

## ‘A Word of Counsel to the Church on the Sanctity of Nascent Life’ adopted by Joint Commission

The Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine of the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE has adopted “A Word of Counsel to the Church on the Sanctity of Nascent Life.”

The NALC Executive Council and NALC Bishop John Bradosky have received this document and have approved its contents, and now commend it to the church as an educational and theological resource.

“At the constituting Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church, a resolution was presented that called for the preparation of a statement on abortion. The Convocation referred the matter to the Executive Council, which, in its turn, referred it to the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine,” explained the Rev. Paull E. Spring, NALC Bishop Emeritus and a member of the joint commission, in a letter sent to NALC congregations with a copy of the statement.

The Joint Commission, after studying the matter, has written and adopted “A Word of Counsel to the Church on the Sanctity of Nascent Life.” The Joint Commission includes members of both Lutheran CORE and the NALC and serves both bodies.

“This document is a word of counsel to the church,” explained Bishop Spring. “One of the responsibilities of the Joint Commission is the preparation of ‘educational and other resources’ for our church (NALC Constitution 12.02). Resources like this ‘word of counsel’ are not teaching statements as described in the NALC Constitution (7.03) nor are they social statements as that term is used in some

other church bodies. Rather they are materials intended to support study and reflection by congregations and pastors of our church.”

“This ‘word of counsel’ breathes a deeply Biblical spirit. Throughout, there are specific Biblical references — creation, sin and forgiveness, the incarnation, and the annunciation. Explicit reference is made to the redemptive work of Christ. The document reflects the Confession of Faith of the North American Lutheran Church that the Bible is “the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life,” Bishop Spring said.

“This is a season that reminds us for all seasons and in every circumstance that nascent life is precious to God and must be just as precious and holy to each of us as well,” said NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

“I am deeply grateful to all who contributed to this statement, but especially to the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin for accepting the primary responsibility for this assignment. I am equally grateful to Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring for coordinating the effort of the Commission for Theology and Doctrine,” Bishop Bradosky said. “I pray for your careful consideration of this document and your faithful response to all the implications of the guidance it provides.”

Congregations and pastors of the NALC are invited to use this document as a resource for study and reflection on this important issue before the church and in our society.

# ‘The Lord Is with You’

## *A Word of Counsel to the Church - The Sanctity of Nascent Life*

**The Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine  
North American Lutheran Church  
Lutheran CORE**

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The beginning of human existence, i.e., nascent life, carries in it the fullness of the genetic code, the complete chromosomal material of an individual. The strengths and characteristics given to us by God have not yet blossomed for all the world to see, yet they are fully present in the beauty of His love. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5) Luther’s Small Catechism proclaims, “I believe that God has created me and all that exists,” so in faith we continue to proclaim that our life, and every life, comes from God and belongs to God. In our earthly dependency upon the womb of our mothers for protection, nourishment, and love from the first moments of our lives, we see in the creation of each life the shape of faith. We will always be fully dependent upon God for life, for shelter, and for mercy — the God who uses men and women to bring forth every generation of His creation.

How we in the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE speak about the dignity of nascent life is indicative of so much more. As the fullness of God’s mercy calls us into newness in each day, we come to know that no day in our lives is beyond His care. God himself has given us a pattern by which we know His love: the conception, gestation, and birth of our Lord Jesus. As we reflect upon when life begins and what life means, we look to what God has done in sending His Son to live among us from conception, to death, to resurrected life.

In the Annunciation of the Good News given to Mary, the Mother of our Lord, we come to know the gift of every life in a new way, and we come to know the holiness of her womb as a sanctuary of mercy

for all humankind. She who is our Mother in the faith shelters the One who is the Savior of the world with her very body, a model of love beyond all fear, of obedience beyond all personal security, of faith in the One who is yet unseen.

In the self-emptying (kenotic) movement of God in the incarnation, He was never more vulnerable, more helpless than when He was *in utero*, swaddled in amniotic fluid. He was also never more intimately protected, swaddled in the myriad layers of a mother’s love. It is the vision of this love that is ever so needed in this day — a death defying love, an eternal love, a fierce love, a sacrificing love. It is this vision that we are called to bear for the sake of generations to come. For in the disordered loving of a fallen world that removes sexual intercourse from the fidelity, trust, and delight of the marriage bed, there will continue to be the littlest among us, made in the image and likeness of God, who without a holy love, will be unprotected from the lies that say they are neither human nor of any value. In a time in human history when the laws of many nations sanction the destruction of new lives simply because they are an inconvenience, the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE, and all who belong to the Body of Christ, are called to teach and preach the message that the Lord who created the heavens and the earth, the Lord, who in the power of the Holy Spirit grew in His mother’s womb, the Lord, who in obedience gave His life for all, The Lord is with you.

“The Lord is with you.” This is what we are called to speak to every woman with a child in her womb. The Lord is with you, regardless of the circumstances of your pregnancy. We urge the NALC to commit itself as a church, as the Body of our Lord on earth, along with those joined with it in mission in Lutheran CORE, to be with you as well. We seek to attend to your needs, to help you, to guard you, and to guide you that you may bear your child in a community of love. Whether a husband and wife, or a mother alone raises that child or puts

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that child into the arms of another family, we will provide spiritual counsel so that parents and child will have the abundant life that Christ Jesus has promised them. We do not want a woman who is overwhelmed by the news of an unintended pregnancy to abort an innocent child, a child whose cries for life cannot yet be heard, a child who is of great value to God, regardless of the circumstances of the child's birth. Whatever the circumstances of the pregnancy, the termination of the life of their child will not make a mother's or father's life better.

