

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

November 2011

Regional Mission Districts are organizing

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are organizing regional Mission Districts in various parts of the United States. Eight Mission Districts have formally organized, and others are in the process of doing so.

Members of NALC congregations in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming gathered Oct. 28-29 at the Watertown, S.D., Event Center to organize three mission districts.

Bishop John Bradosky was the featured speaker for the gathering. Jeanne Wallace of the NALC Women's Council provided a workshop for women about the NALC's women's organization. Other speakers included Pastor Steven King, who led a workshop on resources available from Sola Publishing, and Verlyn Hahn of Hahn Financial Group, who led a workshop on the NALC-Lutheran CORE health insurance and retirement plans.

Pastor Tim Lundeen of Grace Lutheran Church in Erskine, Minn., was elected Dean of the **Minnkota Mission District** which serves Minnesota and eastern North Dakota.



Opening worship at the NALC Mission Districts Conference in Watertown, S.D. Three Mission Districts were organized at the conference.



The newly-elected Executive Council of the Ohio Mission District. Back row, from left: Pastor Alan Knoke; Matt Kohler; Pastor Dan Powell, Dean; Pastor Paul Larson; and Don Karger, Treasurer. Front Row: Pastor Lisa Peterson; Ethel Briggs; Tom White; and Pastor Amy Little, Secretary.

Pastor Randy Eisenbeisz of Hayti Lutheran Church and New Hope Lutheran Church of Hayti, S.D., was elected Dean of the **Eastern South Dakota Mission District**.

Pastor David Baer of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Whitewood, S.D., was elected Dean of the **Western Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming Mission District**.

There are 15 congregations in South Dakota, 10 congregations in Minnesota, two congregations in North Dakota and one congregation in Wyoming.

Prior to the conference, South Dakota pastors from the NALC and LCMC met together with orthodox ELCA pastors in South Dakota to discuss ways to continue to work together.

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The **Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Mission District** met on Oct. 22, at Zion Lutheran Church in Caroline, Wis. Pastor Roy A. Harrisville III of New Life Lutheran Church in Menomonie, Wis., was elected as Dean.

There are 14 congregations in Wisconsin and nine in Michigan (two in upper Michigan).



Pastor Michael G. Tavella presides at the meeting of the Atlantic Mission District.

The **Atlantic Mission District** met on Oct. 22 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Abington, Pa. Pastor Michael Tavella of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Abington, Pa., was elected as Dean.

The Atlantic District includes eastern Pennsylvania, eastern New York, eastern Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, and Washington, D.C. There are 27 congregations in Pennsylvania, four in Maryland, four in New York, one in New Jersey, and one in Washington, D.C. A Mission District is organizing for western Pennsylvania.

The **Ohio Mission District** met on Oct. 8, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Ashland, Ohio. Pastor Dan Powell was elected as Dean. The Ohio Mission District is the NALC's largest with 40 congregations.



The newly-elected members of the Executive Council of the Wisconsin-Upper Michigan Mission District, from left: Gerald McEathron; Arne Kloes; Rich Bloomberg; Pastor Roy Harrisville III, Dean; Pastor Craig Nehring; Pastor M. L. Jacobsen; and Pastor Bert Schulz.

The **Iowa Mission District** met on Oct. 1. Pastor Ken Kimball of Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church in Waterville and Old West Paint Creek Lutheran Church in Waukon, was elected Dean. There are 26 NALC congregations in Iowa.

The **Carolinas Mission District** was the first Mission District to organize. Pastor Carl M. Haynes of Christiana Lutheran Church in Salisbury, N.C., was elected Dean at its constituting Convocation June 3-4. There are 31 congregations in North Carolina and three in South Carolina.

The **Illinois Mission District** will meet on Saturday, Nov. 5, at First Lutheran Church, Paxton, Ill. There are 14 NALC congregations in Illinois.

The NALC constitution explains the purpose of the Mission Districts as: "Congregations shall join in collaboration to fulfill most effectively the ministry and mission of the NALC, normally based on common geographic boundaries."

The boundaries and number of Mission Districts will remain flexible to best serve mission on the local level as the NALC continues to grow.

Each Mission District will elect as Dean a pastor who will work with the NALC Bishop in conducting similar ministry to the Bishop in their regional area. "Deans shall serve as pastor to ordained ministers, their families, and congregations, and will conduct a ministry of teaching and visitation with ordained ministers and congregations," the constitution explains.

Ordination in Minnesota



Pastor Jill Torgerson poses following her ordination at Samhold Lutheran Church in Gonvick Minn., on Sept. 18. Also pictured are Pastor Tim Lundeen of Grace Lutheran Church in Erskine, Minn., and Pastor Michael Sletto, a seminary classmate of Pastor Torgerson. Pastor Lundeen was the NALC's provisional Dean for Minnesota. He was elected Oct. 28 as Dean for the Minnkota Mission District. Pastor Torgerson is serving Samhold Lutheran Church and United Lutheran Church in Berner, Minn.



Pastor Jill Torgerson with her 94-year-old mother, Emma Tharaldson, at the altar of Samhold Lutheran Church following Jill's ordination. Jill was also baptized, confirmed and married in this church. Her mother, who is also a member of Samhold, had the honor of placing the red stole on her daughter during the ordination service.

Convocations to be in Minnesota

Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn., (a suburb of Minneapolis) has been chosen as the site for the Convocations of the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE. The NALC Executive Council approved the location and schedule at its October meeting.

The 2012 NALC Convocation will be Thursday and Friday, Aug. 16-17. Lutheran CORE's Convocation is Tuesday, Aug. 14.

A joint NALC-Lutheran CORE Theological Conference is held between the two Convocations. The 2012 theological conference will focus on Law and Gospel.

