



MISSION DISTRICT DEANS MEET

Mission district deans from throughout the North American Lutheran Church met Nov. 8-9 at the Sheraton DFW Airport Hotel in Irving, Texas.

The focus of this annual meeting is to provide an opportunity for the deans, representing mission districts throughout North America, to hear from Bishop Dan Selbo and other NALC staff, and to provide input into the life and ministry of the church.

The role of mission district dean was addressed by Bishop Selbo. He explained the responsibilities of deans and the expectations of their role for their mission district and the wider NALC.

The basic purposes of mission districts are to offer support for the mission district pastors, to enable and enhance shared mission opportunities, and to promote and encourage discipling relationships to be developed by the mission district.

The deans heard updates on the work of the NALC from Bishop Selbo; the Rev. Dr. Amy Little, general secretary; the Rev. Dcn. Andrew Ames Fuller, director of communications; the Rev. Carol Fryer, missions specialist; the Rev. Shelly Schultz, call process coordinator; the Rev. Teresa Peters, director of youth ministry, and the Rev. Jeff Morlock, director of vocational discernment for the North American Lutheran Seminary Network.



Bishop Dan Selbo addresses the meeting of the NALC mission district deans.

A special time was scheduled for the deans to meet in geographic areas for focused discussion on ministry in their mission districts with their regional assistant to the bishop and with Bishop Selbo, Bishop Emeritus John Bradosky and Pastor Little.

The new role of Bishop Bradosky as director of area support and development was explained to the deans.

In this new position, Bishop Bradosky will be working with the area assistants to the bishop, call process coordinator, interim ministry coordinators, and the director of discipleship to develop, coordinate and provide support for NALC pastors, deans and congregations. He will be creating a crisis team to work with congregations facing difficult situations. He will also be involved in ecumenical

Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

consultations and will play a role in supporting congregations that desire to join the NALC.

The deans spent time in discussion of several significant areas for ministry.

The deans received an update on the candidacy process leading to ordained ministry and the number of current and prospective candidates considering ordained ministry.

Pastor Little also gave an update on the significant number of pastors from other church bodies seeking reception into the NALC, as well as the process for receiving new pastors into the NALC from other Lutheran churches and from other traditions.

The deans discussed the Ordination Under Special Circumstances (OUSC) process and the NALC's dedication to providing pastoral care and support for all congregations. OUSC offers a path to calling an ordained pastor for congregations facing particular challenges with financial resources, size, or location, allowing them to identify a local individual to serve as their pastor. Nominees are required to undertake a series of 14 seminary courses through the North American Lutheran Seminary Network, spread over a minimum of two years. Candidates may be ordained to serve their congregation after completing half of these courses, and must finish the full curriculum to maintain their status as an NALC pastor in good standing.

The NALC deans engaged in thoughtful discussion regarding the roles of lay individuals in preaching and presiding at Holy Communion within congregations. Respecting the Lutheran Confessions' directive that no one should publicly preach or administer the Sacraments without a "regular call" (Augsburg Confession, Article 14), the NALC is exploring supportive measures for congregations lacking pastoral presence. Among the considerations is the provision of prepared sermons for lay reading, to ensure the Gospel continues to be faithfully proclaimed. Additionally, the concept of the "Reserved Sacrament" was examined, intended primarily for occasions when a pastor, present one week, reserves the Sacrament for the congregation's

use in subsequent weeks when a pastor may not be available. Discussions are ongoing regarding whether this practice might extend to sharing the reserved Sacrament with other congregations or should be confined to the congregation where it was initially consecrated.

The Commission on Theology and Doctrine (CTD) has authored several documents on this matter, including "Word of Counsel for Lay Worship Leadership" and "Guidelines for Lay-Diaconal Distribution of Holy Communion," providing detailed liturgical guidance and an "Order for the Distribution of Reserved Sacrament." "Theology of Sacramental Practices" offers a theological framework for these practices, emphasizing the Lutheran commitment to sacramental integrity and pastoral care. Furthermore, "Pastoral Guidance for Serving Congregations with Extended Vacancies" outlines multiple strategies for the NALC to assist congregations during extended pastoral vacancies, complemented by a synthesis in "Lay Preaching, Lay Presidency, and Communion from Reserved Elements in the North American Lutheran Church," summarizing the key points of these complex considerations by the Rev. Dr. David Wendel.

The deans learned that the NALC is poised to celebrate the ordination of its first deacon this December, marking a significant step in the integration of a diaconate within our ministerium. A brief historical review was presented to the deans, detailing the tradition of the diaconate in Lutheranism and including Martin Luther's practice of ordaining deacons, as well as the role of these ordained deacons in the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

In 2022, the NALC Task Force on Church and Ministry, in consultation with CTD, advocated for the establishment of a permanent diaconate and the ordination of deacons. This recommendation received approval from the Executive Council, affirming the diaconate's role within our church's structure. Bishop Selbo's staff reported regarding the upcoming release of a Frequently Asked Questions resource, educational guidelines, the liturgy of ordination, and steps for those entering the candidacy process.

Continued on Page 19

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.

Continued on Page 4

Continued from Page 3

Pastor Development Days is a continuing education event designed to help newer pastors build trust, handle change, and become a beacon of support in their congregations. The theme of the gathering is "Strengthening the Foundation: Navigating Challenges and Building Resilience." It is held Jan. 12-15.