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Apart from victims of sexual violence, the NALC and Lutheran CORE should call to repentance all men and women who have engaged in sexual behaviors outside of marriage. Men and women who are not married to each another and who have used their procreative abilities irresponsibly and then have chosen to abort a child, as well as husbands and wives who have aborted children whom they do not want, are called to confession, contrition, and amendment of life. God wants us to know His joy, and until we acknowledge our sin and throw ourselves upon His mercy, we can never live rightly. The wanton destruction of a human life for matters of one's own convenience is sin. The

casual use of abortion as a final solution for a conception born of recreational sex is sin. The intimidation and emotional blackmail to undergo an abortion that women have received from the men who have impregnated them is sin.

The church also has great concern for those among us, who under the advice, counsel, or persuasion of family and/or medical personnel, have aborted a life *in utero* as a result of rape, incest, severe abnormalities of fetus, or endangerment to the life of the mother. In these cases, we as a church seek to be a vessel of compassion and consolation. Even in the most difficult situation, the termination of the pregnancy will not necessarily bring an end to the intensity of the current pain. The end of any of new life, even when it comes to be the only apparent solution that one believes can be endured, will still carry layers of sorrow. Again, we urge the NALC to commit itself as a church body, along with its partners in Lutheran CORE, to provide pastoral care to all parties who are involved, for there are no decisions in such times that will be without familial grief. We seek not to condemn but to console. As anger, abandonment, regret, and the depths of despair each come in their turn, so the mercy of our ever-present God will need to be spoken. The Lord is with you. The Lord is still with you.

The rationales, however, for legalizing abortions in North America are far from these limited cases of "therapeutic" abortion. The arguments have changed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries from easing the burdens of the poor on the society, to the right of a woman to have autonomy over her own body (Roe v. Wade; Morgentaler v. Her Majesty the Queen, Supreme Court of Canada, 1976), to sex-selection of children from cultures that value male progeny over female, to simply one of economic gain, (i.e., not wanting to support another child). In too many cases, legalized abortion has simply become a form of retroactive birth control. Abortion dehumanizes and diminishes all who are involved. It affects the father, who has lost what it means to be a guardian to his family and who has lost the learning that comes from a relationship in which spirituality and sexuality are not divorced. It affects the mother, whose denial may break down if she later conceives and bears a child, or is later

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unable to conceive a child, or whose guilt may spiral into the bondage of shame as she seeks to keep her abortion a secret. At last, it affects the child, the blessed child, a living human presence who is denied the fullness of body that was intended for him in this life and in the age to come.

Legalization of abortion puts the state at odds with the historic witness of the church, and so we are called to listen again to the Word of God as proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures, the wisdom of the Church Fathers, and the insight of the Reformers as we seek to follow Christ faithfully in our day. The *Didache* clearly speaks the law as stated in the fifth commandment to the issues of abortion and infanticide in the ancient world, “Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion, nor again shall thou kill it when it is born.”<sup>1</sup> *The Epistle of Barnabas* speaks of those who seek to end the life of one *in utero* as “killers of the child, who abort the mold of God.”<sup>2</sup> The Nicene Creed professes that Jesus is fully human and fully divine from the moment of His conception and in doing so declares that human life begins at conception.<sup>3</sup> Again and again the Psalter sings that fearfully and wonderfully made, we are the work of God’s hands (Ps 139:14). John Calvin, in concert with the early Fathers, regards an unborn child as “already a human being.”<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther regards procreation as “the work of God” and speaks of those who kill the growing fetus as an example of the wickedness of human nature.<sup>5</sup> The witness of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is clear: There is no life that is beyond God’s care, beginning at the moment of conception. The child *in utero* is not simply the possession of the father or the mother, for each nascent life is the handiwork of God. “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” (Psalm 139:15).

The North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE strive to witness to the all-encompassing love of God in early 21st century North America, when nearly 50 million abortions have been legally performed since 1973 in the United States and 1988 in Canada. We urge the NALC and Lutheran CORE to commit not only to protecting the next generation of children during those first exquisite nine months of life, but to helping those for whom abortion mars their procreative histories. As parents

come to healing through the counsel and ministries of the church, their witness will be invaluable. In the renewal of their faith, the lies that were told against the littlest among us will come to an end. As their voices then sound within the assembly of all who believe that He who is the Savior of the world is fully human and fully divine from the moment of His conception, so we come yet again to understand the giftedness of the creation of our own bodies. May each of us seek to live out the dignity with which we were created, so that our lives as the enfleshment of God’s love will bear witness to His love for all the world.

December 14, 2012

### Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine

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<sup>1</sup>*Didache* 2:2.

<sup>2</sup>*The Epistle of Barnabas* 19:5.

<sup>3</sup>The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) is explicit, “We confess the Holy Virgin to be the Mother of God because God the Word was made flesh, and became man from the moment of conception.” See also the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VII.10, “Therefore we believe teach, and confess that the Son of man according to his human nature is really (that is, in deed and in truth) exalted to the right hand of the omnipotent majesty and power of God, because he was assumed into God when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb and his human nature was personally united with the Son of the Most high.” *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 488.

<sup>4</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, trans. Charles Bingham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 3:41,42.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* vol. 4. ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1964), 304.

# Bishop comments on message on the sanctity of nascent life

Advent is a season pregnant with meaning and the most appropriate time to release our statement on nascent life. This is a season dealing with Biblical texts that remind us of God's creative power at work in the miracle of conception. We are forced to face the struggles involved with accepting God's will for marriage, pregnancy, and the essential community of a loving family.

