moment, Pastor Hohag knew that the 20/20 Vision was more than a strategic plan; it was a renewal of their covenant with God, a pledge to continue their journey of faith, guided by the enduring light of Christ's love.

You can learn more about the NALC's 20/20 Vision at vision.thenalc.org.

Carl E. Braaten 1929-2023

The Rev. Dr. Carl Edward Braaten was a renowned American Lutheran theologian. He is known for his significant contributions to Lutheran theology and ecumenism.

Carl Braaten was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on Jan. 3, 1929. His parents were Norwegian-American Lutheran pietists, who served as missionaries in Madagascar, and he received his early spiritual formation in that context.

After finishing high school at Augustana Academy, a Lutheran boarding school in Canton, South Dakota, he attended St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota; Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota; Heidelberg University in Germany; and Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he studied under Dr. Paul Tillich and earned his doctoral degree.

His doctoral dissertation was titled, "Christ, Faith and History: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Martin Kähler's Distinction Between the Historical Jesus and the Biblical Christ Developed in the Past and Present Context."

He married LaVonne Gardner in 1951. They had four children: Craig, Martha, Maria, and Kristofer. LaVonne died in 2015. He later remarried.

Braaten was ordained by the Evangelical Lutheran Church (a predecessor of The American Lutheran Church) in 1958. At that time, he served Lutheran Church of the Messiah in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and began teaching at Luther Seminary. In 1961, Braaten, together with Dr. Robert Jenson, Dr. Roy Harrisville, Dr. Kent Knutson, Dr. James Burtness and others, founded the journal *Dialog*. Braaten served as editor of the journal until 1991.



Carl Braaten

In 1962, Braaten accepted a position at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago where he taught as Professor of Systematic Theology until 1991.

In 1991, Braaten and Robert Jenson founded the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology and established a new theological journal, *Pro Ecclesia*.

Braaten died on October 28, 2023, at the age of 94. A funeral service was held at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Sun City West, Arizona, on Nov. 25.

Braaten authored and edited more than 50 books and numerous theological papers.

He told the story of his life and experiences in two books: *Because of Christ: Memoirs of a Lutheran Theologian* and *My Ecumenical Journey: Ecumenical Experiences and Perspectives of an Evangelical Catholic Theologian*. He shared the story of his missionary parents in a 2023 book, *Living the Great Commission in Madagascar: The Story of My Missionary Family from the Diary of Clara Braaten*.

The two-volume *Christian Dogmatics* edited by Braaten and Jenson was a foundational text in the seminary education of a generation of Lutheran pastors. Braaten published *The Christian Faith: Ecumenical Dogmatics* in 2020.

His many books include *Principles of Lutheran Theology*; *Justification: The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls*; *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism*; *Who is Jesus?*; and *Essential Lutheranism*.

The Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology, held in conjunction with the convocations of the North American Lutheran Church, are named in his honor.