Separate gatherings for clergy couples and clergy spouses will be held at 7 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 15. These gatherings are designed to be opportunities for support and fellowship.

The First Five Pastors' Continuing Education is a special continuing education event intended for pastors in their first five years of pastoral ministry. It is held on Thursday and Friday, Jan. 18-19. All costs of this portion are covered by the NALC.

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

MATCHING FUNDS FOR 20/20 VISION APPEAL

Thanks to the kindness of a generous donor, gifts to the NALC's 20/20 Vision appeal will be matched up to \$100,000.

From now until the end of the year, every dollar you contribute will be matched, amplifying your support for our vital ministries and missions both locally and globally. This is a perfect time to make your gift count twice as much in advancing our shared vision and the transformative work of our church.

For more information on the 20/20 Vision or to give online go to thenalc.org/vision.

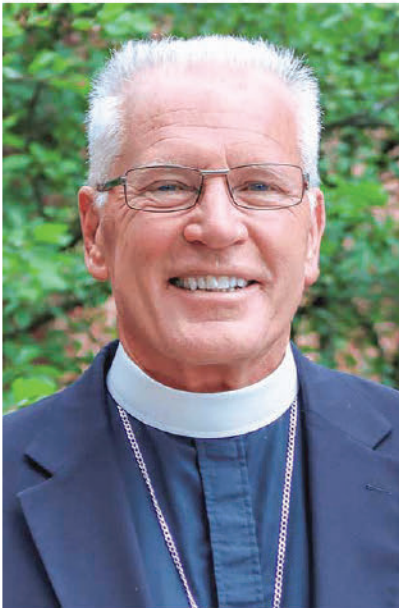
JOHN BRADOSKY JOINS NALC STAFF

Bishop Emeritus John Bradosky has accepted a part-time position on the NALC staff as the director of area support and development.

In this position, he will be working with the area assistants to the bishop, call process coordinator, interim ministry coordinators, and the director of discipleship to develop, coordinate, and provide support for NALC pastors, deans and congregations.

He will also be involved in the NALC's ecumenical consultations and will play a role in supporting congregations that desire to join the NALC.

As we work to address the challenges and opportunities we face as a growing denomination, this position will help support the ministry of the



John Bradosky

NALC as a Mission-Driven and Congregationally-Focused church body.

"I am excited about implementing this new position and encouraged that Bishop John is willing to serve in this role," said Bishop Dan Selbo. "His wisdom and experience will be a strong asset to our collective efforts to support our churches and to deepen our commitment to making disciples of Jesus, as well as a welcomed support for the work I do in my role."

Bishop Bradosky served as bishop of the NALC 2011-2019.

You may contact Bishop Bradosky at jbradosky@thenalc.org.

NALC DEVOTIONS FOR ADVENT, CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY

Echoes and Epiphanies is the title of the 2023 devotional booklet from the NALC for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

The devotions—written by NALC staff members—are available in a variety of formats. The devotions may be downloaded as a printed booklet or may be received as a daily email or text message. You may sign up for the emails or texts or download the 74-page booklet at thenalc.org/advent.



Video recordings of the devotions will be distributed on Facebook at facebook.com/thenalc where it will be easy to share them with others.

“In the sacred tapestry of the Christian liturgical calendar, this year marks a significant expansion in our journey of faith as we extend our devotional reflections to encompass not only the season of Advent but also the joyous celebration of Christmas as well as the illuminating days of Epiphany and the Baptism of Our Lord. This extended pilgrimage, from the anticipatory silence of Advent to the resounding clarity of Epiphany, invites us into a deeper exploration of the scriptural narrative that echoes the omnipresence of Jesus Christ and culminates in the epiphanies of His divine revelation” wrote the Rev. Andrew S. Ames Fuller, NALC director of communications, in the forward to the booklet.

“*Echoes and Epiphanies* is an invitation to embark on a scriptural pilgrimage, to discover the nuanced resonances and radiant epiphanies of Jesus Christ. It is an opportunity to appreciate the intricacy of God’s redemptive story and to inspire a life attuned not just to Christ’s gentle reverberations but to His moments of illuminating truth. May this devotional guide you in your reflections and deepen your faith

during this extended season of grace and revelation,” Deacon Ames Fuller said.

We encourage you to download the devotional and share it widely. We pray it guides you in your reflections, and deepens your faith during this extended season of grace and revelation.

For details on how to access the devotional electronically or to receive it as a daily email or text message, please visit thenalc.org/advent.

MAIL YEAR-END GIFTS EARLY

Please mail year-end gifts to the North American Lutheran Church early this year. Dec. 30-31 are over a weekend this year, and most banks will close for the year on Dec. 29.

Please allow a week for your mail to reach its destination.

KYLE SCOTT NAMED DIRECTOR OF WORLD MISSION PRAYER LEAGUE

The World Mission Prayer League (WMPL), a Lutheran prayer and mission organization, has called Kyle Scott, former executive director of WMPL's Lutheran Aid to Medicine in Bangladesh (LAMB), as the eighth executive director of the organization. WMPL is a mission partner agency of the NALC.

Scott comes to the WMPL Home Office with a vast array of experience. He and his wife Lois have worked overseas for most of his professional career. "Over the last 30 years, my wife, Lois, and I have only lived together in the U.S. for about a year and a half at one time, requiring some adjustment as we confront some reverse culture shock!" he said.