Advent is about hopeful expectation, waiting, watching and preparing. Every pregnancy requires substantial change. It demands a reordering of our priorities. It calls our attention to the details of life, what we eat, and how we rest. It requires training, exercise and practice for the conclusion of the process. There is no promise that it will be fast and easy. On the contrary, it will be laborious and painful. Without doubt, the day will come, and we live with that certainty.

The Word reminds us that Mary and Joseph listened to the proclamation of God's will through the angel that appeared to them. Mary was troubled, bewildered and afraid. Joseph was concerned about what others would think, and he wondered what his response should be. In spite of the fact that they couldn't see all the pieces of this puzzle, they still believed and trusted the Word of God that came to them. They believed what they heard and they responded obediently.

That is how faith begins: we hear, we believe, and we respond obediently.

Our preparation for receiving a child into our lives begins by making a place for them in our hearts. We make a place for that new life in our relationships. Then we make a place for them in our homes — a bed, a crib and a nursery. We prepare by securing car seats, changing tables, high chairs, strollers, blankets, clothing, diapers, formula, diaper bags, and toys — the list seems endless.

That process is the same for biological parents as for those who decide to adopt their children. This



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## *From the Bishop*

**Bishop John Bradosky**

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process of preparation helps us to practice putting this new life ahead of our own. It is a way to practice the selfless love necessary to nurture a new life. Regardless of the cost, we are willing to give all we can to provide the best that we can. So too, our faith starts by making a place for Jesus in our hearts. That's what Mary and Joseph did when she heard the Good News.

Martin Luther writes, "Let us, then, meditate upon the Nativity just as we see it happening in our own babies. I would not have you contemplate the deity of Christ, the majesty of Christ, but rather His flesh. Look upon the Baby Jesus. Divinity may terrify man. Inexpressible majesty will crush him. That is why Christ took on our humanity, save for sin, that He should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor He should console and confirm."

This is a season that reminds us for all seasons and in every circumstance that nascent life is precious to God and must be just as precious and holy to each of us as well. I am deeply grateful to all who contributed to this statement, but especially to the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin for accepting the primary responsibility for this assignment. I am equally grateful to Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring for coordinating the effort of the Commission for Theology and Doctrine. I pray for your careful consideration of this document and your faithful response to all the implications of the guidance it provides.

May this Advent season deepen the joyous wonder of your Christmas celebration!

# Looking Over the Overlooked

*A Christmas Message from NALC Bishop John Bradosky*

During the beginning of this Advent season, I was speaking at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania General Assembly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As our driver transported us from our hotel to the event and back, we were listening to Advent and Christmas music on the ELCT radio station. I looked around at people who were preparing to celebrate Christmas, many of them herders of goats and cows. As I saw the poverty of their lives, I thought about how many Advent and Christmas seasons I had experienced and had never once given them a thought. I was instantly reminded of the shepherds in the Christmas narrative.

If there was ever a fellowship of the forgotten, the shepherds were it. They were the last people you'd expect God to notice.

First, they were religious outcasts. They couldn't attend all the feasts and holy days — they had to watch their sheep. They couldn't offer all the appropriate sacrifices. They were nomads in search of grass and water.

Second, the shepherds were social outcasts. The only group lower on the social scale were the lepers. The shepherds' honesty and integrity were so questionable that they were not even allowed to testify in a court of law. The Talmud instructed people not to give help to heathens or to shepherds. It was a lonely, wearisome, boring, tedious and occasionally dangerous job. They had



*An African shepherd named Moses with his goats. (Photo by Alona Westberg)*

a lot of contact with sheep but not much interaction with people. They were not the kind of people you hoped your daughter would marry. Martin Luther writes, "It was a mean job, watching flocks by night. Common sense calls it low-down work, and the men that do it are regarded as trash!" It was a difficult life. Few thought of their lives as making a difference, having any significance.

In the musical *Child of the Promise* the song *Nothing Ever Happens to a Shepherd* captures what it was like for shepherds:

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*It's cold outside in this God-forsaken place and we're stuck here with a thousand sheep.  
While life is exciting for everybody else, the highlight of our day is sleep.  
It's lonely out here in this isolated job.  
Our position is without esteem.  
We're socially challenged.  
We're society's scourge.  
We're not exactly every woman's dream.  
Shepherds have a humble purpose.  
Of our fate few people care.  
Sometimes I wonder if God knows we exist.  
If he does he's forgotten where.  
Nothing ever happens to a shepherd.  
Life is boring as can be.  
While exciting things occur all over the world, nothing ever happens to me.*

In spite of this, the Christmas narrative describes the angel's face-to-face encounter with the forgotten.

Wouldn't it have made more sense for Jesus' birth to be announced to the most important people of the world — the political leaders, kings and governors, the religious high priests and rabbis, the wealthy merchants and business leaders, the powerful military leaders and soldiers, and the news media and talk show hosts? Yet none of them were invited!

To whom does God announce the birth of His Son? Who does He invite to come and see the new baby? A bunch of sheep herders! There is only one announcement of Christ's birth recorded in the Scriptures, only one invitation from God to anyone to come and visit Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus. And it goes to a bunch of shepherds!

Not only does God share the Good News with the shepherds, but knowing what I just wrote about the nature of shepherds, isn't it amazing that Jesus calls Himself "The Good Shepherd?" *Good* and *Shepherd* don't belong together. It is an oxymoron, yet that is how Jesus describes Himself. He calls His sheep by name and His sheep hear His voice and obey. He cares for them and at great risk to Himself, He will seek and save the lost and those in grave danger.

