

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

February 2012

NALC reaches 300 congregation milestone

The North American Lutheran Church has reached the 300-congregation milestone.

The church body has been experiencing rapid growth since it was constituted Aug. 27, 2010.

The NALC reached the 100-congregation milestone in January of 2011, the 200-church milestone in May, and the 300-congregation milestone in January 2012.

Many more churches are expected to vote to join the NALC in the coming months.

Ohio is the state with the most NALC congregations, with 44. Pennsylvania and North Carolina follow with 32 and 30 congregations, respectively. Iowa has 29 NALC congregations.

A map and listing of congregations are available on the NALC website — www.thenalc.org.

‘Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God’ is theme of theological conference

“Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God” is the theme for the 2012 Theological Conference sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the North American Lutheran Church.

The annual theological conference — which is held between the Convocations of Lutheran CORE and the NALC — will be Aug. 15-16 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn.

“This theological conference will focus on the chief hermeneutical principle of Biblical exegesis in the Lutheran confessional tradition — the art of properly distinguishing between Law and Gospel,” conference organizers explain in publicity material.

“These two words of Scripture, the word of God’s judgment (Law) and the word of God’s justification (Gospel), must be properly distinguished in every effort to reform and renew the church. . . .
Confounding Law and Gospel is the principal source of confusion in the life of the church and its ministerial practices. It was so in Luther’s day and it is so today.”

Presentations for the theological conference include:

***Law and Gospel:
The Hallmark of Classical Lutheranism***
The Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten

The Law/Gospel Debate Revisited
A Reformed View – The Rev. Dr. Michael S. Horton
A Lutheran View – The Rev. Dr. Steven D. Paulson
A Catholic View – The Rev. Dr. Jared Wicks, S.J.

***Did Luther Get Paul Right
on the Doctrine of Justification?***
The Rev. Dr. Stephen Westerholm

Law, Gospel, and the Beloved Community
The Rev. Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky

***Third Use of the Law:
Freedom and Obedience in Christian Life***
The Rev. Dr. Piotr Malysz

***Applying the Law/Gospel Distinction
in Preaching and Worship***
The Rev. Dr. Larry J. Yoder
The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin

Love of a little girl brings Catholic bishop to her Lutheran church

The love of a little girl broke down barriers between Roman Catholics and Lutherans in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Eight-year old Chloe Kondrich invited Bishop David Zubik of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh to preach at her Lutheran church.

The bishop responded positively, and Chloe's pastor did too. And the bishop was in the pulpit on Sunday, Jan. 29, at Chloe's church — Zion Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation, in Pittsburgh.

"Only Chloe could get the Catholic Bishop of Pittsburgh to preach at a Lutheran church," said Kurt Kondrich, Chloe's father.

Chloe and her family sat with Bishop Zubik at a Nov. 4 banquet in Pittsburgh honoring persons who work with children with disabilities. Kurt Kondrich, Chloe's dad, was honored with an award for his work in advocacy for children with Down syndrome.

"Our beautiful daughter Chloe, who has Down syndrome, became friends with Bishop Zubik at the St. Anthony Opportunity Award Banquet," explained Kurt Kondrich. Chloe is a big fan of Elvis Presley, and she called the bishop a "hunk-a-hunk of burning love."

"Bishop Zubik and I spoke to the large audience about what a priceless blessing children with Down syndrome are to this world, and Chloe planted many positive seeds at the event," he said.



Chloe Kondrich with Roman Catholic Bishop David Zubik at Zion Lutheran Church.

At the banquet, Chloe showed her abilities to the 600 people in attendance.

"Chloe, at age 8, has already become a very strong advocate for all children with Down syndrome and their families. And she has shown us all that the smallest voice can make the largest impact," Kurt Kondrich said.

"Chloe met with the president of the Pittsburgh Pirates who is a big supporter of children with special needs, and she connected with many other VIPs in the community at the banquet," he added.

Chloe has met many public figures — from baseball players to politicians — and helped them

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understand and appreciate the abilities and significance of children with Down syndrome. She has also met former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

Pastor Eric Riesen of Zion is one of the lives touched by Chloe. He and his wife are Chloe's godparents.

“About eight years ago Kurt and Margie Kondrich asked my wife, Terry, and me to be godparents for their yet unborn child. When Chloe was born it was soon discovered that she had Down syndrome,” said Pastor Riesen. “She was, and still is, a beautiful



Pastor Eric Riesen, Bishop David Zubik and Kurt Kondrich.

little girl full of life. I baptized her, and she became my goddaughter. Since then, my wife and I have remained close with the family. Chloe will receive her first Holy Communion this year.