Model constitution for congregations updated

Updates to the Model Constitution for NALC congregations have been approved by the NALC Executive Council. The updates reflect changes to the constitution made at the 2011 Convocation.

The Model Constitution is provided as a resource to assist congregations as they update their own constitutions. It is available on the NALC website document library.

The NALC does not require congregations to adopt a particular constitution. However, the church body does ask congregations to formally subscribe to the NALC's constitution and confession of faith in their governing documents.

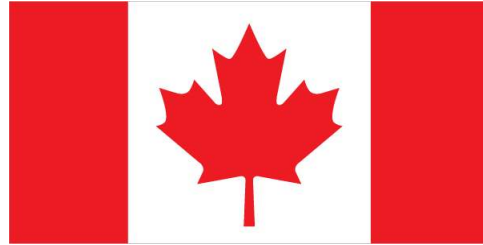
NALC prepares to welcome Canadian congregations

The North American Lutheran Church is preparing to welcome congregations from Canada who are expressing interest in joining the NALC.

The NALC Executive Council has appointed a Canadian Commission to work on legal issues necessary to assist congregations in Canada in joining the NALC and for those congregations to have an ongoing relationship with the NALC.

The Canadian Commission consists of three American pastors and three Canadian pastors:

Pastor Donald Allman - chair
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Grove City, Ohio



Pastor Mark C. Chavez
NALC General Secretary
Landisville, Pa.

Pastor Phil Gagnon
St. Albert Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Albert, Alberta

Pastor Karl Johnsen
Calvary Lutheran Church
Edmonton, Alberta

Pastor K. Glen Johnson
Ascension Lutheran Church
Calgary, Alberta

Pastor Victor C. Langford III
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Seattle, Wash.

NALC leaders are also consulting with leaders of the Anglican Church in North America as to how they have handled cross-border issues in their church.

Many congregations are considering leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada which, like the ELCA in the United States, has moved away from traditional Christian teaching and practice.

Like those leaving the ELCA, those leaving the ELCIC believe that the Bible no longer norms the faith and practice of their previous church body.

Orders of Creation theme of theological conference

The doctrine of the Orders of Creation will be the theme of a theological conference April 16-19 in Canmore, Alberta — near Banff National Park.

The conference will feature the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen and the Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder.

Professor Nestingen, professor emeritus from Luther Seminary, is a NALC pastor and will be serving as a NALC missionary this winter teaching at the seminary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesu.

More information will be available in the *NALC News* for December and at www.thenalc.org.

Endorser approved for NALC military chaplains

The North American Lutheran Church has reached an agreement with Augsburg Lutheran Churches to provide official endorsement for NALC chaplains in the U.S. military.

Like the NALC, Augsburg Lutheran Churches is a member church body of Lutheran CORE.

Military chaplains may now affiliate with the NALC with Augsburg Lutheran Churches as their endorsing agent for the U.S. military.

The NALC-Augsburg Lutheran Churches partnership will protect chaplains from being forced to officiate at the blessing of same-sex unions.

NALC retirement and insurance plans are approved, enrollment has begun

Plans could save congregations hundreds of dollars a month

Retirement and health insurance plans for NALC pastors and church employees have been approved by the NALC Executive Council. The plans are ready to receive participants.

Similar plans have been created for Lutheran CORE congregations that are in other church bodies. They are also receiving participants.

NALC pastors and congregations were sent information on how to enroll in the plans by e-mail on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1. Hahn Financial Group is offering live informational “webinars” online for those interested in the plans.

The NALC and Lutheran CORE are working with Hahn Financial Group in Sioux Falls, S.D., to provide the plans. Hahn Financial Group oversees similar retirement plans for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The new Lutheran Benefits medical plan is available as a package with short-term disability insurance, long-term disability insurance, life insurance, critical illness insurance, and access to an employee assistance program.

A person on the health plan will also be able to participate in optional dental and vision plans.

Flexible spending account options are available for health expenses, dependent care expenses, transportation or parking expenses.

Participants also will be able to purchase additional amounts of life insurance, critical illness insurance and accident expense insurance for themselves or their families.

Those who wish to begin the insurance coverage on Dec. 1 must complete and return the necessary forms to Hahn Financial Group by Nov. 11. It is

recommended that those who have met the deductible in their current plan begin the new health plan on Jan. 1.

The health insurance plan will provide coverage similar to or better than that provided by the ELCA Board of Pensions plan. However, unlike the ELCA plan, the NALC plan will not cover elective abortions or partners in same-sex sexual relationships.

Cost comparisons indicate that the packaged insurance costs will be less for almost all congregations compared to the ELCA plan and compared to other health plan options available to congregations. For example, congregations providing coverage for their pastor and family could save hundreds of dollars a month compared to the ELCA plan.

The retirement plan is a 403(b)9 plan. Forty mutual funds have been chosen for the plan to assist pastors and church employees in making the best choices in their financial planning.

The plan is written to enable retirement fund distributions for clergy to be designated as housing allowance for tax purposes in retirement.

Most pastors may transfer any or all of their retirement funds from the ELCA plan to the NALC plan. Pastors who are still serving an ELCA congregation may join and make new contributions to the NALC Benefits Plan, but they may not transfer funds out of the ELCA plan.

Please contact Hahn Financial Group with questions or for more information at 1-800-516-4246 or lutheranbenefits@hahnfinancialgroup.com.

Questions about the plans may also be addressed to Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary at 717-898-0801 or mchavez@thenalc.org.

St. Dysmas, a new NALC congregation, to do ministry inside California prisons

A new ministry is forming within the North American Lutheran Church that is designed to reveal Christ to and through incarcerated members of the Body of Christ. It will be called St. Dysmas of California.