Scott succeeds Dr. Paul Gossman, executive director of WMPL since 2017. Gossman anticipates returning to the Pacific Northwest, where he and his wife, Pris, love taking advantage of the hiking, the beaches, and the divergent culture of the Seattle area. A new ministry opportunity is still being developed but is greatly anticipated for his next chapter.

Gossman has been instrumental in helping the Board of Directors move the Prayer League to board-led policy-based governance. Gossman's other key accomplishments include instituting a team-based approach to the structure of the home office, refining operational policies, and instituting the Discipleship House, an on-site place for young adults to practice community living with a heart to pray and plan to go toward areas yet unreached by the good news of Jesus.

In addition, Gossman visited every global worker of the Prayer League during his six years in office, oftentimes accompanied by his wife, Pris. These onsite opportunities to see the work first-hand have been encouraging to the global staff and incredibly informative to the prayer and financial supporters of the Prayer League.



Lois and Kyle Scott

Gossman's last foreign trip as executive director was to visit global workers in Africa in August 2023 to introduce Scott to church leaders there. While Scott has vast experience in South Asia, this was his first trip to Africa.

In a recent article, Scott said that he "was very grateful to learn from Paul's expertise in missiology and his vast historical and contextual knowledge."

Continued on Page 7

"We were blessed by seeing firsthand the work among the Samburu and the sacrificial efforts of our workers to get the Word of God to the tribal people. We witnessed a ceremony that occurs every 14 or 15 years when Samburu boys become warriors. It was an enlightening rite of passage. It made me reflect on life-changing rites of passage, such as my decision to be a disciple of Jesus, my confirmation declaration, my commissioning in missions, and my marriage to my wife, Lois. I was reminded of the importance of gaining knowledge and perspective in preparation for what God has for us. I am thankful to have had the chance to study intercultural studies and leadership to understand some of the nuances before me," Scott said.

Scott will draw upon his years (2015-2023, 1994-2002) as the executive director of WMPL LAMB, a Christian organization in Bangladesh that is comprised of a 100-bed hospital, community health and development program, a rehabilitation center, a training center (including a midwifery and nursing



The three most recent executive directors of the World Mission Prayer League, from left, Paul Gossman (2016-2023), Charles (Chuck) Lindquist (1997-2016) and Kyle Scott.

institute), a 130-student English medium school and a MIS-research unit with many expatriate and several hundred national staff, located in northern Bangladesh.

Before that, he worked with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Afghanistan for almost five years, serving as a senior development officer in various locations in Eastern Afghanistan and closing his time in the Office of Management in Kabul.

Before that, he worked for about five years with Habitat for Humanity International, first as the national director of the Bangladesh program, then as the regional program manager for the South Asia region, and finally as associate director for regional programs for HFHI, Asia Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand.

Fluent in Bengali, Scott began his international life as a child when his parents experienced a call to Bangladesh to help establish the LAMB Project through WMPL. Kyle met his wife Lois in boarding school in Pakistan. Her parents



World Mission Prayer League's Lutheran Aid to Medicine in Bangladesh (LAMB) facility, where Kyle Scott served as executive director.

Continued on Page 8



WMPL leaders and their families pray for Kyle Scott during his installation service as executive director.

Continued from Page 7

were missionaries with the Presbyterian church. After their graduation and two years with Youth With A Mission (YWAM), they married and began their international career together.

Following training in YWAM's Applied Cross-Cultural Training School in 1990, Kyle completed the 15-week Perspectives on the World Christian Movement series, furthering his knowledge and solid background in mission movements and the Biblical basis for mission. He was certified in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in 1991.

While living in Albania between 2003 and 2005 as an associate worker of WMPL, Scott earned a Master of Arts in Global Leadership (emphasizing cultural anthropology, missiology and developing learning organizations) from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

They feel blessed to have three married adult children walking with the Lord and six wonderful grandchildren.

Kyle understands that this is a responsibility that is too great for him alone. He is proud to join the dedicated national and global workers and members of WMPL who are committed to discipleship, prayer, the unreached and mobilizing others in those areas. Thank you for joining us in praying for Kyle as he assumes this responsibility. We praise God for our partnership with the NALC.

World Mission Prayer League is a mission partner agency of the NALC. You can learn more about their ministry at wmpl.org.



Kyle and Lois Scott family

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

Rev. Dr. David J. Baer, *editor*
North American Lutheran Church
PO Box 130455
Saint Paul, MN 55113
+1-651-633-6004 | news@thenalc.org



NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
CHURCH

Please copy and share this newsletter widely.



Pastor Richard (Rick) Robers was ordained on Oct. 1, 2023, at St. John Lutheran Church in Roanoke, Virginia, where he serves as associate pastor.



Pastor Ben Blobaum was ordained on Nov. 5 at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Flanagan, Illinois.

ORDINATIONS



Pastor Justin Baker was ordained on Aug. 20 at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Export, Pennsylvania, where he serves as pastor.



Pastor Pál Pusztai was ordained on Sept. 17 at St. Jacob's Lutheran Church in Glen Rock, Pennsylvania. He is called to serve as Atlantic Mission Region pastor at large and as associate pastor at St. Jacob's.

ONE PLUS GOD MINISTRIES

One Plus God Ministries is one of the NALC's new Mission Partner agencies. One Plus God has been working with an NALC congregation's partnerships in Tanzania helping it to expand into new areas of ministry, including evangelical outreach.