Paul writes, "Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (1 Corinthians 1:26-30)

The good news is that the shepherds discovered that even if you are not one of the beautiful people — not wealthy, powerful, influential — on the fringes of social status and not even very religious, you are still special to Him! He came to the shepherds to remind us that there is room for everyone at the manger. There is room for not just the best and the brightest but the most humble and for those who think they are the least.

God sends in the angels. They speak the Good News:

*"Fear not for unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will toward all people" (Luke 2:10b-14).*

Luther writes, "It is a great miracle that the shepherd should have believed this message. They might have easily thought to themselves, who are we that the whole host of heaven should be marshaled for us and all the kings on earth and dwellers in Jerusalem should be passed by. I know I would have appealed to common sense and said who am I compared with God, angels and kings? But the Holy Spirit who preached through the angels caused the shepherds to believe. It is pure wonder that enters into the heart of man. Our God begins with angels and ends with shepherds."

Finally, the Christmas narrative tells us of the faithfulness of the forgotten. The first names in the guest book belong to the shepherds. After the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph and Jesus, they began to tell everyone one they could. They began to make an even greater impact on the lives of others and on the entire world.

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# Bishop Bradosky's Christmas message

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The story of the shepherds has been told countless times throughout these centuries. They were really the first evangelists — the first preachers — proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. “And everyone who heard it wondered at those things which the shepherds told them” (Luke 2:18).

It is not enough that we just hear about Jesus or come to the manger and say, “how sweet,” reducing Christmas to nothing more than sentimental feelings. If Jesus is not born in our hearts, if hope is not unleashed in our souls, then we miss His reason for coming. Even more, we learn from God's attention to the shepherds that we would do well to spend time looking over the overlooked in our world.

In His ministry, Jesus insisted that we reach out to the overlooked. If we resist them, we resist Him. But when we reach out to them, we reach out to Him. He said, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:35-36a, 40).

The overlooked today come in many categories. They are the elderly, outcast, and homeless. They are the unappreciated and challenged. They are the untouchable, the addicts, and the diseased. They are infected with AIDS. They are convicted felons. They are the battered spouses and neglected children. They are migrant workers. Essentially, the overlooked are the ones you and I don't “see” in our everyday lives. Just like the shepherds, all are invited to worship. All are invited to “come and see.” By the grace of God, each one of us is welcomed.

As I interacted with the people on the streets of Tanzania and thought of the shepherds, I asked myself, when was the last time I sent a kind word to a cook at a restaurant or thanked a busboy or

dishwasher? When was the last time I shook the hand of a hotel maid or the person who cleaned my car? When was the last time I spoke to the garbage man or left a thank-you note for my postman? Have I ever spoken up for the developmentally or physically disabled and promised to support their presence in my community in a group home? When was the last time I went to a hospice to visit a patient who simply had no one to visit with them, or paused for a moment at the nurse's station and thanked the people who care for others?

Stop for a minute and think of the people you are not seeing, people who are behind the scenes at work, serving, struggling and trying to survive. God doesn't give preference to any group or class. He does not discriminate on the basis of intelligence, education, wealth, profession, political power, or social standing. The shepherds remind us that Jesus is the Savior of all.

What happened next? The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told to them. Luther writes, “They did not despise their service but took it up again where they left off with all faithfulness and I tell you that no bishop on earth ever had so fine a crook as those shepherds.” After Christmas, we too will return to our “fields and flocks.” Let us go, like the shepherds, forever changed, transformed by the experience of hearing the Gospel of Jesus, coming to Him, believing in Him, and proclaiming Him as Savior.

We can return to “business as usual” at the same places, but not as the same people. This Christmas and in the days that follow if you want to express your devotion to Jesus then make a connection with those most often overlooked. Look again and touch their lives with encouragement and praise. What awaits you will be an even greater gift, the gift of Christmas from the shepherds' perspective.

May the season of Advent and Christmas fill your hearts with joyous anticipation of time spent looking over and engaging the overlooked.

**Bishop John F. Bradosky**

# Advent Expectation

Advent began with the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."*

— Jeremiah 33:14-16

In the beloved Advent hymn, we sing, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." Expectation is surely one of the themes of this season of preparation, repentance and longing. As did the prophets, we today are to yearn for the coming of the Lord — in joyful expectation.

The difficulty with having a season of expectation is that we are not good at waiting. We tend to want what we want — *Now!* Instant gratification is the way of the world and, sadly, the way of most of us Lutheran Christians. When we are told to patiently wait — to journey in hopeful expectation — most today would say, "Why bother? It probably won't happen anyway."

And isn't that how most of us live our lives — as if Jesus won't come, anyway? Already in the time of the apostles, the faithful were beginning to tire of waiting and patiently hoping for the return of Jesus the Christ. Today, while the Church in her liturgy prays, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus," we go about our busyness as if we are indifferent to His coming. And, indeed, many of us are indifferent. Many of us simply do not expect Jesus will return — at least, not in our lifetimes!

The reality of Advent, however, is that we are not just looking expectantly for Jesus' so-called "second coming." In Advent, we prepare for the many ways that Christ comes to us — chiefly through the Means of Grace, in Word and Sacrament. We are to walk through our days looking forward to Sunday, the Lord's Day, on which our Lord comes to us again and anew in the Word — written, read and preached — and in His real presence — broken and poured out for us — in the Lord's Supper.