The new congregation is the child of the NALC's Mission Developer for Prison Congregations, Pastor Bill Lundgren. Pastor Lundgren was the pastor of The Community of St. Dysmas, a prison congregation in Maryland for four years.

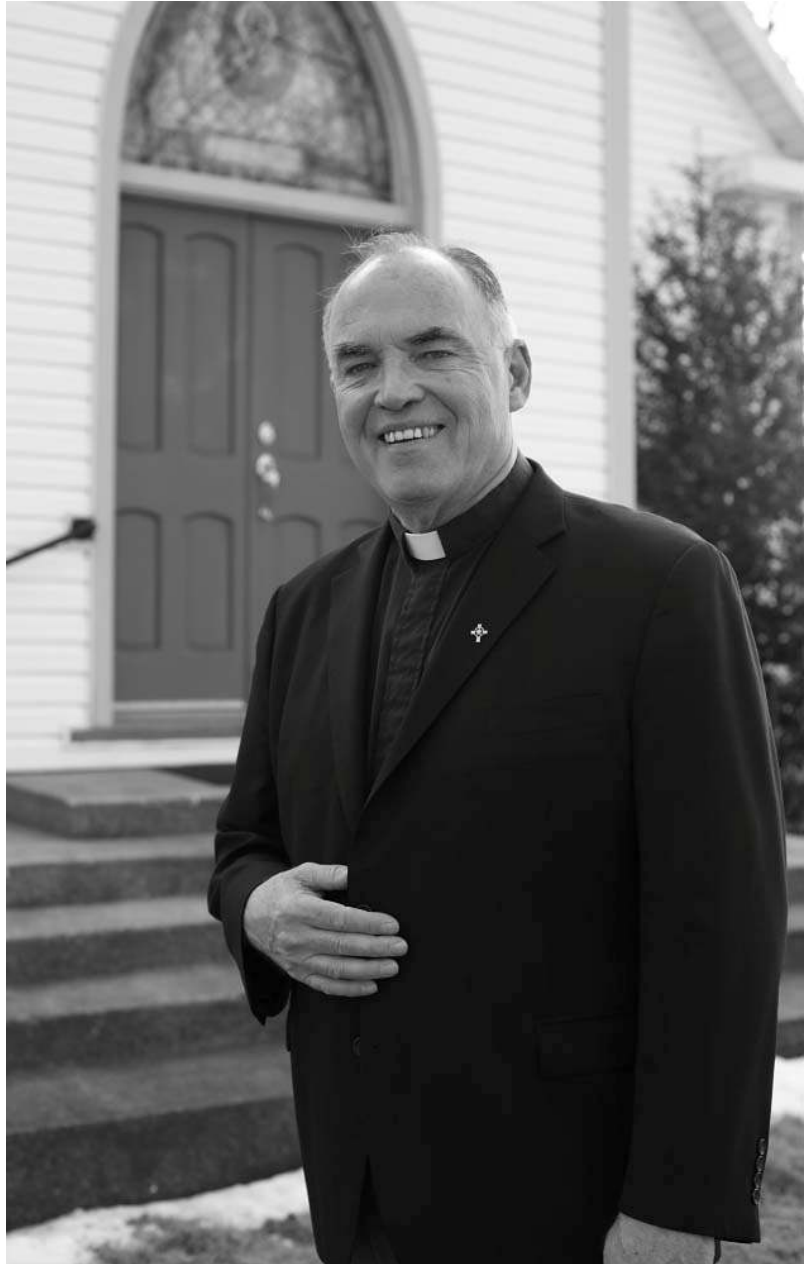
This is the first of a series of articles on this ministry. Each part of the series will deal with the theology, church participation, needs, accomplishments, and mission of this outreach to "the least of these."

By Pastor Bill Lundgren

Dysmas is the name that the early Church understood as belonging to the thief who was crucified next to Jesus — the one who believed Jesus was without sin and did not deserve to be crucified.

From Luke 23:39-43: "One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'"

Dysmas' confession on the cross, and his ascension on the day of his crucifixion, gave the early Church cause to consider him a saint. He is the saint who personifies the



Pastor Bill Lundgren

Photo by Hans Fisher

grace of God through the laborers in God's field who were hired late in the day (Matthew 20:1-16).

Using his name for a congregation within prisons is a reminder to those who will come to worship services, Bible studies, and addiction recovery classes that no greater joy fills the Father than the faith of a repentant heart (Luke 15).

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Prisons offer an excellent opportunity for the NALC to implement its key attributes. Today we look at the attribute of being Mission-Driven:

“Mission-Driven: We believe that the mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel and to make disciples for Christ. We believe that making disciples — in our congregations, in our communities and nations, and around the world — must be a priority of the Church in the present age.”

Since we hold this as true, making disciples in our prisons is a priority as well and for good reason. Satan’s craving to win the souls of those who believe in Christ thrives in a prison’s environment of isolation and punishment. Often, people are released from prison more spiritually and psychologically impaired than when they were arrested for their crime. The need for security to protect volunteers, prison staff and the prisoners themselves causes the environment to be austere and unforgiving. Disciples are needed for the fulfillment of Jesus’ commission, to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in his name (Luke 24:46-47).

Making disciples for Christ within prisons is also necessary because the administration of the prison restricts the access of outside volunteers. They can only enter when there is an approved, scheduled activity. Scheduled activities for a religious “program” are usually limited to 5 or 6 hours per week, with no drop-by’s or drop-ins for pastoral visits or lay fellowship. That leaves about 162 hours per week for Satan to do his work without interference. But for the Christian who is incarcerated, the ones we call “residents,” this time can be used for prayer, evangelism, study and outreach.