One Plus God Ministries can provide:

- + Excellent short-term trip opportunities to a variety of countries.
- + A great serving opportunity in Tanzania for your congregation.
- + Powerful messages for your mission events.
- + Partnerships to grow your global missions ministry.

Pastor Wayne de Wet founded One Plus God in 2013. The ministry is now involved in Thailand, Papua, Mali, South Africa, Jamaica, Haiti and Tanzania.

Originally from South Africa, Pastor Wayne has been involved with missions for more than 25 years. He holds a PhD in New Testament, has a deep love for the Lord, and is committed to helping churches to grow their global missions involvement. Pastor Wayne and his missions team are ready and excited to serve you.



Although many of the ministries provide amazing serving opportunities, the ministry in Tanzania is specifically involved with Lutheran churches and schools, thus providing a great entry into global missions for churches within the NALC.

This is a growing ministry making a new life possible for orphans, while also having an evangelism and social reach into remote villages where the darkness of witch doctor beliefs and the abuse of women and children are being conquered with the light of our Lord and Savior.

Registration is now open for a short-term missions trip to Tanzania.

Reach out to One Plus God Ministries or Pastor Wayne to broaden and deepen your global missions involvement. You may contact him at 567-356-2007 or wynand@oneplusgod.org.

One Plus God is a mission partner agency of the NALC. You can learn more about their ministry at oneplusgod.org.





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

NALC YOUTH GATHERING REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

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,'" a testament to the profound connection we share in Christ.

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.

This gathering stretches beyond the traditional boundaries, welcoming home teams from other confessional Lutheran bodies to partake in this monumental event.

With each session, we delve into what it means to belong to Christ, to the Church, to our communities, and to each other, echoing the profound truth of our theme passages from John 10:14–15.

As we anticipate the glorious days of CYG 2024, we remain rooted in the promise of Isaiah 43:1, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

With only 500 spots available and a deadline for registration on April 15, 2024, be sure to mark your calendars and register as soon as possible.

Should you have any questions, contact Pastor Teresa Peters, director of Youth and Family Ministry and organizer of this event, at tpeters@thenalc.org.

LETTER FROM BISHOP ON CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS

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

In the wake of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, which is also emerging in other parts of the region, our hearts are heavy with sorrow and concern for the people and the nations involved. An abrupt offensive led by Hamas, has resulted in an escalation of violence that has caused abhorrent suffering for countless individuals, families, and communities.

The North American Lutheran Church unequivocally condemns the violent actions of any terrorist group, as well as all forms of antisemitism found throughout the world. In contrast, we advocate for peace, justice, and the sanctity of all human life. We believe in the power of prayer and the potential of human hearts to move towards reconciliation and peace under the divine guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We stand with all those in the region who yearn for peace. We pray for the safety and wellbeing of all its inhabitants, remembering that we have brothers and sisters in Christ living in Israel, as well as in other Arab nations including Palestine, who find themselves in dire circumstances amidst the turmoil.

We are mindful of the complex history and deep-rooted tensions that permeate the region. Yet, we ardently pray for an end to the hostilities and for a sustainable resolution that honors the dignity, security, and rights of all individuals. We call upon the leaders involved to act with wisdom, compassion, and a genuine desire for lasting peace.

We invite our pastors, congregations, and partners in ministry to unite in fervent prayer for peace in Israel, Gaza, and the surrounding region, for the illumination and guidance of the leaders involved, and for humanitarian aid to reach those in desperate need. Let us all be praying for a future where enmity



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

is replaced with understanding, oppression with justice, and despair with hope, under the sovereign grace of our loving and Triune God.

I encourage our congregations to be places where our doors are open for comfort and prayer for all of God's people, and where the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, revealed to us in His life, death, and resurrection from the dead for our sin are abundantly present and found.

The following prayer is offered for your use, individually, as families, and in your congregations:

Gracious God, in a world overshadowed by sin and strife, we come before You with heavy hearts, seeking Your divine mercy and peace for the people living in Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the surrounding regions. We pray for the leaders of the nations, that their hearts may be stirred towards justice, reconciliation, and the well-being of all people.

We pray for those whose lives have been lost, for those torn from their homes and families, as well as for those who are being held hostage in this brutal conflict.

We pray for comfort, protection, and healing for wounded spirits and bodies, knowing that all true healing is found in You alone. Lord, may Your boundless love lead us through these dark times towards a horizon of hope, understanding, and enduring peace.

Continued on Page 13

Continued from Page 12

Help us to never lose sight of the promises we have in Jesus and to never lose hope in the One who, through His cross and resurrection from the dead, has secured our lives eternally. In the holy and precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

—John 16:33 NIV

In Christ's service,

The Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo

Bishop, North American Lutheran Church

HOW TO PRAY

In light of the ongoing crisis in Israel and the Gaza Strip, we invite you to join us in fervent prayer, imploring God's mercy, healing, and peace over the distressed lands and peoples:

For the Wounded: Pray for all those who have been injured by rocket fire or terrorist gunfire, that God's healing hand may rest upon them, bringing physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

For the Kidnapped: Uphold in prayer more than 130 reportedly kidnapped Israelis, including men, women, children, soldiers, and civilians. Pray for their safe return and for God's comforting presence with their anguished families.

For the Grieving Families: Pray for God's grace and comfort to be with all grieving families, especially the many children who are caught up in the horror of these events. May the Lord provide for their physical needs and restore their peace.