But do we live our lives expecting He will come to us during the worship of the community each and every



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## *Ministry Matters*

### **Pastor David Wendel**

Assistant to the Bishop  
for Ministry and Ecumenism

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Sunday? Do we hurry to worship on Sunday morning full of joyful expectation that our Lord will come, incarnate in Word and Sacrament? If that were our expectation, if we waited all week for the chance to receive our Lord as He comes to us on Sunday, wouldn't we show up? Still, three out of 10 Lutherans do not show up on Sunday. Lukewarm Lutheran attitudes toward Sunday worship may mean many things, but one thing it may indicate is that we do not really expect anything to happen during worship. It may indicate that we do not expect our Lord will come.

Bishop Bradosky has reflected in several venues on what he learned in Ethiopia. I would like to offer one of the things I learned in Tanzania during our recent visit there. Without doubt, the Lutherans in Tanzania pray fervently. But unlike many of us Lutherans in North America, in Tanzania, they expect that God will act, will answer, will come! Time after time, they witnessed to us how they had prayed and then had waited, fully expecting that God would respond. They never presumed to know how God would act, but they waited and hoped, knowing that the living God would hear their prayer and intervene in accordance with His will. I left Tanzania having been "schooled" in hopeful expectation, especially with regard to prayer.

In that regard, I hope that we can all learn from our brothers and sisters in Tanzania. I hope that we can let Advent be Advent — not rushing to our celebration of the Christ-mass, but enjoying this time of expectation, repentance and preparation. I hope that as we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," we will truly expect that Jesus will come — this Sunday, as we gather to receive God's Holy Word and the blessed Sacrament of the Altar — as well as at the time when He will come again in power and glory to judge the world in righteousness. May the Lord bless us all this Advent season with His most merciful coming!

# Greetings from missionaries in Ecuador

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We give thanks to God Almighty, the sustainer and giver of life.

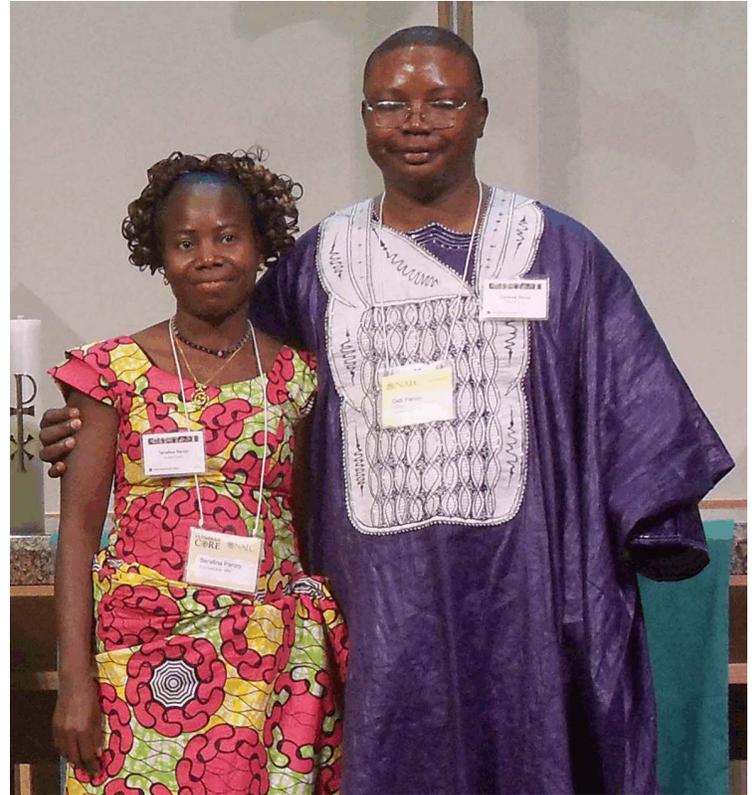
It has been a year since we came to Ecuador and began serving as NALC missionaries. Time goes by so quickly! It is hard to believe that we can face all the worries and pressures of living in this country, but God is so good you can't imagine it.

We also thank Him because of your love and generous gifts that make our ministry of witnessing about Jesus to the marginalized, the abused, and the abandoned possible. Many lives have been touched through our work responding to the call of our Master and Savior, Jesus Christ. We face many challenges that could prevent us from doing what we have been called to do but, because of your prayers and support, we made it.

Ecuador is one of the blessed countries in South America. It is also a place where human rights are not respected. Murder, kidnaping, drug trafficking, human and sexual slavery, and abuses of many kinds are major, visible issues here. You can see how dangerous it is to live in such a country where safety is a concern. But when God calls, He equips, protects and provides for any needs. We are working with a wonderful foundation — *Paz y Esperanza* — that follows God's principles in defending and restoring His people. Our involvement is to preach, pray, counsel, strengthen and restore those in abusive situations. We also preach and teach at Lutheran churches and seminaries.

During 2012 the devil attacked us in different ways: the death of relatives in Africa; robbery in Ecuador; and the illnesses of my father and Serafina's brother, who passed away. We also face financial challenges in covering our needs. Psalm 23 is always our answer at such moments. We have another year in our contract before we can return to the United States for vacation. Please pray for us.

We encourage you to look regularly at our blog — [www.wmpl.org/blogs/dspanzo](http://www.wmpl.org/blogs/dspanzo) — and visit our



*Serafina and Diedone Panzo*

Facebook page — [diedone.diela](https://www.facebook.com/diedone.diela) — as quick ways to help us connect with you, because email does not work well here. You can also contact us by mail: Diedone and Serafina Panzo; c/o World Mission Prayer League; 232 Clifton Avenue; Minneapolis MN 55403-3497.