The Word of God empowers them to practice their discipleship in the dining hall, in the yard, at their GED classes or with the residents located in their unit. They can bring Christ into the “Hole,” often known as “Solitary,” which is a dark place used to isolate and punish inmates who have misbehaved. The members of a prison congregation can be present with the population inside the prison on a 24-7 basis. Often they speak of Christ to other

prisoners at great personal risk. However, in the end, they make the environment of their imprisonment safer each time Christ is invited in to be the Lord of another’s life.

Web Page Development: Two websites are being developed to bring the ministries of SDC to the world. Both are under development by Everett Winnick, my stepson and a pro at internet applications and network development. The domain names (web addresses) will be:

stdysmasca.org: This will be the home page for the mission development ministry of Saint Dymas of California. It will contain news on site selection, inside services, volunteer training, ministry funding, partnership activities with Prison Congregations of America and Golden State Kairos, mission goals, fund raising and more.

seventytimes7.net: This will be the home page for SDC’s outreach to those who need to forgive someone or to be forgiven. It is a forgiveness devotional site based on the repetition of offerings that Jesus commanded Peter to make (Matthew 18:21-22).

I used the New King James version, which states “seventy times seven,” to emphasize that Jesus picked a large number so that we would realize we must practice our forgiveness devotionally. No one gets it on the first try but our Father in Heaven. Each week a new set of prayers, readings and writings will be waiting to guide the visitor’s forgiveness devotions. An offering of \$1 to \$2 per week will be recommended to underscore their commitment to forgive.

Contributors Needed! Please consider submitting your favorite Scripture verses or books concerning forgiveness, or a personal story on the ways in which forgiveness has brought change to your life. We will maintain complete confidentiality unless you provide written authorization to use your name.

Stay with us in prayer during these initial months, as we seek administrative approvals from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Holy Spirit’s guidance in choosing the prison site for our initial congregation. The Lord is with you always.

The reading of the Holy Scriptures is central to Christian worship

By Pastor Michael G. Tavella

The Father sent the Word into the world as His supreme self-revelation. The Gospel of John tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us to give us life and light. The Word is the Son of God, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, co-equal in divinity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We affirm in the Nicene Creed that the Son is one Being with the Father and is eternally begotten of Him.

The Word is also the reading of the Scriptures in worship and preaching. The evangelical preacher is called upon rightly to divide the Word between the Law and the Gospel so that repentance of sin, forgiveness, and strengthening of faith may occur. The Holy Spirit uses the Word and the Sacraments, which are the Word together with material signs, to create and sustain faith. St. Paul tells us that the Word is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Finally, the written text itself, the canon (a term that refers to the books accepted by the Church as Scripture) of the Old and New Testament, is the Word of God.

This threefold description of the Word is common in Lutheran circles. It is derived from Luther's own theology of the Word and the Confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church.

Luther emphasized the centrality of the Word of God, which he thought (and was right in his assessment) had been neglected and distorted in the life of the Church. He translated the Bible into German, his native tongue; wrote *Church Postils* that provided and still can provide guidance for sermon preparation; and preached often. He stood on the foundation of the Word of God and on it alone in all his teaching, preaching, and writing. He insisted that all essential doctrines of the Church must derive from, and not contradict, the Holy Scriptures. The confessional Lutheran view of the Holy Scriptures is stated in the *Epitome of The Formula of Concord*, Part I of the last of the Lutheran Confessions, "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all

doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged . . ."

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll, asserting when He had finished, that this Scripture is fulfilled in Him. He is the One anointed by the Spirit to bring the Good News that God has come to save His people. The reading of the Old Testament Scriptures in the Church, written in Hebrew with a few instances of Aramaic, derives from the practice of the synagogue. The early Christian Church understood the Old Testament as revealing Christ. When Christians gathered, the Old Testament was read, as in the synagogue. Apostolic letters and other works that were available to them were also read. It was during the early centuries of the Church that the New Testament canon was in formation.

The hearing of the Scriptures then is central to the worship of the Church. In a Lutheran congregation, a lesson is read from the Old Testament (except in the Easter season when the reading is from the book of Acts); from the New Testament, and from one of the four Gospels. A psalm provides an intervenient chant between the first two lessons. The Gradual (coming from the Latin word *gradus* for step, because it was sung from steps in the sanctuary) or Gospel Acclamation, both Scripturally based, provide the bridge to the reading of the Gospel.

Because of its special place of honor in worship, the Gospel is preceded and succeeded by the acclamations of the worshiping community, first *Gloria tibi, Domine*, "Glory to You, O Lord", and afterwards, *Laus tibi, Christe*, "Praise to You, O Christ." Some pastors, when announcing the Gospel, lift up the book from which this lesson is read to show the honor due it and to bring by ritual action this very important moment to the attention of the congregation.

Either a Bible or a lectionary book with all three lessons for every Sunday of the Church year and for festivals is provided on the lectern and the pulpit for

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readers. A lay reader usually reads the first and second lessons. The pastor reads the Gospel and preaches immediately following this climactic Scripture.

The sermon should be rooted in the Scriptures just read. It is the responsibility of the preacher to reflect on the texts and preach from them, rightly dividing Law and Gospel, to a congregation hungering for spiritual refreshment in the midst of the many challenges and difficulties the people face.

The Scriptures should be read so that the people can clearly hear what is being said. Readers should be practiced in the fundamentals of public speaking, which include projected voice, good diction, and clear enunciation. Proper pronunciation of words and names of another language, i.e. Hebrew and Greek, should be well rehearsed.

I remember a lay reader in a parish I served who failed to look at the text before having to read. It was on Pentecost Sunday when he looked too late at all those place names in the lesson from Acts 2 where the descent of the Spirit on the disciples and the amazement of the crowd are described. Realizing his dilemma, in good humor, and desperation, instead of struggling through all of the difficult names, he finally said, “. . . and all those other places.”