For Our Servant Leaders: Ask for perseverance, wisdom, and calm for our mission partners as they serve amid fear and uncertainty. Pray for safe passage and divine protection for all who are in or traveling to the affected areas.

For Upcoming Mission and Travel Engagements:

Pray for discernment for those in the NALC with upcoming trips scheduled to visit the region—for wisdom on how to proceed amidst the volatile circumstances.

For Our Leadership: Pray for the leadership at NALC as they continue to assess how best to respond to the unfolding situation, seeking God's guidance in every decision.

For Our Youth and Responders: Especially intercede for young people from local communities who are part of response teams serving as soldiers or medics in harm's way.

For the Residents of Gaza: We have heard countless stories of individuals who are frightened and fearful for their lives. Pray for God's protection, peace, and provision for them amidst the turmoil.

For Border Peace: Pray that the borders will remain secure, and that steps towards lasting peace will prevail over forces of destruction and despair.

May our earnest intercessions rise as a pleasing aroma before the throne of grace, and may God's peace, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Continued from Page 15

[Apple of His Eye Mission Society](#)

Overview: The Apple of His Eye Mission Society is a Lutheran-based organization that actively explores the theological intersections between Jewish and Christian beliefs, such as the Jewish roots of Jesus and questions about the nature of God from both perspectives.

Domestic Efforts: The organization's primary aim is evangelization, focusing on reaching out to the Jewish community in North America with the message of the Gospel. They engage in various outreach programs and educational activities to foster understanding and build bridges between Jewish and Christian communities, all while emphasizing the importance of sharing the Christian faith.

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR CRISIS RELIEF AND AID ORGANIZATIONS

In these trying times, many have inquired about organizations providing relief in the midst of the Israel-Hamas conflict. We highlight Lutheran World Relief, a current mission partner of the NALC. However, it is vital to note that other listed organizations have not been vetted by the NALC or its Executive Council. The practices or views of these organizations may not align with those of the NALC, its leadership, or its congregations. We present this list for individual and congregational discernment, recognizing each entity's presence and efforts in this crisis.

Lutheran World Relief

Overview: Lutheran World Relief (LWR) is a Lutheran-based organization that has been dedicated to saving and improving lives in the poorest parts of the world since 1945. It is currently a mission partner of the North American Lutheran Church.

Relief Efforts: They focus on supporting rural economies and agricultural livelihoods, promoting sustainable farming practices, and providing humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters and complex crises. LWR has an ongoing appeal to assist civilians caught in the danger of the Israel-Hamas conflict. The organization encourages donors to share their spirit of Christian love with neighbors enduring crises, emphasizing that caring for others is an expression of faith in Jesus Christ. They aim to show families in Israel, Gaza, and globally that they are loved, and they're requesting donations to provide lifesaving support.

International Committee of the Red Cross

Overview: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was established in 1863 and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It operates globally, assisting those impacted by conflict and promoting international humanitarian laws, primarily the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The ICRC is an

independent and neutral body, with over 21,000 employees in more than 100 countries. Its mission is to protect and assist victims of armed conflict and violence. The organization is governed by an Assembly and a Directorate, and funding comes mainly from voluntary donations from governments, societies, and other entities.

Appeal for Israel and Occupied Territories: The recent hostilities since October 7 have caused significant suffering to civilians on both sides. Over 180,000 people in the Gaza strip are displaced due to military strikes. The ICRC is urgently calling for assistance and has been active in providing medical supplies, supporting essential infrastructure, assessing damage to water and sewage systems, assisting detained individuals, and locating missing persons. The organization emphasizes the protection of ambulances, health workers, and facilities at all times.

The Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Overview: The Church's Ministry Among Jewish People (CMJ) is an Anglican-based organization birthed from the early joint missions sent by the Church of England (Anglican) and the Evangelical Church in Prussia (Lutheran), resulting in a united Anglo-German evangelical church in the Holy Land—now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the Episcopal (Anglican) Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. Today, CMJ's mission focuses on teaching the Jewishness of the New Testament, combating antisemitism, and building bridges with Jewish communities.

Relief Efforts: CMJ is offering aid and shelter to those displaced due to the Israel-Hamas war. A number of Israeli CMJ missionaries have now been called into active-duty military service.

Continued on Page 15

Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries

Overview: Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries (FIRM) focuses on transforming lives in Israel through Gospel-centered ministries. Rooted deeply in Christian faith, FIRM aspires to be the hands and feet of Jesus, connecting supporters to trusted ministries in Israel while keeping Jesus central to every project. Based in Jerusalem, FIRM supports a network of 60+ ministries in Israel with a passion for reaching people with the Gospel.

Emergency Appeal: FIRM has initiated an emergency crisis response fund to provide aid for families across Israel that have suffered losses and displacement, asking supporters to show the love of Jesus to those hurting.

International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

Overview: Established in 1980, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) was inaugurated in Jerusalem with the attendance of 1,000 Christians from 32 nations to celebrate the biblical Feast of Tabernacles. Today, the ICEJ is represented in over 90 nations and supporters in more than 170 countries. They engage in various initiatives, from assisting Jewish immigration to Israel to supporting embattled communities, emphasizing comfort, reconciliation, and practical love towards every community in Israel. ICEJ has a proven track record of reaching out in genuine Christian love and concern to every community in Israel – whether Jewish, Arab, Christian, Muslim, Druze or Bedouin. At the same time, the ICEJ has a distinct calling to be a ministry of comfort to the Jewish people, particularly in response to the tragic legacy of Christian antisemitism.