We also encourage you to visit Ecuador so you can witness the reality of what we are doing here and get to know the people whom God entrusted to us to serve, because you are the ones who are preaching through your donations.

Again, thank you for your support. We ask you to continue to pray for us that God may provide for our needs. Pray also for safety and for those whom we are serving, as well as for the country of Ecuador as it approaches its presidential election in February 2013. We wish you a Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Your servants in the Lord,

**Diedone, Serafina and Sarah Panzo**



*Participants in the LCMS-NALC dialog were, from left, President Robert Bugbee, Dr. James Nestingen, Dr. Albert Collver, Prof. John Pless, President Matthew Harrison, Bishop Paull Spring, Bishop John Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, Pastor Larry Vogel, Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, and Pastor David Wendel.*

# Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, North American Lutheran Church leaders meet for consultation

A consultation was held on December 13-14 between representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The meeting was held as a continuation of a conversation begun in December 2011 at the invitation of the LCMS. NALC had also committed itself in its formal ecumenical statement to meetings with the LCMS. The meeting took place at the LCMS Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind.

The NALC was represented by Bishop John Bradosky and Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring, Dr. James Nestingen (retired seminary professor), the Rev. David Wendel (NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism), and the Rev. Mark Chavez (NALC General Secretary).

President Matthew Harrison, Dr. Albert Collver (Assistant for Church Relations), the Rev. John Pless (CTSFW professor), Dr. Joel Lehenbauer and the Rev. Larry Vogel from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations were the LCMS representatives.

President Robert Bugbee represented the Lutheran Church—Canada.

Among his comments on the meeting, Bishop Bradosky said, “I am deeply grateful for this developing relationship between the NALC, the LCMS and the Lutheran Church—Canada. Our discussion on the Gospel and Scripture was a significant and timely topic. We are blessed by our common commitment to biblical authority and theological, confessional integrity.”

President Harrison expressed, “I am extremely pleased and pleasantly surprised by the high degree of agreement we have on the Word of God.”

Topic for the discussion focused on “The Relationship between the Gospel and the Scriptures.” There was also discussion of theological and ecumenical issues facing each church. Areas of cooperative work between the church bodies were also considered. The meetings between the churches will continue with the next meeting planned for May 2013 in Dallas, Texas.

# NALC mission trip opportunities

*By Judi Reeder*

When I was 15, I attended my first mission trip (in those days, it was called a work camp). Although we spent most of the week painting a conference center in northeast North Dakota, we spent two weekends at a nearby Native American Reservation working with the residents.

As an adult, I have been on four mission trips: two in the United States, one in Mexico, and one in Paraguay. My husband, Earl, has also been on a mission trip to Kosovo and an additional trip to Paraguay.

To me, the benefit of short-term mission trips is enjoyed by both parties. To learn about a different culture is invaluable to understanding the diversity of our world. To share God's love with others while doing something worthwhile — such as Vacation Bible School, medical clinics, or simply spending quality time with a group of orphans — allows God to work His miracles long after we depart.

The NALC is a *Mission-Driven* denomination and, as such, it has connected with several global missions as NALC mission partners. Those who attend the yearly Convocations have had the opportunity to meet and talk with a number of these mission partners.

Several of the mission partners sponsor short-term mission opportunities, usually over the summer months, which are open to any interested party. The leaders of these trips are comfortable with attendees who are strangers at the start of the trip. Any congregation should feel free to have one or more people attend.

This summer, I was given the go-ahead to be a liaison between the NALC and its mission partners and to gather information from them on their mission trips and put it in a consistent format for easy reading on the web.

Information submitted about short-term mission trip opportunities is available on the NALC website under the Mission-Driven heading on the left side of

the home page: Global Connection—Mission Opportunities. This information will be updated as new opportunities become known.

Criteria for any opportunity include a safe part of the world, work that is non-toxic, and with defined skill sets so that the potential attendees can realistically evaluate their ability to fulfill expectations. Additional information includes dates (both for the trip and last date to make reservation), prices, accommodations, average weather conditions, visa requirements, number of attendees desired, general age expectations of attendees, activities, and inoculation recommendations.

For any questions, I can be reached at [JudiReeder@hotmail.com](mailto:JudiReeder@hotmail.com) or 215-431-7265.

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## Two events this summer for youth

Two significant youth events will take place this summer.

Youth Encounter will hold its Impact National Youth Event June 27-30 in St. Louis, Mo. Youth Encounter is a partnership ministry of the NALC. More information is available online at [www.youthencounter.org](http://www.youthencounter.org).

The Lutheran Church—Canada is holding its National Youth Gathering July 5-9 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The theme is "Stand Firm." They are inviting all NALC youth to be a part of this event. More information is available online at [www.lutheranyouth.ca](http://www.lutheranyouth.ca).

Youth Encounter also hosts regional youth events throughout the year. More information is available online.

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# Moving beyond conflict to mission

This month's column will be a departure from the more pragmatic emphasis of my previous articles. I'd like to reflect on the turmoil literally hundreds of Lutheran congregations in the United States and Canada have experienced over the last three years.

Two reasons for choosing this topic: One is my discovery of the Hartford Institute study on congregational conflict entitled "Insights Into Congregational Conflict." The second reason is that I am still processing what my congregation has been through as we eventually voted to leave the ELCA and join the North American Lutheran Church. So I hope you'll bear with me as I use this column to (in part) help me process what my congregation and I have been through.