It is best if the people listen to the Word without following the written text, though access to the text on an insert or in the bulletin itself is helpful for reference during sermons and for personal reflection.

The translation to be used is often a question that is raised. At one time, the Authorized Version, also known as the King James Version, was *the* version read in Protestant churches and is still used in some. Now we are faced with a host of translations. What should be used? Guidelines should include faithfulness to the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) texts and the quality of the English translation. The basic question is, does the text provide a faithful translation in good modern English?

Paraphrases of the Bible should be avoided in public reading, and also in private reading and Bible studies. In fact, they should be avoided at all times. Paraphrases are more interpretations than translations of the text. Translations with ideological

preferences are to be avoided at all costs. An ideological preference is indicated when, for example, the text avoids “He” for God, when the translation should render the pronoun “He”.

In some Protestant churches the Scriptures are read only in conjunction with the preaching of the sermon. I have heard very good evangelical sermons and participated in respectful worship in these churches; nonetheless, this practice is a downplaying of the importance of the reading of Scriptures in worship. In an evangelical Lutheran Church, this practice should never occur.

Let us not adopt questionable practices that do not reflect our worship tradition. It is true, as Luther teaches us, that we have evangelical freedom with regard to things indifferent (adiaphora). But, we must remember that good order, which Luther also teaches, should prevail. And we must also remember what is essential in worship. Luther vehemently criticized “heavenly prophets” like Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt for their disorderliness which negatively affected their views regarding worship. We must remember that Luther and other evangelical theologians set out on a conservative reform of the Church. The reformers desired to retain tradition and good practice where it did not contradict the Holy Scriptures. Many practices of the Western Church were preserved by Luther and others to the benefit of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. We Lutherans treasure the “Great Tradition” of the Church which took form through its history, especially during the first seven or eight centuries. We are the beneficiaries of this perspective and, as evangelical Lutherans, are entrusted with passing on this legacy. Time-tested practice will endure; fads will fade and disappear.

There is no doubt that with the reading of three lessons in the Liturgy and the emphasis on the importance of preaching, the Word holds a central place in our worship practice. May respect for the Word, its authority, and place in worship also hold a central place in our hearts and minds.

Next month we begin to look at the Biblical infrastructure of the order for public confession and the entrance rite.

Pastor Michael G. Tavella and his wife Pastor N. Amanda Grimmer are pastors of Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Abington, Pa. You may contact him at MGTavella@msn.com.

Bishop Bradosky's address to the Association for Church Renewal

NALC Bishop John Bradosky addressed the Association for Church Renewal meeting Oct. 17 in Washington, D.C. Here is the text of his address:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I have been made aware of your work through Pastor Mark Chavez and your inclusion of Lutheran CORE as one of those bodies working for renewal in the ELCA. We are in this together.

What is the honest assessment of our current state?

Let me begin with the obvious because it remains hidden from the full view of our people and is a source of celebration in our current cultural and political climate. Mainline churches are in a state of decline. The only thing that separates us is the slope of that decline. If you compare our statistics to population growth, we are in far worse shape than our year-to-year decline would lead us to believe.

Baptists, of all types, are not far behind. If you are one of those who enjoys the phrase, "misery loves company," you will be pleased to know that other evangelicals, even the independents, will be joining our ranks soon. Christianity in North America is in a state of decline!

What are the root causes for the decline?

1. The focus on achieving "relevancy" started with an invalid assumption — that the Gospel of Jesus Christ depends on us to make it relevant to the culture. The mission of the church was diverted from the Great Commission and the Great Commandment to the agenda of the culture. By promoting the agenda of the culture, some believed the culture would then be more open to the mission of the church. However, as the church abandoned its mission in favor of speaking out for the culture, there was no need for the culture to respond to the church because the church now adopted the culture's values as its own. The church became mired in the political as a means to attain popularity. Political agendas and activism became the means for demonstrating relevancy. But the result was a church that became less popular and increasingly irrelevant to the culture.



Bishop John Bradosky

2. One of the specific cultural values that undermines the authority, mission and ministry of the church is the preoccupation with evolution and the theory that became dogma regarding the progress of humanity toward positive change, sophistication and therefore superiority over our predecessors. The present is far more valuable than the past, we told ourselves. The values, ideas, lifestyle, philosophies, and lack of religious faith in the present is far superior to the past. The hermeneutic of the present is skepticism for anything in the past.

3. The sense of the transcendent gave way to the systems of salvation we could manufacture for ourselves. Science, technology, medicine and politics led the way. Rather than discuss the nature of the Kingdom, the church was content to settle for socialism or communism, depending on the denominational line. Today there are still many who believe the Kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed will be ushered in on the political

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platform of Democrats, Republicans or Independents. Social engineers and educational systems would take the place of the church in setting values. Government would take over the responsibilities for caring for the poor and hungry, the widows and orphans, the sick and dying.

4. Internally the church adapted by abandoning the authority of Scripture. In order to validate the values of the culture, we had to also abandon the historic interpretation of the Scripture. Seminary professors, in the name of the “historical-critical method,” were free to engage in deconstructive methods of interpretation, revisionist methods and reductionist methods or Gospel minimalism. Those methods obscured the nature of the Christ. Luther wrote, “Let the Bible cease to be heard and soon the remembered Christ becomes an imagined Christ, shaped by the religiosity and the unconscious desires of His worshipers.” “The authority of the Church becomes nothing more than the wisdom of popes and councils . . .” Luther understood that without adherence to the Word, the remembered Christ becomes the imagined Christ that fits our agendas and issues. The mission Jesus gave to His Church is abandoned for the new mission of cultural relevancy, and evangelism that leads people to Christ is abandoned for the sake of leading people to embrace the “cause.” The freedom to redefine sin according to the new values of the culture meant that forgiveness and repentance were also considered unnecessary. The new authority and driving force were feelings and personal experiences. A Savior who offers forgiveness and salvation was once important but now is no longer necessary.