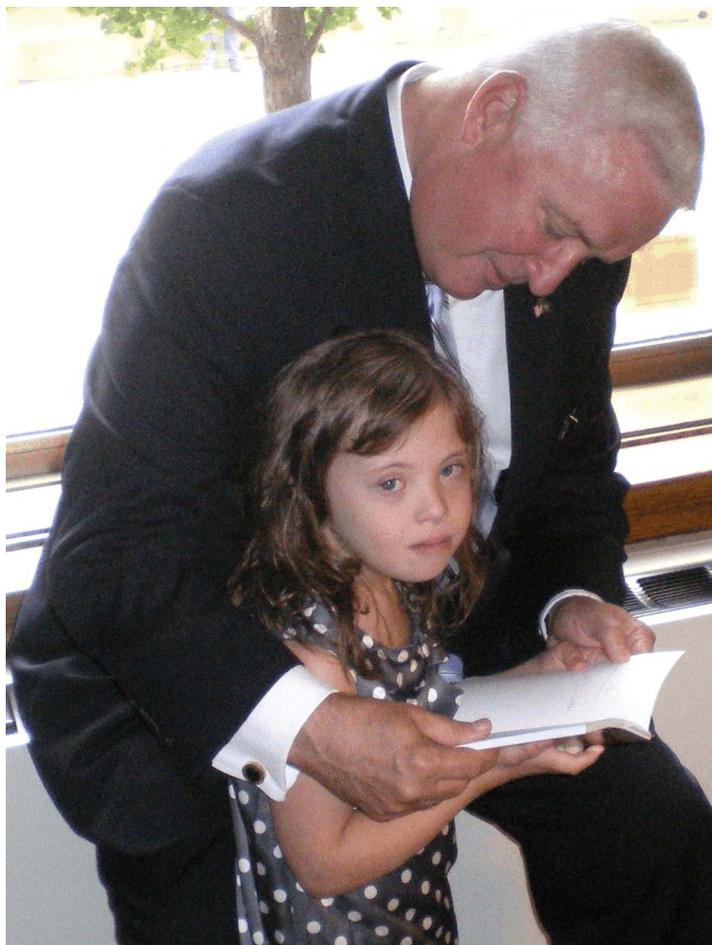
“Kurt was then a Pittsburgh police officer, but Chloe’s birth changed his plans. He took an early retirement from the police force, went back to school, and got a master’s in Early Intervention. Since then he has become a strong advocate across the state — and across the country and internationally — for early intervention and the full inclusion of children with disabilities,” Pastor Riesen said.

Kurt Kondrich is now Director of Community-Family Outreach at Early Intervention Specialists.

“His pro-life convictions were also strengthened as he became aware that over 90 percent of unborn children prenatally diagnosed with Down syndrome are aborted,” he added.

“Ecumenically, Bishop Zubik’s coming shows that Christians can and must cross confessional lines in the cause of our greater common witness to the sanctify of human life and the centrality of marriage and family life,” Pastor Riesen said.

You can learn more about Chloe’s achievements at chloesmessage.blogspot.com.



Chloe Kondrich has demonstrated her reading abilities to numerous public officials including Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett (pictured here).

Lutheran CORE and NALC to foster a new generation of Lutheran theologians

By Carter Askren
Lutheran CORE Connection

A group of younger theologians from across the country — representing both new Ph.D. recipients as well as established theologians — will gather Aug. 13-14 at a theological colloquium sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the North American Lutheran Church.

The colloquium is entitled, “Doing Theology for the Church.” It will be held at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn., immediately prior to the Theological Conference and Convocations of Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

The event will include presentation of papers by the scholars and discussion moderated by noted professors

Dr. Robert Benne and the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten.

“We’ve been running these theological conferences sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the North American Lutheran Church for three years now,” remarked Dr. Braaten, emeritus professor of theology from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

“Most of the speakers at the Lutheran CORE theological conferences are senior theologians. They are either established in their careers or are retired. The basic idea behind this colloquium is the necessity for any church or theological movement to pass the baton to younger theologians. We organized the event based on the premise that theology is the rudder that gives guidance to the church,” he said.

The group includes scholars from a variety of Lutheran church bodies including the North American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

“We’re not limiting the group to a particular denomination or synod,” said Prof. Braaten.

“This colloquium has to do with the health and flourishing of Lutheran theology in North America. We want them to bond together and engage in a conversation on their own. Most of these people don’t know each other, and this is a way of creating a cadre of younger theologians who will ‘carry the water forward’ as the older ones move on to another life,” Prof. Braaten remarked.

The participants will be asked to write a brief essay on either the three most pressing theological issues facing North American Lutheranism or on what resources Lutherans might have to deal with the crisis of authority in today’s church.

“Theology is a conversation, not a Robinson Crusoe thing. It’s complex, and involves scholarship in the Old and New Testaments, as well as ancient, medieval and modern theologies. No one theologian can do it all, and we need to be a team. That’s the idea of a colloquium,” he said.

The Orders of Creation

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

Featuring Jim Nestingen and Nathan Yoder

April 16-19, 2012

Canmore, Alberta - Banff National Park

Watch the *NALC News* and NALC website for more information or contact Pastor Phil Gagnon: 780-458-6012 or pastorphil@me.com

Embracing our mortality sets us free

Dear Friends:

Our Lenten journey is not far off.