Relief Efforts: ICEJ is on the frontlines providing essential supplies and shelters to vulnerable Israeli communities during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Bridges for Peace

Overview: Founded in 1976 by Dr. G. Douglas Young, Bridges for Peace is a Christian organization committed to nurturing Christian-Jewish relationships

worldwide, and supporting Israel both in times of peace and crisis. Their mission emphasizes educating Christians about Israel's biblical roots and actively countering anti-Semitism. Through diverse programs, they provide publications, prayer groups, assistance projects, and Bible study tours in Israel. Advocacy for Israel's divine right to exist is central to their endeavors. They invite global Christians to become active "bridge-builders", promoting peace and understanding.

Relief Efforts: They are urging people to help Israel during the war by giving to their Crisis Fund, which aims to demonstrate the love of God by blessing the people of Israel during this challenging time.

Shevet Achim

Overview: Shevet Achim (inspired by Psalm 133:1) is a faith-based international community that collaborates with advanced medical centers in Israel to assist children with congenital heart defects. Established in 1994, the organization has its roots in the shared recognition that every life is created in the image of God. Historically, their primary focus was on children from the Gaza Strip, but breakthroughs in later years expanded their reach to Iraq and Syria as well. The organization's foundation story revolves around the plea of a mother in 1994 who came to Israel with her son, seeking life-saving treatment, and asking a simple, heartfelt question: "Will you help us?" This plea led to the formation of a compassionate community that works to save children's lives by facilitating heart surgeries in Israel.

Relief Efforts: Congregations can support Shevet Achim's on-the-ground relief efforts by sponsoring individual children from conflict regions like Gaza, Iraq, and Syria, who need urgent heart surgeries. By sponsoring a child, congregations can receive regular updates on the child's progress and even have the opportunity to meet the child during their stay in Israel.

For support to the Jewish community in North America, and especially care and evangelistic efforts, consider supporting:

Continued on Page 13

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

This article is a part of a series of articles from NALC Life Ministries for the NALC News and Lutheran CORE Voice.

By the Rev. Dr. Dennis Di Mauro

Imagine a scenario where an elderly loved one is suffering from an incurable condition. Disease has wracked her body, and she is experiencing unimaginable pain. And yet, the antiquated laws on the books have prevented her from finding peace once and for all. Shouldn't such laws be changed to allow a medical professional to compassionately put her out of her misery?

This is the argument posed by physician-assisted suicide (PAS) advocates, and it has proven successful in changing numerous laws in North America and around the world. But is it true? Is death the only sure remedy for ending pain? And do laws which allow PAS only affect people in the scenario described above, or are others affected in unexpected ways as well? Furthermore, could the legalization of PAS be abused?

First let's take a look at the facts. Physician assisted suicide is legal in many westernized countries today—including Canada, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Columbia and Japan. But the country with the most data on PAS is the Netherlands, since it was one of the first countries to legalize the practice.

Shockingly, more than four percent of all deaths in the Netherlands today are by means of PAS, and the percentage is probably larger, since many such deaths go unreported. Furthermore, many of those euthanized were either unaware or incompetent to make this decision for themselves. Even children as young as 12 can be euthanized under the law. People can even be euthanized for depression in the Netherlands, and 83 people were put to death for psychiatric conditions in 2017. Because of these facts, many Dutch citizens worry about being euthanized against their wishes. In fact, it is

estimated that 10,000 Dutch citizens carry a “do not euthanize me” card, just in case they become incapacitated and are taken to the hospital.

Sadly, the United States and Canada are following in Holland's footsteps. Already 10 U.S. states—California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia—have legalized the practice of physician-assisted suicide, and the number of states which will legalize PAS in the future is expected to grow.

In Canada, PAS (called medical assistance in dying, MAiD) was legalized in 2016. Tragically, 10,000 people died from the practice in 2021 alone. MAiD has come under scrutiny by human rights advocates who criticize the law's lack of safeguards and the fact that it targets the most vulnerable members of society: the disabled and the poor. Critics also believe that health care providers are given incentives to suggest euthanasia to people who would normally not consider it.

But what are the risks of legalizing PAS? Physician bias is always an issue. One only needs to find one unscrupulous and agenda-driven doctor who is willing to approve nearly any request for euthanasia, and numerous unneeded deaths will be the result. Furthermore, as the price of health care increases, the possibility for coercion grows. Families will decide, often for economic reasons, that it's best to end a loved one's life rather than pay for long-term treatments which might result in financial collapse.

But is physician-assisted suicide even needed to control pain? One of the positive movements in recent decades has been the growth of the hospice movement and its effort to provide palliative pain care in the last months of life. The truth is that the vast majority of pain conditions caused by life-threatening disease can be alleviated through the use of analgesic medications, including opioids.

Continued on Page 17

Indeed, proper hospice care has been able to extend life in many cases, even above the expected longevity of undergoing additional treatment.

We've been discussing the need for, and the possible abuses related to legalizing PAS, but ultimately, as Christians, we need to understand how PAS does, or does not, fit into God's plan for our lives. As with any moral issue, God's Word has to be our final guide.

One of the problems with today's society is that there is no perceived value in suffering. Everything is solved with a pill, and, if that doesn't work, we may think it's time to cash it in. But God's Word tells us otherwise. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul reflects on how the Lord told him that, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Paul writes, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." You see, in a somewhat counterintuitive way, our illnesses teach us about the kind of humility we need to embrace in order to have an honest relationship with the living God.