5. What has preoccupied us for decades is teaching the content of issues and agendas rather than the faith. It is no small concern that our people know more about environmental issues than they do about the life of Jesus. We know more about political issues than our confessions. We know more about the economy than we do about ecclesiology, the nature of the Church. We know about social ills but very little about the spiritual ills that plague us. We are aware of world hunger but care little about helping others hunger for God. We are aware of our need to conserve water resources but fail to lead others to the wellspring of the Water of Life, Jesus. We talk about freedom but say little about obedience. We focus on grace but don't see the value of repentance and transformation.

6. The over-institutionalization of our churches has worked to hasten our decline. We have adopted a

corporate model requiring the upward flow of power, money and control to the uppermost levels of our structures, depending on those at the top to address problems and concerns, to produce the changes necessary for renewal and rebirth. What they have succeeded in doing is to suck the life out of the local congregation. The front line for mission and ministry are those stuck in bureaucratic offices who have the least contact with those in need. They are the least effective in delivering what is helpful, but they use every contact to promote the values of their internal culture and insist on conformity with their agendas. As they continued to fail — decreasing in size and financial assets — they resorted to what every dying institution does.

7. Institutional survival has now become the mission. Preserving their existence becomes the most important goal — even if it means compromising the Gospel. Evangelicals who overbuilt their infrastructure are forced to fill the seats by making their message popular. The easiest way to do so is to compromise the Gospel for the sake of a more popular message that is sure to please. The characteristics of institutional survival are defensiveness, deceit, attacks, creating new enemies to blame for failure, and protection strategies. Denial of the truth and maintaining images are everything.

How did we get to this point?

Whenever I speak about this, the most frequently asked question is how did we get to this point? We have to have a reasonable and plausible answer for such questions. My stock answer is — just a little at a time. George Barna addressed this concern some years ago in his book, *The Frog and the Kettle*. This concept of social change is called gradualism. As a pilot, I understand the nature and use of the compass. That analogy is also a good way to describe our situation. If you are only off a few degrees and you are only going five miles, you will still hit your target. If you are only off a few degrees and you are going 500 miles you could miss an entire city. If you are off a few degrees and you are going 5,000 miles, you could miss an entire state or two. This methodology for change is imperceptible but intentional. Those advocating it have a consistent mantra — Why are you worried about the little things? This is insignificant. It won't affect you. You are making a mountain out of a mole hill. By the time we realize how far off course we are, it is too late!

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Where do we go from here?

1. Staying or leaving is not the main issue.
2. Whether people stay or go, we must admit that renewal can't happen without reform.
3. Reform is not going to come until the pain of continuing down the current path is greater than the pain of changing.
4. People cannot stay on the front line of such conflict forever. This is a battle. People are being attacked and left demoralized. They are shell-shocked and suffering from fatigue.
5. While renewal groups can be a safe place for people to share their war stories and pray for one another's war wounds, they will not be able to hold people together endlessly.
6. People need a place to go to be immersed in faithful service, mission and ministry that is bearing fruit.
7. As a result, I think renewal groups are going to have to be a place where the front line has to change regularly. Offering fellowship, sharing, encouragement, spiritual renewal are good, but the development of a battle plan is even better.

The NALC has developed a church culture based on four basic values:

Christ-Centered — Jesus is everything, and the only one we follow is the Christ revealed in the Word. We uphold Biblical authority as the norm for all matters of life and faith, the revealed and transcendent truth. Our Theological Conference in August was titled, "Salvation Today," with the keynote address: "The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus." It was so essential because, through these last several decades, both pastors, in their seminary training, and in congregations, through the preaching of those pastors, our people have become confused regarding salvation! Jesus is unique, exclusive, definitive, normative and absolute. There is no other savior or means of salvation apart from Him. This is counter-cultural in a pluralistic world. Yet it is the truth.

I am reminded of the story of a thirsty cowboy who walked into a saloon. The bartender said, "Care for a drink, stranger?" The cowboy responded: "What are my choices?" The bartender answered: "Yes or No." In a

world that wants all kinds of choices, we have a singular focus on Jesus because there are no other choices. There is only one Lord, one Savior, Jesus!

The second value of the NALC is **Mission-Driven**. We believe the Great Commission is the only mission Jesus gave to His Church. We are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that Jesus commands. We are not defining ourselves in a negative sense by what we oppose. Rather, we are looking forward to doing everything we can to fulfill the Great Commission.

The third value is that we are **Traditionally-Grounded**. We affirm the ecumenical creeds and the faithful witness of the Church across time and space. We seek dialog and fellowship with other Lutheran churches and with faithful Christians of other confessions. We are not trying to reinvent the Church but to remain faithful to the heritage that has made Lutherans a blessing to the entire Body of Christ. We are a part of the legacy of those countless saints who came before us who gave their lives for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus so that we might know Him and worship Him and follow Him by sharing His Gospel until the whole world knows.

The fourth value is that we are **Congregationally-Focused**. The local congregation is the front line for mission and ministry. Everything else we do organizationally should be to support, facilitate and encourage the ministries of local congregations. We will be lean and structure ourselves so that we can keep pastors and congregations connected for best practices, best ideas for ministry, sharing resources, offering support and care, etc. In so doing we have abandoned the corporate model of the upward flow of money, power and control and empowered local leaders and encouraged the development of ministry and mission at the place where it will do the greatest good.

In short, we see ourselves as a part of the Confessing Church movement. For those of you who have not read it yet, I commend the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metrax. Bonhoeffer was a pastor and theologian during World War II. He was a leader of the Confessing Church movement in Germany that opposed the German Church. The German Church had been conscripted by the culture and the authority of political leaders, like Hitler and others, such that it was willing to compromise the truth for the sake of its own survival. As you read it, I believe you too will be struck

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by the similarity in the issues the church was facing then and what we are facing today. The need for the Confessing Church has never been greater.