Reflecting on what we went through at Our Savior's Lutheran in Salem, Ore., I have good days and bad days. The bad days involve the grieving process as a result of the members who chose to leave our congregation. Not a particularly large percentage of our total membership, but some very conscientious and highly-committed brothers and sisters in Christ. I still vividly recall my shocking realization, back in the fall of 2009, that no matter what our ultimate decision as a congregation, we would undoubtedly lose a number of our members.

In other words, the ELCA's decisions, in August of that year, meant our congregation was about to endure the most significant internal conflict in its 55-year history. I knew this to be the case because I had, by 2009, already been serving at Our Savior's for 14 years, and I was very familiar with the makeup of this congregation. I knew, for example, that a great many of our members were not raised Lutheran. This meant they had no great sense of loyalty to the national church. And I also knew that many of our people were more evangelical when it came to their personal piety. This meant many were especially upset with the ELCA's policy changes.

As a result, even if my co-pastor and I were inclined to "sweep" these issues "under the rug," that would simply not be an option at Our Savior's. So we had to confront these highly-politicized and controversial issues up front; trying — not always successfully —



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## *In Pursuit of the Great Commission*

**Pastor Don Brandt**

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to explain that the ultimate issue we faced was not sexuality, but rather Scriptural authority.

I mentioned that, in processing the last three years, I also have my good days. Those would be the days when I think to myself, "It could have been so much worse." On those days I still grieve, but I grieve for the hundreds of congregations where the consequences of this controversy have put the very survival of their ministries at risk. That would probably not be the 640 congregations that have had successful votes to disaffiliate, but rather the 339 churches that, as of June of this year, had *unsuccessful* votes to disaffiliate.

Do I grieve for these congregations because they are still a part of the ELCA? No. However, I know that a large percentage of these churches ended up with a majority of their members voting for disaffiliation. In other words, they had a majority in support but fell short of the required two-thirds majority. In those instances the outcome often *completely divided* these congregations. And when this happens in rural or small-town settings, we are talking about a very public airing of the congregation's turmoil. This, in turn, tends to completely undermine the potential public witness of these churches in their surrounding communities. And then there is the toll all of the above has taken on pastors; many of whom have ended up — whether by choice or under duress — seeking a new call.

So if you are a part of a congregation that is still, on some level, grieving, what can be done?

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# Holy Baptism and the Apostles' Creed

The primary liturgical context for the Apostles' Creed is Holy Baptism. Though the present text of our baptismal creed may derive from a later time, the creed is rooted in the earliest centuries of the Church. The tradition is that the apostles composed the creed. While this is probably legendary, the creed does embody apostolic teaching.

In the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the Apostles' Creed is also provided in the Burial of the Dead; the Suffrages; the Service of the Word; Affirmation of Baptism; and in the Holy Communion, where the rubrics suggest its use in certain seasons.

The Service for the Burial of the Dead contains baptismal language. The service begins with words from Romans 6: "When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death. We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like His."

At the time these words are said, a white pall, representing the baptismal garment, may be placed on the coffin. The baptismal theme continues in the Apostles' Creed, prefaced with the words, "God has made us His people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith." Baptismal references are also found in The Prayers.

Now we turn to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. While the renunciation in its LBW form is contained in one question, the rubrics allow for the question to be divided into three: the forces of evil, the devil, and his empty promises. After the renunciation, the creed is recited in response to three questions pertaining to each person of the Holy Trinity. In the Apostles' Creed, a threefold renunciation is followed by a threefold profession of faith.

Before the renunciation and profession, the presiding minister addresses all present, "I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the Church," In this text, the



## *Words on Worship*

**Pastor Michael G. Tavella**

word faith is used twice and in two different, but related ways. Faith in Jesus Christ is the belief that comes to the person from the Holy Spirit's work through Word and Sacrament. The faith of the Church is its doctrine and teaching, embodied in such Symbols as the Apostles' Creed. One who trusts in Christ believes what the Word of God teaches.

Structured according to each of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Apostles' Creed contains the fundamental teachings of the Christian Church. This ancient Symbol, derived from the Western Church's baptismal practice, asserts God as Creator of the universe. There is no *creation* without a *creator*. If God did not exist or if we did not believe in the existence of God, we could not or should not call *creation* by this name. We would be able to call everything that exists the *universe* (meaning turned into one) or *cosmos* (order), but not *creation*. The Greek word *cosmos* is also the source of our word, *cosmetics* (ordered). In the face of a secular, skeptical, and strident post-modern culture, we confess that the world was created by the one true God who made a covenant with Israel and sent His only Son to redeem us from our sins, a fulfillment of Israel's role as a blessing to the nations.

The Second Article is a confession of Jesus Christ, who is the only Son of the Father and Lord. The creed mentions Christ's birth and death, His descent into hell, His ascent to the right of God, and the eschatological hope of His return to judge the living and the dead.

The Third Article proclaims belief in the Holy Spirit and the Church which comes into existence through His activity. In the Church, sins are forgiven. Sins

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## **Continued from Page 14**

are forgiven through the ministry of the Church, represented in the pastor who possesses the authority of the Office of the Keys. The pastor announces forgiveness in the public assembly and in private confession. There is no forgiveness outside the authority Christ has given to His Church. This does not mean that a brother or sister in Christ cannot announce to another Christian the forgiveness that comes from the Lord. When a fellow Christian reminds us that our sins are forgiven, he represents the holy catholic Church. Those outside the Church cannot receive the forgiveness that comes through Christ.