Some time ago, I encouraged the congregation I served to read the book, *One Month to Live*. It was difficult for some to get past the title.

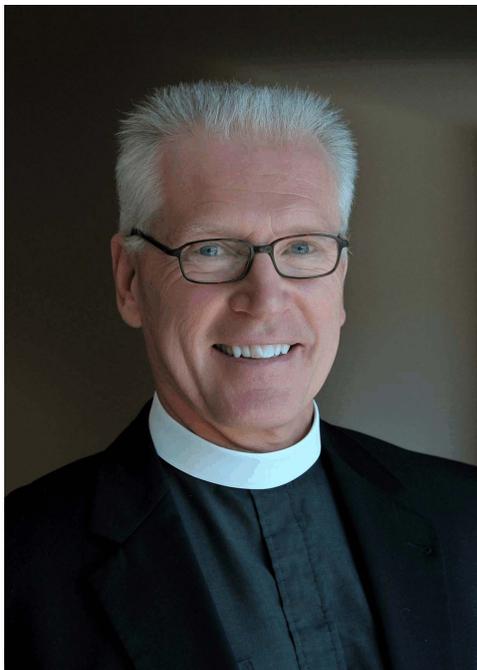
Through our daily routines, regimens and schedules, it is easy to become complacent or bored with life. The longer we are locked into living life that way, the more we feel like life is passing us by. Instead of accumulating memories that frame our lives, we accumulate regrets, missed opportunities and dormant dreams.

So how would you live differently if you had only one month to live or — in the case of Lent — six weeks to live?

Some consider it a bit morbid to talk about the end of our life — our death. Some fear that talking about it may predispose us to facing death prematurely.

It is true that the fear of death paralyzes most people. Even though we know it is reality — all people die — it is hard to admit to knowing that “all people” includes me!

Sooner or later, we all face death — even the people Jesus healed and even those he brought back to life! Not even Jesus was exempt! In fact, Jesus tries to prepare His disciples for His death multiple times in the Gospels.



Bishop John Bradosky

In John 14, Jesus makes it clear that troubled and fear-filled hearts regarding death can get in the way of following Jesus faithfully.

Fear-filled hearts can prevent us from taking the risks necessary to fulfill God’s plan for our lives. Avoiding the reality of death gives our fears the upper hand in controlling our lives.

As those who know that the journey of Lent leads us to the empty tomb of Easter, embracing our mortality sets us free from the fear.

The Gospel of Jesus proclaims clearly that death has no power over us unless we choose to give away that power. Jesus defeated this enemy so that we might live a meaningful and significant life without regret.

Each Lenten season we consider again Jesus’ last weeks with His disciples. Lent is an excellent time to look at the life of faithful living Jesus modeled for his first followers as He reminded them of His impending death.

This is a great season to look closely at His method for coping with that reality — the choices He made, the impact on His relationships and His ministry.

In spite of the impending reality of experiencing death, Jesus focused — not on dying — but on living. He focused on living the purposeful, joyful, abundant life He came to proclaim and made available to all who follow Him.

The journey of Lent is designed to help us take a deeper look at our lives, transform our perspectives, and make needed changes in our behaviors.

I encourage you to stay focused on the daily reading and study of the Scriptures. And I am certain that you will discover the more creative and passionate life that God intends for you.

We keep a little plaque in our home with these words: “Life isn’t measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.”

As you focus on Jesus and the truth of His word this Lenten season, may you discover that qualitative difference in your life.

Bishop John Bradosky

Ministry Coordinator's Corner

By Pastor David Wendel
NALC Ministry Coordinator

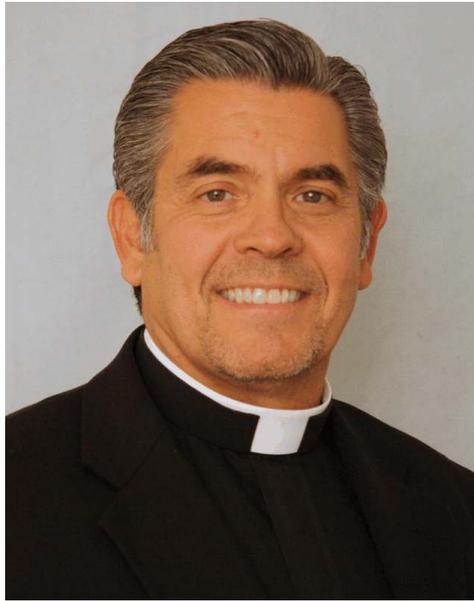
As I have been in my new position for just a couple of weeks, I'm getting my feet wet and trying to get organized! But that doesn't mean that I haven't hit the road running.