Bonhoeffer decries the cheap grace the Lutheran Church of Germany was offering people. He describes discipleship with these words: When Christ calls someone, He bids them to come and die.

Bonhoeffer is reminding us that the cross of Christ — His sacrificial love for the salvation of the world — must be manifest in our own lives. Christ's love and constant presence give us the capacity to give our life away. It is at the cross that sin is forgiven, salvation is received and new life begins.

Discipleship is complete commitment to Jesus. Every part of our life has to die. Our sin, our pride, our worry and concerns, our selfish desire, our materialism, our commitment to buildings, organizations and institutions — all have to die. The only way that you can truly experience life is to die. It is only through dying that we truly live. Bonhoeffer held on for as long as he could, but in the end he had to leave the German Church to lead the Confessing Church movement.

The issue of staying or leaving has to give way to the greater concern of boldly confessing Christ even in the hostile environment of the institutional church culture or the American culture!

Where is the hope for our future?

There is hope. Christianity is still the fastest growing faith in the world. It is just not growing in the West or in the Northern Hemisphere. It is growing in the East and in the Southern Hemisphere.

In my trip to Ethiopia this past February and in subsequent dialogs with leaders from Ethiopia, I have learned several important things regarding the success of the church regarding growth, evangelism and mission. Ethiopia is a place where the Church is growing faster than any other place in the world. Here is the surprise: Lutherans are at the forefront of that growth.

What they have confirmed as reasons for that growth in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, are:

1. Complete reliance on the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

2. The essential nature of prayer.

3. Personal ownership of the Great Commission. The real vocation of every Christian is to fulfill the Great Commission. Everything else you do with your life is an avocation that serves your primary purpose. . . . Personal responsibility for the Great Commission.

4. Bold proclamation of the Gospel — uninhibited by the culture or political correctness.

5. Believing use of the Scriptures — the Bible as normative for their faith and life.

6. Salvation in Christ alone — no other means of salvation.

7. Focus on Discipleship — following Christ obediently.

8. Connect acts of love and care with the sharing of the Gospel.

9. Lay involvement is not only important but essential. Lay people have primary areas of responsibility — catechists, evangelists, pastoral assistants, caring ministries, etc. Demonstration of the priesthood of all believers.

10. Mentoring and education — they want to learn more.

11. Trusting in the Hand of God to work — not our own hands. Our hands respond to Him, and we place our hands in His.

12. The best news of all: They have a mission to reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus and that includes us!

We need one another. We need to work together to strengthen our witness to the world.

I just returned from Rome, where I was amazed at the sensitivity to work together to overcome the passive acquiescence of the church to cultural values that have watered-down or destroyed the faith of those who were once faithful. I was amazed at the honesty about the inherent problems of institutionalization that weakens or diverts the focus of faith in Jesus. The new ecumenical movement must not be simply mutual support or understanding our difference, but a new commitment to unite under the banner of the Confessing Church movement — to boldly confess Christ. It is to that end that we must labor and commit our lives. May the Lord continue to bless and guide you in your work.

An effective stewardship pledge campaign model

In Pursuit of the Great Commission

By Pastor Don Brandt

When a congregation finds itself struggling with its on-going finances, its outreach efforts are usually undermined and/or neglected. Strong financial stewardship is important if a congregation wants to stay focused on outreach. Given the current national economy, too many congregations have fallen into a kind of financial “survival mode.”

In a recent seminary continuing education class I taught, there was tremendous interest in a particular financial pledge campaign model I shared with the pastors in attendance. In my over 30 years of parish ministry, this is the single most effective model I have ever used for an annual financial pledge campaign.

This particular campaign model was inspired by a stewardship program that originally came out of the Methodist tradition. I came across a brochure describing this model back in 1996. It was (and is) called the “Quill” program, and was (and is) based on recruiting your most faithful givers to write personal letters (not e-mails) to their friends in the congregation. In these letters their friends are encouraged to fill out and return the enclosed pledge cards to the church, indicating their financial pledge for the coming year. Based on the brochure alone, it was easy to see the wisdom of such an approach for my congregation’s pledge campaign.

So that’s the *concept* in a nutshell; here are some of the *details* of how I adapted this concept for my congregation’s annual campaign:

Step One: Recruit individuals and couples as letter-writers. These would be members you either know or suspect are your most faithful stewards. Be sure your recruits are not limited to your high-income members. Faithful financial stewardship, as we all know, is not about the dollar amount of a given pledge; it’s about what percentage of income the pledge represents. Your assignment for these “recruits” is for them to write a carefully-crafted letter which will be mailed to their friends. This letter (about one page in length) is both a testimony regarding their own financial stewardship and an invitation to their friends to make a pledge for the

coming year. They will be mailing the same letter to every person on their “friends list,” but each letter will be personally addressed and signed. Their letter will be shared with the pastor and/or Stewardship Committee chair, and the church office will receive their list of friends *before* their letters are mailed. This way no one will be receiving a personal invitation to pledge from more than one friend. Give your writers both a deadline for determining their friends list, and a subsequent deadline for completing their letter.

Step Two: Give your writers ideas for the content of their letters. Provide your writers with ideas, possible Scripture passages, and maybe even anecdotes which might help them craft their letters. Caution: Make clear these ideas are strictly optional. These letters need to be personal, not “corporate.” In fact, encourage your writers to be very transparent in their letters, even sharing what percentage of their income they will be pledging to the work and ministry of your congregation. (This is especially effective if they will be *increasing* their pledge for the coming year.) Most of your writers will balk at the idea of sharing their level of giving, fearing they might appear a bit self-righteous by “going public”. But encourage them to do this anyway, with the understanding that the ultimate decision is theirs.