Carl Braaten and the North American Lutheran Church

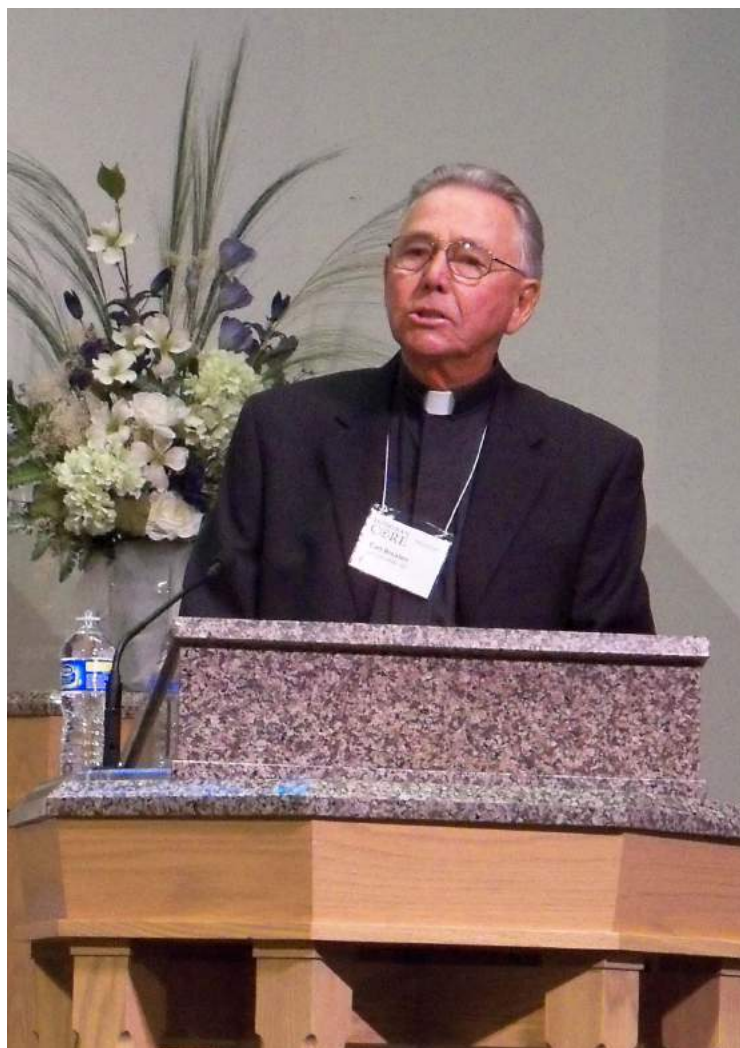
By Dr. Robert Benne

One of the most stunning moments of my churchly life occurred during the first meeting of the Lutheran CORE Theological Lectures that began on August 24, 2010, at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio. As I turned toward the nave to introduce the first speaker, I was almost felled by seeing around a thousand persons gathered in the large nave of the church!

Here they were, gathered together at their own expense to hear theological lectures that analyzed the crisis going on in American Lutheranism and that projected a vision of new paths for Lutheranism. Carl and I planned the conference and invited a stellar array of lecturers, presided over by several retired bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including Bishop Paull Spring, who was shortly to become the first bishop of the NALC. Lecturers were: Robert Jenson, Frank Senn, Stephen Hultgren, Paul Hinlicky, Steven Paulson, Paul Martinson, as well as Carl and I.

Carl edited the lectures into a book published by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau entitled *Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism: Biblical, Theological, and Churchly Perspectives*. He wrote an introduction that is a marvelous history of the theological errors of the ELCA, which were key factors in bringing forth great divisions. The book sold very well.

Such a stirring event had a long prelude and postlude. The prelude involves events that preceded the lectures. I will begin with those nearest the event of August 2010, and work backwards. Preceding the lectures was the great gathering in Fishers, Indiana, in the fall of 2009, soon after the disastrous Churchwide Assembly at which gay marriage and partnered gay pastors were accepted. The gathering in Fishers proposed that a new Lutheran church should be organized the following year.



Dr. Carl Braaten speaking at the 2010 Lutheran CORE Theological Lectures at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio. The lectures were held prior to the constituting convocation of the North American Lutheran Church. Dr. Braaten died on October 28, 2023, at the age of 94.

Though Carl was not at the Fishers event, he had written sharp criticism of the ELCA in his memoirs, *Because of Christ*, which came out in 2010. I contacted him about the plan to form a new church. We agreed that the new church needed to take theology seriously in a way that the ELCA didn't. We planned the theological lectures under the

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request and auspices of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal).

Before that was the long disenchantment with the trajectory of the ELCA. In 2005 he wrote a long letter to Bishop Mark Hanson that lamented that so many Lutherans had headed for Rome. Why, he asked. In the early 1990s, he and Robert Jenson organized two “Called to Faithfulness” gatherings at St. Olaf College, under the auspices of the three independent Lutheran journals: *Lutheran Forum*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, and *Dialog*. In the early 1980s, in the midst of the formation of the ELCA, he organized a conference whose lectures were published under the title, *The New Church Debate*. They were lectures meant to help guide the new church, but which were boycotted by the very people Carl wanted to engage.