Ecumenical and inter-Lutheran gatherings are happening. Ecumenical guests are being considered for the 2012 NALC Convocation. And Bishop Spring and I met last week for the official "hand-over" of mobility files. Now I have to determine what to do with them!

I would simply ask that you feel free to call or e-mail me with requests or communications related to pastoral movement and parish vacancies. And don't hesitate to call or e-mail twice, if a response seems slow in coming. My intention is to respond to communications quickly, so if you get no response, contact me with a reminder.

What I have learned — and learned quickly — is that one of our greatest needs is clergy who are available and willing to serve for pulpit and altar supply or as interim pastors. Are you retired or in specialized ministry, and willing to help? Are you retired and willing to move somewhere new and exciting for six months or so to serve as an interim?

We have many congregations in need of interim ministry, sometimes with a parsonage



Pastor David Wendel

where you could live for a time, serve the congregation part-time, and explore a new part of the country.

If so, send me an e-mail, or call me so that we can discuss your willingness and the opportunities we have currently, or will have in the not-too-distant future. We need supplies and interims! Please consider serving, if you are available.

Finally, let me add that I am continually surprised by pastors and congregations who would like to consider membership in the NALC but are (mistakenly) worried about pension and insurance issues.

Pastors who are praying about considering a call in the NALC often have inaccurate information regarding their pension and benefits. Please share the word that we have a wonderful plan in

place, both for pension and health insurance.

The transfer of benefits is seamless and not difficult, and our health insurance plan is top-notch. This need not be a concern for pastors or congregations considering the NALC. So please put to rest these misunderstandings when they surface.

I want to be available and accessible, so please don't hesitate to contact me. The best way is via e-mail at dwendel@thenalc.org, or through the NALC office at 614-777-5709. I look forward to being of service to you!

2012-2013 clergy cards have been sent to pastors

Clergy identification cards have been mailed to pastors who are rostered in the North American Lutheran Church.

Pastors should have received their 2012-2013 cards in the mail the first week of February.

Pastors who have not received their clergy identification card should contact Anne Gleason in the Minnesota NALC office at 651-633-6004, 888-551-7254, or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org

Bishop Bradosky and Gemechis Buba to speak at International Mission and Theological Conference in Ethiopia

Bishop John Bradosky and Missions Director Gemechis Desta Buba of the North American Lutheran Church will be among the keynote speakers for International Mission and Theological Conference hosted by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus April 21-26 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Other speakers from North America include Pastor Kip A. Tyler of Lutheran Church of the Master in Omaha, Neb., and Pastor Michael Bradley, president of The Master's Institute in St. Paul, Minn., and director of the Alliance of Renewal Churches.

Pastor Tyler will represent Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ. Pastor Tyler is chair of the LCMC Board of Trustees.

President Wakseyoum Idossa and General Secretary Berhanu Ofga of the Mekane Yesus Church will also speak at the gathering.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is one of the largest Lutheran church bodies in the world with 5.6 million members.

North American Lutherans, both lay and clergy, are invited to be a part of this conference. The mission conference is expected to attract more than 20,000 people. It will be followed by the church's leadership conference attended by more than 2,000 people. Contact Rachel Sosebee at the NALC office — 614-777-5709 or rsosebee@thenalc.org — for more information or to register.

NALC Canada Section takes shape

The North American Lutheran Church is preparing the way for more Lutheran congregations in Canada to become a part of the NALC. A part of that is the formation of the NALC Canada Section.

The NALC Canada Section will enable the North American Lutheran Church to function as a church body in Canada. The NALC Canada Section enables areas of ministry and addresses legal matters related to the life of the NALC in Canada.

The North American Lutheran Church is committed to the vision of one church for confessing Lutherans in North America. The Bishop, General Secretary,



Missions Director, and other NALC leaders will provide leadership for the entire church.

The NALC Canada Section will have additional leaders who will serve in partnership with them.

The ministry of the Canada Section will include:

+ Retirement, medical and other benefits for pastors and church employees.

+ Planning and supporting the theological education, assistance, and mentoring of candidates for ministry in Canada.

+ Domestic and foreign mission support and direction from and for Canadian individuals, congregations and ministries.

Plans are for the NALC Canada Section to meet every two years. A theological conference will be held in conjunction with the Convocation of the NALC Canada Section.

The NALC Canadian Commission — which is made up of three Canadian pastors and three American pastors — is providing leadership for NALC in Canada.

One Local and One International Mission!

Clear Vision for Congregational Mission

By Rev. Dr. Gemechis Desta Buba
NALC Missions Director

Congregations reflect and manifest the Body of Christ on earth. They are God's hands at work in the world. Through congregations, God touches and transforms lives.

That is why we say we are a mission-driven and congregationally-focused church of Jesus Christ. We also strongly believe that wherever the Holy Word of God is preached and Sacraments are properly administered, there we find a mission-driven church.

Having a clear and simple vision helps congregations to effectively support their local and international missions. With that vision, mission-driven congregations are called to look beyond their own survival.