Why encourage them to share something this personal? Because some of the most powerful stewardship testimonies include this kind of information. When members discover (for example) that a friend actually gives 10 percent of his/her income to the church, they will often be inspired to seriously re-evaluate their own level of giving. And, by the way, all pledges are still confidential, with the writers never learning how much their friends end up pledging.

Step Three: The coordination of the logistics from the church office. Make sure the church office secretary (and volunteers) are organized to provide the necessary coordination for this campaign. When it comes to the logistics, this campaign is relatively “top-down.” Details handled by the church office include:

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A. Receiving the list of friends each writer has come up with. Lists need to be cross-checked to avoid names on more than one list. Encourage your writers to each come up with ten to fifteen members they know on a first-name basis for their lists.

B. Collecting the actual letters once they are written. Initially, the office only needs one original copy from each writer. Check letters for clarity, spelling, etc. (Don't be too legalistic about this.) If there are suggestions for making minor improvements to the text of a given letter, indicate what those suggestions are to the writer. Then ask for a second and final version back within a few days.

C. Receiving the final draft of the letters. Writers should type their letters with each letter being personally addressed and signed by hand. Be sure writers know in advance if any of their friends were removed from their list because they were also on someone else's list.

D. Provide the letter writers with blank envelopes large enough to include their letter, a pledge card, and pledge card envelope to enclose. Ask the writers to hand-write their own return address and their friend's name and address on each letter envelope.

E. Collate and mail the envelopes you receive from your writers from the church office. Each envelope, then, will have three items: The personally addressed and signed letter, the pledge card (including instructions on the card indicating how to fill it out and when to return it to church), and an envelope to use in returning the completed pledge card.

F. *Very important.* Not all of your members will be on somebody's list of friends. Send *these* members the letter your pastor thinks is the most effective among those written. Secure the permission of this writer to use his/her letter in a mailing to the rest of the congregation. Make any minor changes to the letter that you and the writer deem necessary for this larger audience.

These letters need not be personally addressed in the text of the letter. Instead you can address to either "Dear Friends," "Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ," etc. However, ask your writer if he/she would

be willing to personally hand-sign these letters. The mailing envelopes for these letters would be addressed by the office staff and/or volunteers, not by the writer. These should be on church stationery. (Note: All your mailings in this campaign should be first-class postage.)

G. Be sure you've thought through how you want to receive completed pledge cards; whether by mail, in the offering plate, at a special stewardship dinners, or all of the above. Make sure you have clear directions about this on your pledge cards and in your weekly bulletins/newsletters. As for your deadline for returning pledge cards, ask your writers to also mention this date in the text of their letters.

When I look back on the first time I used this particular campaign model (and don't use this model in consecutive years), I have two special memories:

First, going over the first drafts of the letters with my Stewardship Committee chair and being literally moved to tears by how inspirational they were.

Second, my joy at the results of this campaign. We ended — compared to the previous year — with an approximately 35 percent increase in both the total dollar amount pledged and the number of households actually pledging. And these were general fund pledges, with no major, new needs highlighted as a reason (or special motivation) for members to participate.

As perhaps you've guessed, what makes this pledge campaign so effective is the public revelation that some of your members truly do give sacrificially. All of us struggle with the "80/20" challenge: Close to 80 percent of our giving comes from close to 20 percent of our members. Too few of our people know the joy and satisfaction that comes from faithful stewardship. The most powerful way to introduce this to them is through the witness and testimony of a trusted friend.

Pastor Don Brandt serves as senior pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore. He writes this monthly column, "In Pursuit of the Great Commission," for the NALC News and Lutheran CORE Connection. You may contact him at DonB@oursaviorssalem.org. More information on this model for stewardship is available at www.quillinc.com.

Update on New York congregation flooded by Hurricane Irene

By Pastor Michael Tamorria

As reported on the NALC website and the October newsletter, St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Middleburgh, N.Y., was flooded by approximately four feet of water on Sunday, August 28, due to Hurricane Irene. This is an update on our situation:

St. Mark's has been worshipping in the Fellowship Hall while other parts of our building are being restored. The Fellowship Hall was the first area to be completed, in order to facilitate worship and the use of our building for our own ministries and as a community meeting place, since many other of the usual meeting sites in Middleburgh were also flooded and remain unavailable.

We are mostly finished with the remainder of the Ministry Center, with some painting and re-installation of doors and molding remaining to be done. Our office computers and Internet are up and running again.

We are currently refurbishing the pews in the sanctuary. They have been stripped and sanded and await staining and re-installation. The organ is still disassembled, and the chancel area needs work. We are hoping, however, to be able to return to worshipping in our sanctuary for Advent.

We have not been neglecting our ministries and our community while doing all this.

The second floor of the Ministry Center remained unscathed, and that is where our town's Food Pantry and Clothing Closet are located. They have been busy operations. We are also assisting



Flood damage at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Middleburgh, N.Y., following Hurricane Irene.

individuals, both members and non-members, with rebuilding, moving, and counseling.

In addition, we are assisting people in networking with and navigating through the various governmental and community programs which are available, including Lutheran Disaster Response. We are continuing our worship and Sunday School, and recently baptized four children and welcomed 11 to first Communion.

All this would not be possible without hours of volunteer labor, both from our own members and from various other individuals and work teams, Lutheran and non-Lutheran alike.

We also have been the grateful recipients of nearly \$10,000 so far in special donations from congregations and individuals outside St. Mark's as well as our own members, while regular giving has remained strong.

God promises, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isaiah 43:2) St. Mark's has passed through the waters and our God has indeed been with us. May His name be praised!