As to the question of *why* disease and even death afflict us, we can't know for certain. But we must leave the power of life and death in the Lord's hands. After his entire family was killed, Job writes, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." As hard as it is to do, especially in times of calamity, we need to leave our mortality in the hands of God. Because we have a bright and shining future waiting for us—even *after* we die. At the end of time, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

The Rev. Dr. Dennis Di Mauro is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Virginia. He also teaches for St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and the North American Lutheran Seminary.

2024 MARCH FOR LIFE

The NALC Life Ministries Team is preparing for the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., in January, but our plan is a little different. Instead of holding a life conference, NALC Life Ministries has decided to team up with Lutherans for Life (LFL) and participate in their events.

The LFL youth conference, Y4Life, will be held at the Hilton Crystal City Hotel from Jan. 18-20. There are more than 400 youth already registered. We encourage all NALC youth to participate in this conference. To register or for more information go to y4life.org.

On Friday, Jan. 19, we will be participating in the annual March for Life under the NALC banner. Join us at 12th and Madison Streets at noon as we march to the U.S. Capitol.

Before the march, there is a prayer service at DAR Constitution Hall, 1776 D Street NW in Washington, D.C. at 8:30 a.m. NALC members are invited to attend this service, and clergy are invited to participate (stoles are white).

If you have any problems at the march, please contact Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at 703-568-3346. Pastor Di Mauro can also host you in his home if you would like to stay overnight in the area. We can't wait to see you in our nation's capital this January.

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING PASTORS

You may find a list of congregations seeking pastors at thenalc.org/call.

NALC EXECUTIVE COUNCIL REPORT

The NALC Executive Council met in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, Oct. 19-20. The following actions were taken:

Approved the ordination of James Clapper as an NALC deacon. He will be commissioned to serve a one-year CPE residency.

Approved the minutes of the 2023 Mission Convocation.

Reviewed the Mission Vetting Team Criteria that may be used in evaluating current and future mission partners.

The following Pastors were received into the NALC since the convocation: the Rev. John Dostal, the Rev. Robert Weber, the Rev. Beverly Cotner and the Rev. Richard Raymer.

The following congregations were received into the NALC since the convocation:

St. Paul Lutheran Church, Buckstown, Pennsylvania.
Christ Lutheran Church, Scituate, Massachusetts.
St. Paul Lutheran Church, McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania.
St. Paul Lutheran Church, West Falls, New York.
Salem Lutheran Church, Ponca, Nebraska.

UPDATED NALC LIFE-TO-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL AVAILABLE

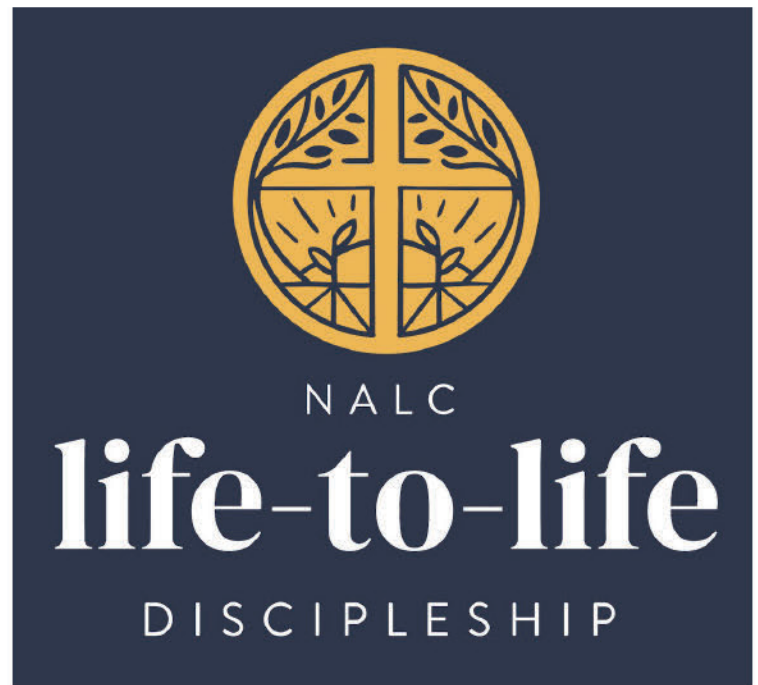
Almost a year and a half ago the NALC introduced *The Life- to-Life Experience for Intentional Discipleship* for Congregations. It has been enthusiastically received by many of our congregations. Those who used the guide gave us valuable feedback and suggestions for improvements.

A revised version of the manual has been released. The manual can be downloaded for free by clicking the "Getting Started" link at the bottom of the Life-to-Life Discipleship website, nalclifetolife.org.

Once the "Get Connected" form is filled out you will be given a link to download the manual immediately.

We are currently out of printed copies, but once they are available, we will post the cost and ordering information online.

If you have already begun the Life-to-Life Experience in your congregation, we hope that you will download the new manual. If you haven't done the experience this would be a great time to start.



Thank you for joining us in our commitment in answering Jesus' call to fulfill the Great Commission.

NALC DISASTER RESPONSE UPDATE

NALC Disaster Response coordinated 22 mission trips for youth and adults responding to eight disasters in the United States in 2023.