Congregations should not be bound and limited to supporting, expanding and sustaining themselves. They must reach out above and beyond themselves. In our context, that calling to go beyond is clearly articulated when every congregation is invited to partner and support one local and one international mission project.

At this time we have numerous local and international mission projects ready for your partnership and hungry for your support. In some cases these needs are present, urgent and pressing!

God is opening doors for mission and ministry locally and globally. There are over 50 NALC mission congregations planted in the United States and this number is growing steadily. These missions are formed as mission posts, house churches, mission fellowships, mission congregations and congregational multiplications. They are working hard to grow and become self-supporting and self-multiplying.

We also partner with international missionaries on three continents. We currently have missionaries



Pastor Gemechis Buba

working in Hungary, Ecuador, and Ethiopia. Soon a missionary family will be deployed to South Sudan. These missionaries provide great service for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We also have numerous mission projects that are waiting for partnerships and support from our congregations.

Already multi-cultural and multi-lingual, the NALC will host a mission strategy consultation with our Asian, Hispanic and African ministry leaders March 26-27. We have Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Ethiopian, Sudanese, Swahili, Oromo, Hispanic and Arabic mission congregations. These vibrant, urban and deeply evangelical groups are growing communities that exemplify the kinds of mission opportunities we share. And new mission opportunities like these are beginning in other communities.

In order to respond to and effectively support these and other mission opportunities, we are utilizing a Biblical and first-century mission strategy. That strategy consists of doing mission advancement and mission support through congregations. Our

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missions office focuses on building congregational capacity for mission by connecting congregations with vital local and international mission opportunities.

As a church we have adopted a congregational vision for mission. That vision calls for every congregation to support one local and one international mission partner.

Small or large, every congregation is formed with a God-given capacity for mission. That capacity-driven thinking enables congregations to be vibrant agents of Christ's mission in the world. Our missions office is committed to encouraging and assisting congregations to discover, maximize, and release this missional capacity for the sake of advancing Christ's mission in the world.

I encourage all congregations to find at least one local and one international mission to connect with and support. We have mission congregations and missionaries that are deeply and urgently in need of your help.

Please reach out and find out how you can be of help to them. If you are not partnered with a local

and international mission, our missions office will facilitate those connections for you with great joy. We have so many exciting local and international missions and missionary families with which to connect. Your congregation would be tremendously blessed and moved by such connections.

Upcoming Discipleship Events

February 17-18 - Houston, Texas

Transforming Congregations through Discipleship: A Discipleship and Evangelization Event featuring Bishop John Bradosky. For more information contact Pastor Claude Villemaire at 281-341-7500 or stpaulrosenberg@sbcglobal.net or Pastor Norm Albertson at Peace_lutheran@sbcglobal.net or 281-342-8800.

February 24-25 - Phoenix, Arizona

Transforming Congregations through Discipleship: A Discipleship and Evangelization Event featuring the Rev. Dr. Michael W. Foss. For more information contact Pastor Glenn Zorb, at 480-893-2579 or gzorb@mvlutheran.org.



International

Mission and Theological Conference

April 21-26, 2012

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

hosted by



**The Ethiopian Evangelical
Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)**

www.eecmy.org Phone: +251-11-5533293
Fax: +251-11-5534148

North America Contact

For general information
and registration

Rachel Sosebee

Tel. 614-777-5709

Email: rsosebee@thenalc.org

Baptism: A Journey of a Lifetime

By Pastor John Hopper

I have been invited to share some thoughts on the ministry of Baptism which has shaped the Office of Ministry for me as a pastor in the Lutheran church for nearly 40 years.

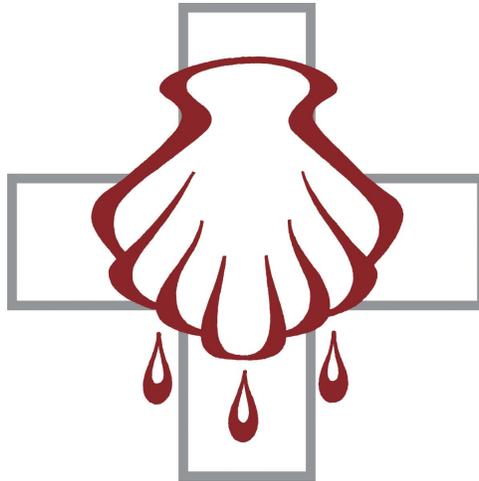
My work has included a thesis in the Doctor of Ministry program at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., the focus of which was connecting Luther's theology of Baptism with his understanding of the priesthood of all believers. I hope this personal experience will be helpful to our entire church.

Martin Luther says about our "work" of a lifetime:

"In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings — victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."

These words from Luther's *Large Catechism* have been instructive for my own journey of faith.