The 1970s and 80s featured many of his articles and editorials in *Dialog* that lamented the LCA and ELCA’s drift into liberal Protestantism. This journey backwards into time depicts only a small portion of the reflections Carl offered on the church’s slow deterioration, a process that many of us experienced along with him.

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Now let’s look at the postlude to the first theological lectures held in 2010 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church. Right after the lectures, many attendees migrated to a large Nazarene church in a southern suburb of Columbus to participate in the founding of a new Lutheran church, The North American Lutheran Church. I attended that gathering but Carl, typically, did not. (I will reflect on that later.)

Given the success of the first set of lectures, Carl and I planned the second, again at the Upper Arlington Church, for 2011. We chose the theme “No Other Name: Salvation Through Christ Alone.” This time the greeting was offered by Bishop John Bradosky, and the event was sponsored by both Lutheran CORE and the NALC. Again, Carl wrote a strong, engaging introduction, and again the lectures featured distinguished Christian churchmen and intellectuals. The ALPB published the book—edited

by Carl—under the aforementioned title, and it, too, sold well.

By now the NALC was well underway. A Commission on Theology and Doctrine was established and Carl became an active member, enjoying the camaraderie and theological work under Bishop John Bradosky. He promoted a number of important causes, for example, the training and ordination of deacons. He served several years on the commission.

It did not seem enough to strengthen the new NALC by holding well-attended lectures. We thought we should organize a gathering of younger theologians who might later serve the NALC in important ways, particularly since the current generation was aging fast. In 2011, then, we called together over a dozen theologians whom we thought might not only be edified by lively theological discussions, but who also might serve as NALC theologians of the future. The NALC now employs some of those younger theologians in key positions in the church, and the gathering continues under a new name, Lutheran Theologians for the Church.

We continued planning the theological lectures: in 2012 it was “Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God” at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota; in 2013 it was “On Being the Church in These Precarious Times” at a hotel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and, finally, in 2014 it was “Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon, and Creed” at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. Carl not only wrote the introductions for each volume, he also edited them. He and I also lectured in most of them.

After that fifth lecture (and young theologians’ gathering) we handed over the organization and editing of the lectures to a younger team of scholars: Paul Hinlicky, David Nelson, Amy Schiffrin, and David Yeago. The NALC then took over the sole sponsorship of the lectures and named them the “Braaten-Benne Lectures.” They persist to the present day under new leadership. The 2017 gathering in Nashville was the last time Carl and I attended the lectures together. By then his wife, Lavonne, had died, and he had married his long-time

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mixed doubles tennis partner, Beryl. We had a wonderful time together.

After that I attended and sometimes spoke in the ongoing lectures, but Carl no longer attended. He would ask me about them. He thought they were becoming too abstract and unengaged with the issues facing the church. He focused his attention on the center and journal that he and Jenson had founded in 1992, *The Center for Evangelical and Catholic Theology*, and its journal, *Pro Ecclesia*. He participated in its governance and attended its lectures held in early June.

As time passed into the 2020s, Carl and I continued our frequent conversations. He was fearful that the center was losing steam, and he no longer seemed interested in the lectures named after us. I noticed that he asked ELCA people to write blurbs for his last several books. He taught in his local ELCA parish in Sun City, West, Arizona. He never gave up his ELCA ordination.

I was puzzled by his distancing himself from the Braaten-Benne Lectures and the NALC. I brought it up to him, but he denied what I thought was obvious. The truth was that he had distanced himself from all his earlier activities in the NALC. But why?

As I pondered some of his writings, I came across the concluding remarks of his lecture at our first gathering entitled, "Lutheranism at a Crossroads: Theological Imperatives for the Future." He concludes his lecture by offering three directions we might take as we encounter the crossroads: stay in the ELCA as a confessing remnant; start a new denomination; or start an ecumenical renewal movement "that exists not for itself but as a beacon of light and a hope for all the churches" (*Seeking New Directions (SND)*, page 49).