The forgiven sinner will inherit eternal life and be raised on the Last Day. After death we shall live an interim bodiless existence with God until we are raised from the dead. Some of the Greek philosophers held to a permanently bodiless existence after death. The Gnostics too shared this belief. Rejection of the resurrection is based on their derogation of the physical body. Christian belief in the resurrection is inherited from Judaism, but it is a fundamental teaching because of the resurrection of Christ.

As mentioned in a past article, a thanksgiving prayer is recited before the renunciation and profession. As the rubrics of LBW inform us, this thanksgiving parallels the Eucharistic Prayer. The rubric states, "The structure of the text parallels the Eucharistic prayer in the Holy Communion to express liturgically the importance of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism." The rubrics also mention that the Prayer of Thanksgiving draws from Luther's Flood Prayer, found in his own revision of the liturgy of Holy Baptism.

The prayer begins in thanksgiving and praise and continues with Biblical references to water associated with God's deliverance and salvation and climaxing in the Baptism of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ has freed us from sin and death and won for us eternal life. This narrative of God's acts is similar to ones found in the various Eucharistic prayers in Holy Communion.

In the prayer, water is called a sign "of the kingdom and of cleansing and rebirth." In his *Small Catechism*, Luther writes, "Baptism is not water

only, but it is water used together with God's Word and by His command." He also writes, "In Baptism God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised."

As in the Eucharistic Prayer of Holy Communion, an *epiclesis* (calling down or upon) of the Holy Spirit on those to be baptized is included. The prayer ends with a doxology, again just as we find in Holy Communion.

After the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the renunciation, and profession, the candidate is baptized. In the practice reflected in *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, the catechumen (a word which means "one who receives oral teaching") stands in running water and is dipped in it three times, once after the recitation of each of the three articles of the creed and the response "I believe." In our form of the baptismal service, the Apostles' Creed is recited by the entire congregation.

The formula for Baptism may be either the Eastern or Western form. The Eastern form begins with the name of the catechumen (without surname) and is in the passive voice. The Western form also begins with the given name of the catechumen and continues, "I baptize ...". As the rubrics state, the former emphasizes God as actor while the latter emphasizes the role of the pastor. After Baptism the catechumen becomes a *neophyte*, a word meaning "newly planted."

After the Baptism, a prayer for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those baptized is said in conjunction with the laying on of hands. The prayer highlights the fact the Holy Spirit is given in Baptism. This prayer hearkens back to the Prayer of Thanksgiving where the presiding minister asks the Lord to send the Holy Spirit upon those to be baptized. The prayer mentions the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord, and joy.

Following the laying on of hands, the newly baptized are signed with the cross. The pastor signs the neophyte with chrism, typically olive oil. This action represents our unity with Christ crucified and our possession of the Holy Spirit. At the Invocation in Confession, the sign of the cross may be made in remembrance of Baptism.

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# Apostles' Creed

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The thematic passage in the Sermon on the Mount is recited as a candle is lit from the Paschal candle:

“Let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The candle may be lit at every baptismal anniversary. Baptism is a once and for all Sacrament, but it is continually remembered in the life of the believer as the entrance to everlasting life and continues to be effective in repentance and forgiveness of sin, most particularly in its liturgical manifestation in public and private Confession.

At the end of the service, the pastor announces that the newly baptized have become members of the priesthood we all share. The congregation welcomes the baptized into the body of Christ.

In these troubled and confused times, there are those who insist that one need not be baptized in order to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. But Scripture tells us differently. At the end of Matthew, Jesus bids the apostles to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. One is not a disciple without the initiatory Sacrament of Holy Baptism. If one is not a disciple, one is not a member of the body of Christ. If one is not a member of the body of Christ, one may not take the Sacrament of the Altar, meant only for members of the body of Christ. When Paul speaks to the Corinthians about Holy Communion, he is addressing those who had been baptized. At the very beginning of the letter, the Apostle refers to the Baptism of the members of the Corinthian community: “. . . were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13).

Baptism represents a new life, a change in the way we live. In his *Baptismal Instructions*, St. John Chrysostom writes “... Christ said: ‘Let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.’ Did you see how He urges us to let the light within us shine forth not by garments but by deeds? After He said: ‘Let your light shine,’ He added: ‘in order that they may see your good works.’ This light does not stop with the bodily senses but illumines the souls and understanding of those who see it;

after it dispels the darkness of evil, it draws those who find it to shine with their own light and to imitate the life of virtue.”

Baptism has an ethical component. We are saved by grace through faith which is implanted at Baptism. Confession serves to bring us back onto the ship of Baptism when we fall overboard. (See *The Large Catechism* in the section on Holy Baptism for this image). Every day the Christian rises to newness of life to live according to the will of God.

Next we look at the Athanasian Creed.

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## Conflict to mission

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First, for a little background on the consequences of conflict in congregational life go to the Hartford Institute website: [FaithCommunitiesToday.org](http://FaithCommunitiesToday.org). Click on the article, “Insights into Congregational Conflict.” This study might help you put the experience of your congregation in some perspective.

Second, if there are still serious issues that remain unresolved in your congregation’s life and ministry, seek out the advice and counsel of someone from outside your congregational family. When it comes to counsel by phone or e-mail, I’m available. No charge. This is something I feel called to. I used to have the attitude, as a consultant, that the last thing I ever wanted to be involved with was congregational conflict. I only wanted to help relatively unified congregations with evangelistic outreach. However, in the last three years I have reconsidered. Partly because I’ve been through this specific kind of congregational conflict myself, but also because so many Lutheran congregations have now been through a similar, very painful process. We can, because of this fact, learn from one another.

It’s time to complete the healing process so we can move on and focus on the Great Commission!

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