My life as a child of God began when God washed me in the waters of Baptism. The shape of my call to the Office of Ministry has been molded by a strong, vibrant baptismal theology. The action of our gracious God has sustained me and guided me through almost 40 years of public ministry as a pastor of the Church.



For Lutherans, all of ministry — all of Christian living — has its foundation in God's action in Baptism. All that God's people *are*, and can *become*, and *do*, grows out of God's gracious act of love and mercy given in Baptism.

The drowning and the rising — the death of the old self and the resurrection of the new person — in Baptism is the daily pattern of our Christian existence. As Peter reminds us: Baptism "... now saves us ..." and calls us into a new "baptismal existence" that focuses our daily life in loving service to others.

So, the practice of Baptism in our congregations is vital in equipping the saints for ministry. As clergy, called to rightly administer the sacraments, we are charged with the awesome privilege and responsibility of teaching God's children what Baptism means for daily living.

My own experience in various congregations has convinced me that we can teach our powerful baptismal theology as Lutherans

directly, by how we administer this wondrous sacrament. I am fully convinced that we can, by our practice, change the understanding of Baptism from "fire insurance" to a powerful dynamic for living as Christians faithful to our calling as servants in the Kingdom.

Yes, it will, says Luther, take a lifetime of living to fulfill this covenant of grace. Just as God, through John, anointed Jesus for His ministry as He was baptized in the Jordan River, so God saves and anoints us for our daily ministry of love and service in the splashing of the water, the speaking of the Word, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit as we are baptized in the waters of the baptismal fonts in our churches.

Luther explains this "miracle" with these words:

"You shall take it (Baptism) as a very special grace that He should deal so kindly with you, so kindly that none could ever be more kindly. For He simply presents a person; He does not put a sword, a gun, or any kind of weapon in his hand, but simply commands him to take a little water with his bare, empty hand and say these words, 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.'"

Baptized into this "priesthood" ministry we are anointed for the lifelong work of God's people in the name of Jesus. I would hope

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this would lead us to carefully administer this sacrament.

As those called into the Office of Ministry, we are given the wonderful privilege of being that person whom God has called to speak and share this “grace” among the people of God. It is to this that I want to speak. And I pray that our lives within the Church will be blessed.

Very early in my pastoral ministry I was faced with what I believe is a distortion — and even an unacceptable practice — of the sacrament of Baptism. I arrived as the pastor of a congregation that had practiced “private Baptisms” for most of its history. In fact, over 75 percent of all Baptisms in that parish were done outside of public worship.

The consequence? The members of the call committee charged with interviewing me told me, “We do not have any children.” Meaning? You can guess. The members of that congregation had no sense of participation in the lives of their children because they were not witnesses to the Baptisms of the children in that community.

Further, this congregation had a practice of “self-service Communion.” The reason? Two things: to “speed up” the process and to leave the distribution of the elements in the hands of the pastor.

In the practice of both sacraments in that place, a theology of “me and God” — a theology of “privatism” — had developed that reinforced a sense of faith being a private experience of God.

The whole understanding of a community of faith was disappearing. I don’t mean to discount the truth that God, through the Holy Spirit and through the Word and sacraments, comes to each of us “personally.” After all, it is your name and my name that are spoken as water is splashed on us, and it is “for you” that the bread and the wine are Christ’s body and blood.

*All that God’s
people are,
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Yet, it is important for our life together that we distinguish between *personal* and *private*. And I believe that is done by careful practice based in Scripture and in our vibrant theology as Lutheran Christians, particularly our theology of sacramental ministry.

In our culture, we are faced with an on-going assault on our faith as members of the Body of Christ. The cultural illusion of

self-perpetuated life erodes any sense of the community of faith. Our cultural “theology” of self-actualization leads us into self-made cocoons with little regard for the “other.” All of life becomes self-focused. Any idea of community is even abused to our own purposes. That leaves no room for serving others by fulfilling our “call” as God’s baptized children.

To that end, over the next couple of months, I will think with you about the practice of Baptism in our midst. Informed by our theology, I hope to share with you some meaningful ways of practicing what we preach and believe by using powerful symbols, introduced into our practice to teach God’s children about the marvelous grace of God that is given in Baptism.

Appealing to generations of Christians who are becoming more and more visual in the way they learn, I hope to present a helpful use of symbols that carry meaning beyond words and give a visual image to help our fellow members of the community of faith understand the life-long “work” of Baptism. After all, says Luther, Baptism gives us “enough to study and to practice” all of our lives as fellow members of the body of Christ.

Pastor John Hopper serves Christ the King Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Newcastle, Wyo.

His book, Baptized: Marked for Living! — A Lent-Easter Reflection on Faith and Life, is available from Sola Publishing, www.solapublishing.org.

Moving from Reactive Conflict to Proactive Mission in your Congregation's Life and Ministry

In Pursuit of the Great Commission

By Pastor Don Brandt

Many of you are part of congregations that have had to contend, over the last couple of years, with a tremendous amount of change — change that has often been accompanied by significant levels of conflict. And some of you are part of a new faith community comprised of people who have left ELCA churches and are now organizing an entirely new congregational ministry.