Carl eschewed schism. Deep down he thought that beginning a new church was not the best option of the three. Rather, "we should associate ourselves with like-minded confessors countering the decay of the Reformation heritage in the mainline Protestant denominations" (*SND*, 48).



Dr. Carl Braaten speaking at the 2016 Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology held prior to the 2016 NALC Convocation in Anaheim, California.

His and Jenson's *Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology* was just what he had in mind. It was meant to be a theological beacon for a larger ecumenical movement of the orthodox that would finally result in a new alignment of Christian churches. "This need not be called Lutheranism" (*SND*, 49). Carl's "last books," and there were many of them, often had the word "ecumenical" in them. Indeed, in 2018 he brought out a book entitled, *My Ecumenical Journey*, for which I wrote one of the blurbs.

The conclusion to his fiery lecture at Upper Arlington in 2010 was the key to why Carl kept a distance from the NALC. Ecumenical ventures, not a new church, elicited his deepest commitments. Nevertheless, his contributions to the new church were immense.

Beyond that, of course, Carl was an incredibly productive, orthodox Lutheran theologian. He was not a "virtuoso" theologian like his friend Jenson, but rather a "church" theologian, devoted to writing solid Lutheran theology for the church, the kind we can trust deeply. May he rest in peace.

Dr. Robert Benne is Jordan-Trexler Professor Emeritus, and Research Associate, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, and Professor of Christian Ethics, Institute of Lutheran Theology, Brookings, South Dakota.

New NALC global workers in Tanzania

Evangelist Ndumieshi Nkya and social worker Tunsubilege Mwasongwe are new NALC global workers in Tanzania.

These two new global workers are working in tandem with one another to lead people to Christ, and affect much needed social change at the same time.

They say, “People care to listen to what you have to share when they feel that you care about them,” which we believe is part of the reason why these women of God have been so successful in their ministry to the highly impoverished and remote villages in the area surrounding of Bariadi, Tanzania.



Evangelist Ndumieshi Nkya



Social worker Tunsubilege Mwasongwe

As people learn about salvation in Christ, and see with their own eyes how Christians care for one another, the church growth has simply been phenomenal. After a recent church building in one of these villages had been completed and dedicated to the Lord, more than 40 new believers were baptized on the same day!

Ndumieshi and Tunsubilege literally go from door to door, village by village. Day by day they share the Good News, and assist in people’s needs. They are a formidable team in the Lord, reaching the lost, changing and even saving lives, as witchdoctor beliefs continue to fail people on all levels.

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Ndumieshi focuses on the four new church plants—preaching, teaching, training, prayer and discipleship meetings, continuing the spiritual battle against evil practices, and shifting customs to become Christ centered. She also assists the new church plants in identifying land, managing building projects, leading dedication services, and identifying and training assistant evangelists.

Tunsubilege provides individual social care, while also arranging large-scale training events on topics like health care, family planning, parenting, nutrition, farming, and entrepreneurship. She reaches out specifically to the vulnerable, including widows, people with disabilities, abused women and children, and those who are ill due to inadequate nutrition or access to medical care.

The difference that these two global workers are making by the grace of our Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to the glory of our Father is humbling and encouraging!

Pastor Wayne de Wet is the direct contact for these global workers, and director of their sending agency, One Plus God Ministries, a partner agency of the NALC. To schedule a phone call, a Zoom meeting, or an onsite presentation of the work being done in Tanzania contact Pastor Wayne de Wet at 567-356-2007 or wynand@oneplusgod.org. You can learn more about One Plus God Ministries at oneplusgod.org.

Director of development

The North American Lutheran Church and the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) are seeking a seasoned and proven development director to lead and implement the development and fundraising strategies for the NALC and the NALS. For more information go to thenalc.org.