The Maui wildfires caused the greatest number of fatalities and long term recovery rebuilding will take years for the families to recover.

The Arkansas tornadoes were widespread, devastating families in six states.

Hurricane Idalia has been the most recent and impacted one of the poorer communities in Florida.

Your help is needed in 2024. There are many opportunities to glorify God and to share the love of Jesus by scheduling your mission trip today, by collecting much needed gift cards, and by praying

for the thousands of families who have lost everything due to disaster.

Gift cards and supplies may be sent to NALC Disaster Response; 16500 Noble Ave.; Caldwell, OH 43724.

Monetary donations for NALC Disaster Response may be mailed to North American Lutheran Church; PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please indicate "disaster response" on your check.

Go to thenalc.org for disaster updates or to give online. Thank you for all your prayers and support.

For more information, contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or disasterresponse@thenalc.org.

DEANS MEETING

Continued from Page 2

The Commission on Theology and Doctrine's function within the NALC was clarified to the deans. As an advisory group appointed by the bishop, the commission delves into theological issues and contributes to the creation of theological and educational materials. However, it is under the bishop's purview whether to implement the commission's recommendations, ensuring that our practice remains firmly rooted in our theological convictions and responsive to our community's needs.

The Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits for congregations were discussed, exploring options to continue to offer these experiences.

The deans were pleased to hear about plans to update the NALC website to make it easier to use with mobile devices.

Plans for a more permanent NALC office in Bedford, Texas—near the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport—were shared with the deans. The 2021 NALC Mission Convocation approved plans for a central NALC office in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The NALC offices have been in a shared-office facility in Grapevine, Texas, while the search for a permanent location was conducted. The new offices should be operational early in 2024.

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.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT DEVOTION FROM BISHOP SELBO

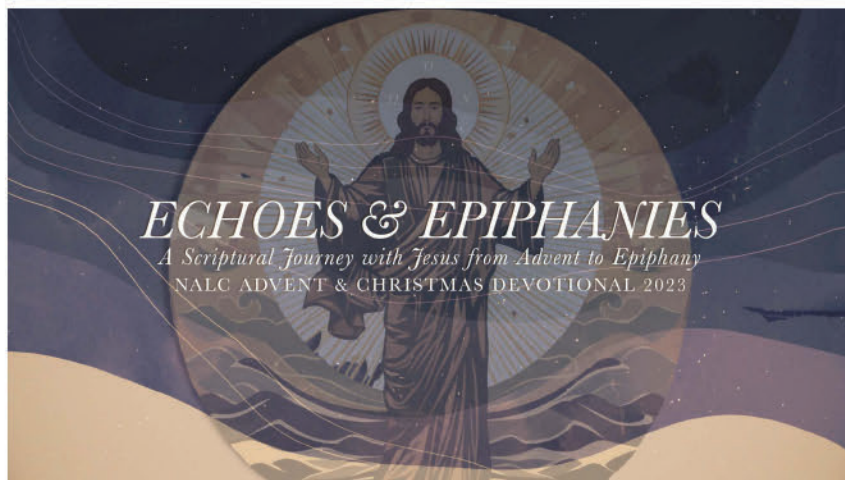
The following devotion from Bishop Dan Selbo, based on Luke 21:5-19, is reprinted from the 2023 NALC devotional booklet "Echoes and Epiphanies." You may access the other devotions at thenalc.org/advent.

Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus as we begin a new year in the life of the Church, and a new season in the Church's life. The theme chosen for this year's devotionals, "Echoes and Epiphanies," leads us from this first day in Advent—a time when we patiently wait for the coming of Jesus—to the Day of Epiphany—the clear declaration in His Baptism that Jesus is the promised Son of God.

That same declaration is echoed throughout all of Scripture. The Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming of the Messiah and of how God would fulfill His promises in and through His chosen One. The New Testament proclaims that the chosen One is here, and that in His presence and coming, in the person of Jesus Christ, we begin to see the face of the Father and the fulfillment of His saving plan and purposes for His world.

The passage we read today helps us to hear some of those same echoing promises being declared, as well as to be given an epiphany, a new insight and awareness, of how God is working in all things to save His world in Christ. It speaks of the destruction of everything in this life that is not of God, and of the kind of events that will take place as the world, as we know it, comes to an end. Nations rising against nations, wars and earthquakes, famines and plagues, followers of the Lord being persecuted and betrayed. It doesn't take much imagination to begin to see how the end of this world might be sooner than we might expect.

At the same time, our Lord also tells us to never lose sight of the calling we have in Him, and to never forget the promises that belong to us through our



faith. When the world begins to fall apart, remember whose world it is. When life begins to turn upside down, use it as an opportunity to tell the world where to turn.

World history, as well as current events, are filled with stories of people who have built their lives on the wrong foundations. Although the details of their lives are vastly different, their life stories end up the same. Jesus says, "Be careful where you are building. Do not forget what will last and what will not."

As we begin this season of Advent, take the echo of our Lord's words to heart. Build your life on the certainty of His promises. Secure your life on a foundation that will last. And as you do, don't be surprised if you have an epiphany. God has been opening the eyes of His people from the time our world began.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we begin this Advent season, preparing to celebrate Your birth into this world, and as we look forward to that day when You will return, help us to hear the echoes of Your voice found in Scripture, revealed in Your Word. And as we do, lead us to new epiphanies, new insights and revelations that remind us and assure us of the security we have in You. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.