This mostly unplanned and unanticipated change — and its related stress — has not just been corporate. It has often been very personal. Relationships have been strained and sometimes broken. And this has been especially difficult for churches located in smaller towns and communities, where congregational conflict inevitably becomes public, adding to what was already a very difficult and painful situation for members.

An additional reality that complicates this situation is our current cultural ministry context in North America. We are part of the mainline Protestant subculture. And mainline Protestant denominations (including Lutherans) achieved their peak worship attendance back in 1965. Do the math: That's 47 years ago! And over that time period perhaps the single most prevalent mainline growth strategy has not been evangelism, but rather growth through *mergers*. For all intents and purposes it was a "consolidating our losses" denominational growth strategy. So as an ALC pastor back in 1986, I was part of a denomination with approximately 2.5 million members. Then, within a year, I belonged to a denomination, the (then) new ELCA, with 5.2 million members. Not even the evangelicals could match *that* rate of growth!

But, of course, denominational mergers — in and of themselves — have rarely if ever brought new people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And when it comes to the statistics, mergers tend to actually accelerate the rate of decline. So we find that the ELCA, which began in 1987, has already lost over one million members. We haven't even seen the final statistical losses related to its policy changes of August 2009, and yet the ELCA is already approaching losses of 20 percent since its inception.

Dealing with congregational change is never easy, but coping with this change in the midst of conflict and an increasingly challenging mission context is even more difficult.

I recently read Peter Steinke's book, *A Door Set Open* (2010, The Alban Institute). He makes some important observations regarding change in congregational life — observations we can all learn from. Perhaps his most important observation is that change almost always invokes an *emotional* response from our members. This is "emotional" — as in *not* always rational.

He writes, "We can believe that, in a church community, people will behave rationally, thereby extending goodwill, patience, and respect when interacting with others. We think our core values, like cream, will rise to the top" (p. 53).

He then makes clear that, unfortunately, this is not always the case. Change is usually far more contentious than we anticipate. People instinctively resist being moved out of their comfort zones, and leaders almost as often show impatience as they attempt to lead the congregation through change.

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Added to all this, too many of our members belong to the Body of Christ primarily to “be fed” and have their needs met, not because they strive to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly, change is rarely viewed by these members as a way to “be fed.”

Steinke emphasizes that change is not only emotional, it often produces intense *anxiety*. His suggestion to leaders: “If you, the leader, do not overreact to anxiety, you will positively influence the emotional field. . . . The challenge of change for leaders is to keep one’s eye on the ball (stay focused), take the heat (remain nonreactive), stay connected (talk and listen), and get a good night’s sleep” (p. 120).

Steinke also observes that congregations in *need* of change are not always *ready* for change. “Transformation begins with endings. Death comes to the system in some form” (p. 59). Given this challenge, the timing and pace of change needs to be customized to the unique characteristics of *your*

congregation and *your* mission context.

Something *not* specifically addressed by Steinke is when change is forced upon a congregation by decisions made at the denominational level. The unfortunate result of such changes is often more *reactive* than *proactive*. And it’s a fine line between “reactive” and “reactionary.” That’s why it’s so important that congregations move, as quickly as practical, from a reactive response to a proactive mission strategy.

Next month, in Part 2 of this topic, I will explore practical strategies to help a congregation (like yours) move from a reactive posture to a proactive mission focus. This mission focus is more crucial than ever when a congregation is dealing with a challenging mission context and the contentious consequences resulting from unanticipated and, in many cases, unwanted change.

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The Church praises God in Biblical song

By Pastor Michael Tavella

Holy Communion and the Daily Office — such as Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of Day — include a number of texts from the Bible that have been set to music.

The Psalms, canticles and chants are testimonies to the fact that the backbone of the worship of the Church is Holy Scripture.

When we sing or recite them, we are joining the voices of the people of Israel and the Church throughout the ages. The singing of these texts enhances the beauty of the liturgy.

The Psalms are appointed for use in many of the services of the Church. In the *Lutheran Book of Worship* 10 chant tones are provided. Musical settings of the Psalms are also available from other sources. The chant tones and many other musical settings are intended for congregational participation.

The Psalm may be sung alternately between a cantor or choir and the congregation, sung in unison, or sung by a cantor with the congregation repeating an antiphon. An antiphon, a verse usually taken from the Psalm being sung, is repeated after every few verses. Occasionally, a text from outside the appointed Psalm is utilized as the antiphon.

The Psalm is not a fourth lesson in the Holy Communion service. It serves to connect the First Lesson and the Second Lesson and should not be introduced as if it were a Scripture lesson, though it is from the Scriptures.