WHY ISN'T MY CHURCH GROWING?

WITH THE REV. BRAD HALES

“Why Isn’t My Church Growing?” This question alone can illicit feelings of sadness and frustration. While many congregations struggle with stagnation and decline, are there other ways to reverse these trends? In this course, we will examine both external and internal reasons why churches are not growing. This class will also delve into biblical insights, which will provide direction for renewal in the local parish. There is hope.



NORTH AMERICAN
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The Rev. Brad Hales

Director of Church Planting
and Aging Ministries

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Youth and family ministry update

Youth Greater Calling Retreat Great Rivers Mission District

The event will take place at American Lutheran Church in Rantoul, Illinois, Feb. 23-25. The Rev. Teresa Peters, the NALC director of Youth and Family Ministries, will be the guest speaker.

She will be speaking on the “Greater Calling” of Christians. The goal is to get youth to recognize that they are called by God. Like all Christians, they are called to be disciples of Jesus—not because of anything they have done but because of what Christ did for them personally.

There will also be an opportunity to participate in a mission project with NALC Disaster Response. Students will help prepare disaster and hygiene kits for emergency situations. These kits help thousands of individuals who suffer natural disasters every year.

In addition to lessons and mission, there will be games, food, music, and fellowship with other youth.

The registration cost for the event is \$60 per person. This includes meals and accommodations. American Lutheran Church will provide separate sleeping spaces for boys and girls. Please have students and volunteers bring their own toiletries, a bedroll and pillow, and a bath towel. Meals include a snack on Friday, breakfast, lunch, and dinner on Saturday, and breakfast Sunday. The church will host a potluck after worship on Sunday for those who wish to eat before departure.

To register or for more information contact Pastor Aaron Dawson at dawsjr98@icloud.com. Please register all youth and volunteers by Feb. 2.

NALC Continental Youth Gathering July 1-4 in Bourne, Texas

See Page 15 for information on the NALC Continental Youth Gathering.



Youth and Family

Rev. Teresa Peters
Director of Youth
and Family Ministry

NALC Continental Youth Gathering Leader in Training Application Deadline

LITs are leaders in training—young adult volunteers (19-24) who are eager to serve in a variety of ways at the Contintal Youth Gathering. This includes welcoming, organizing, running events, Bible study leading, event setting up and tearing down, taking care of details, etc. In addition to serving and volunteer work, there will also be special trainings, as well as sessions with our guest speakers.

This program is designed to offer meaningful tasks that will develop your leadership experience, as well as to aid the planning committee in carrying out a successful gathering. Volunteers may be assigned to different program teams, and we attempt to place individuals in areas where they are using their strengths or developing skills of interest.

LITs will be required to have up to five Zoom training sessions, and to also arrive on Friday June 28, to begin on-site training.

Accommodations for the LITs will be in a separate location from the Home Teams, and is provided free of charge for the training and the gathering itself.

Those that wish to be an LIT (ages 19-24) will begin the application process online the same way as an adult that is coming without youth, which can be found at cyg.thenalc.org. Once the LIT has answered a set of initial questions, the application will be sent to the CYG Leaders in Training team, where they will set up a zoom interview with the LIT. If

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approved, the LIT will then be able to complete the registration online. LITs must apply by February 1. Interviews will take place the month of February and applicants will know by March 1. Young adults, please consider sharing your gifts with the church.

Update on Online Confirmation

Online confirmation classes began again this fall. This is a two-year program that runs one evening a week from mid-September until mid-May.

In addition, the students work with mentors in their own congregation and help with worship activities. We are currently offering Wednesday evenings run by the Rev. Mark Braaten, NALC Southern Area assistant to the bishop, and other supporting pastors and Thursday evenings run by the Rev. Teresa Peters, NALC director of Youth and Family Ministry, again with other supporting pastors. We currently have 36 students from 11 different congregations enrolled.

The plan is to start new groups next September, and we will need more instructors. If you are interested and want more information, please contact either Pastor Mark at southernaab@thenalc.org or Pastor Teresa Peters at tpeters@thenalc.org.