In the Biblical text, a number of Psalms include superscriptions that indicate they were sung in ancient Israel; and, in some cases, tune names are given. For example, Psalm 60 was sung to the tune “The Lily of the Covenant” (NIV). Of course, we do not know what that tune sounded like. It is long lost. Accompanying instrumentation is sometimes suggested in the text as in Psalm 55.

In *LBW* canticles are provided with musical settings. Canticles are Biblical texts or are based on Biblical texts set to music for use in the liturgy. Twenty-one canticles are the first hymns of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Among these canticles are alternate musical settings for chants provided earlier in *LBW* in the texts of the various liturgies.

An example of a purely Biblical text is the *Benedictus Dominus* — the Song of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, from Luke 1:68-79. The *Benedictus* is sung in Morning Prayer. In the ancient Gallican liturgy used in France in the early Middle Ages, it was sung in the place where we sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* or *Worthy Is Christ* in the Communion liturgy.

Some of the canticles are Psalm texts, e.g. *Domine, Clamavi, Let My Prayer Rise before You as Incense*.

The *Te Deum* — appointed for use in the Paschal Blessing in Morning Prayer — includes within it a Biblical text, Isaiah 6, called the *Sanctus*, “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.” Replete with Biblical language, the *Te Deum* is a magnificent confession of the faith of the Church. In it we are made aware that we sing with the whole company of heaven.

The Service of Holy Communion, or the Holy Eucharist, contains within it several chants, many of which have been sung for centuries. They are rooted in Biblical texts. The Eucharistic liturgy includes the *Kyrie Eleison* (*Lord, have mercy*); the *Gloria in Excelsis* (*Glory to God in the Highest*); *Worthy is Christ*; the Alleluia verses; the offertory songs, *Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful, Lord and What Shall I Render to the Lord*; the *Sanctus* (*Holy, Holy, Holy*) with the *Benedictus Qui Venit* (*Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord*); the *Agnus Dei* (*Lamb of God*); and the *Nunc Dimittis* (*Now, Let Your Servant Depart in Peace*).

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In his *Formula Missae et Communionis pro Ecclesia Vuittembergensi*, Martin Luther included the *Kyrie*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, the *Sanctus*, the *Benedictus Qui Venit*, and the *Agnus Dei*.

The *Nunc Dimittis* is an example of a Biblical text (Luke 2:29-32) — Simeon's response to beholding the Christ Child — with the *Gloria Patri* coming at the end of the song.

The *Gloria in Excelsis* begins with the angel's song in Luke 2:14 followed by a Trinitarian elaboration. The text of the *Gloria* includes a portion of the *Agnus Dei*.

I have given many Latin titles and one Greek (the *Kyrie*) for chants and canticles. I think it is good for us to know them. Using the Latin nomenclature connects us to the Church and its tradition. We are the beneficiaries of a long and esteemed liturgical development in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Our worship is an example of what is called the Great Tradition, the post-biblical deposit of creed, song, and practice that aids in the transmission of the true faith.

We have no evidence that any of the chants and canticles were used in the earliest centuries of the Church. Early sources — such as Justin Martyr's *First Apology* and Hippolytus' *The Apostolic Tradition* — do not mention them when they speak of the worship of the Church. Justin gives an outline of the Communion service as it was practiced in Rome during his time. Hippolytus gives us actual liturgical texts. In Hippolytus, the *Sanctus* had not yet found its place in the Eucharistic Prayer. Over the centuries, chants were added as the liturgy developed.

Many of the chants are part of the Ordinary that includes those elements of the liturgy that remain the same from week to week, though at certain seasons of the year some of them may not be used, as is the case with the *Gloria in Excelsis* or *Worthy is Christ* in Lent.

The Psalm and Alleluia Verse are Propers, elements of the Service whose texts change from week to week.

The Psalms, canticles, and chants are drawn from the rich treasury of the Bible. "It is truly meet, right, and salutary" (*Common Service Book*) that the Church praises God in Biblical song. We echo the Word that God that has been revealed to us by sending up praises to heaven in Biblical song. In the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the *Sanctus*, we sing with the heavenly host, a reminder that heaven and earth are united in praise of the most Holy Trinity, One God in Three Persons.

There is so much more to say about the Psalms, chants, and canticles in the Lutheran liturgy that the discussion will have to be continued. Join me again next month.

Pastor Michael G. Tavella and his wife Pastor N. Amanda Grimmer are pastors of Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Abington, Pa. He writes this monthly column on worship. You may contact him with comments or suggestions at MGTavella@msn.com.

Photos needed for new NALC video

Good quality high-resolution photos from NALC congregations are needed for use in a new video that is being produced about the North American Lutheran Church.

Some examples of photos that are needed:

- + Photos of your congregation at worship.
- + Photos of mission projects — especially your members working in other countries.
- + Photos of the life of your congregation.
- + Photos of your women's group meeting or doing projects.
- + Photos of your congregation's youth.

Please send photos to the video producer, Steve Puffenberger, at steve@advent1.com.



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