Faith Formation Festivals

Would you like to host a Faith Formation Festival in your area? The goal of a Faith Formation Festival is to strengthen, encourage, and equip anyone working with or related to young people. We invite speakers on a variety of topics that you identify as areas highly in need of instruction from a biblical perspective. Once topics are chosen, each Faith Formation Festival is structured to meet the needs of your mission district or mission region. Faith Formation Festivals can be one or two-day events.

Pastor Teresa Peters is the director of Youth and Family Ministry for the NALC. You may contact her at tpeters@thenalc.org.



WE BELONG
"I KNOW MY OWN AND MY OWN KNOW ME"

NALC Youth Gathering

Registration is now open for the North American Lutheran Church's Continental Youth Gathering (CYG) July 1-4, 2024, at St. John Lutheran Church in Boerne, Texas (near San Antonio).

NALC youth will rally around the theme "We Belong: 'I Know My Own and My Own Know Me.'"

The mission of the youth gathering is to provide opportunities for Lutheran youth to not only grow in their faith, but to be encouraged by connecting with other believers throughout North America.

The youth gathering isn't merely an event, but a milestone in nurturing a robust community of believers across North America. It is a space where youth can dive deeper into Scripture, engage in earnest conversation with peers and leaders, and encounter God in a fresh, transformative way.

Over four days, attendees will join together in worship, Scripture study, large-group and small-group sessions and mission events that reach out to the broader community.

The exciting line-up of speakers—ranging from pastors to specialists in life affirmation and mental health—are geared to ignite conversations that resonate with the youth on personal and collective levels. Our musical guests, the Lurvey Brothers, will elevate our spirits with their unique blend of song leading, fostering an ambiance of joy, reflection, and togetherness.

For more information go to cyg.thenalc.org.

2024 Clergy Retreat to focus on rest and spiritual health

The 2024 NALC Clergy Retreat will be held at the Drury Plaza Hotel Orlando - Disney Springs Area in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The theme is “I will give you rest.” The primary retreat will be held Tuesday through Thursday, Jan. 16-18. There will be focused events both before and after the main retreat.



Brad Hales



Ken Hohag



Dawn Rister

This year, the NALC’s annual pastors’ conference will be transformed into a tranquil clergy retreat and gathering of the ministerium, inviting pastors and deacons to a haven of rest and spiritual health. This retreat embodies a gentle pace, offering a welcomed pause from daily ministry duties.

Pastors and deacons are invited to immerse in a journey of soul care, enveloped in daily prayer, reflective solitude and heartfelt community interactions. They are invited to engage in spiritual practices, find solace in confession, and draw closer to Christ through thoughtful large-group and small-group sessions.

“It’s not merely a retreat; it’s a sacred space of healing and support, fostering a deeper bond within our ministerial community as we together seek rejuvenation in the Lord’s presence,” organizers explained.

Throughout the retreat, devotional sessions will be led by NALC pastors. Featured presentations are:

+ “Spiritual health as a grounding for ministry in the church” by the Rev. Ken Hohag, pastor of Black Forest Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs.

+ “Spiritual health as a grounding for ministry in the community” by the Rev. Brad Hales, pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Virginia, and director of church planting and aging ministries for the NALC.

+ “Spiritual health as a grounding for ministry in times of joy and crisis” by the Rev. Dawn Rister, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Pomaria, South Carolina.

The clergy retreat will also include a meeting of the NALC ministerium with Bishop Dan Selbo and an affirmation of ordination vows.

The name of the event was changed from a pastors’ conference to a clergy retreat, in part, to reflect that the NALC now ordains deacons as well as pastors.

The clergy retreat will be bookended by familiar and new events, including Pastor Development Days, a Clergy Spouses’ Gathering, a Clergy Couples’ Gathering, and First Five Pastors’ Continuing Education.

For more information on the retreat and other events go to thenalc.org.