

Bishop Bradosky joins other American religious leaders in defending religious freedom

Bishop John Bradosky of the North American Lutheran Church has joined other American religious leaders in an open letter defending religious freedom in the United States.

The letter was entitled, “Free Exercise of Religion: Putting Beliefs into Practice, An Open Letter from Religious Leaders in the United States to All Americans.” It was released on June 21.

“No government should tell religious organizations either what to believe or how to put their beliefs into practice. We indeed hold this to be an unalienable, constitutional right,” the letter states.

The letter directly addresses a mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that requires some religious groups to provide benefits that include contraceptive medications and procedures that violate their religious beliefs.

“That we share an opposition to the mandate to religious institutions while disagreeing about specific moral teachings is a crucial fact. Religious freedom is the principle on which we stand,” the letter states.

“Even we who hold differing convictions on specific moral issues are united in the conviction that no religious institution should be penalized for refusing to go against its beliefs. The issue is the First Amendment, not specific moral teachings or specific products or services.”

The letter was released prior to the Independence Day celebrations when Americans celebrate their freedoms. Many congregations addressed issues surrounding religious freedoms in the time surrounding the July 4 holiday.

The letter (which is printed on Page 4) was drafted by the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

“We drafted this letter because there are moments in history where one needs to speak and stand for basic principle,” President Harrison told the *LCMS Reporter*. “The time to confess is now. We don’t know what tomorrow might bring. We have been too silent as our nation has continued to slip into the morass of relativism.”

In addition to Bishop Bradosky and President Harrison, Lutheran signers included the Rev. Mark Schroeder, president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; the Rev. John A. Moldstad, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod; and Deaconess Cheryl D. Naumann, president of the Concordia Deaconess Conference.

Other signers included leaders of a wide variety of church bodies and religious organizations including the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church in America, National Association of Evangelicals, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Presbyterian Church in America, Assemblies of God, and Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Support for religious freedom has deep roots among Christians

A Message from Bishop Bradosky

Dear Friends,

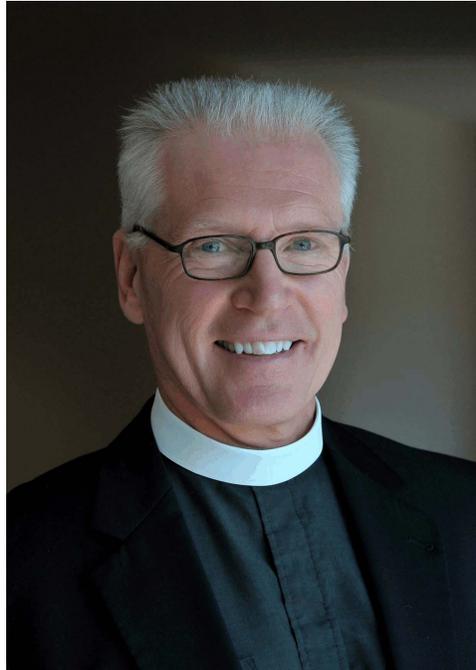
The issue of religious freedom is one that has pulled together a variety of Christian leaders to discuss the essential nature of such freedom and the necessity of speaking out to defend and promote this fundamental right.

While it is important for Christians to know and understand the nature of those freedoms guaranteed by government, it is even more important for us to study the teaching of the Scriptures, to especially review the teachings of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament regarding the relationship between Church and state.

If you research this topic you will discover that Christians were thrust into this issue of discerning the proper divide between Church and state as a result of surviving the demands of both the politics and religious beliefs of Rome.

Both the comments of Jesus and Paul deal with the reality of Rome. As the Church began to grow, so did Roman persecution. It was during that period of the late second and third centuries that the leading Christian theologian Tertullian advanced arguments that broke new ground in the struggle against Rome.

Tertullian argued that it is a “fundamental human right, a



Bishop John Bradosky

privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions” (*Ad Scapulam* 2).

He was the first to coin the phrase “freedom of religion” (*libertas religionis*), as a way of promoting religious toleration.

His understanding of religious freedom meant that the state could neither persecute nor coerce. Those who dissent from the state’s understanding of religion should be permitted to worship when, where, and who they wished.

This religious freedom should not be a matter decided by the culture, nor a matter of the political will of the people, but an individual right.

His focus on the individual conscience was unique but consistent with the reality of Christian faith among those who came to faith in Jesus giving up the past religious beliefs of their families and instead worshiping a God that transcended all national and previous religious boundaries. Christian faith was for all nations and all cultures.

Tertullian offered a theological rationale for religious freedom in his *Apology*. He asserts that the basis for religious freedom is found in the nature of the relationship that God seeks. He writes:

“Look to it, whether this may also form part of the accusation of irreligion — to do away with one’s freedom of religion (libertas religionis), to forbid a man choice of deity ... so that I may not worship whom I would, but am forced to worship whom I would not. No one, not even a man, will wish to receive reluctant worship” (*Apology* 24).

Tertullian is insisting that authentic faith and devotion to God must be voluntary, not coerced.

“The injustice of forcing men of free will to offer sacrifice against their will is readily apparent, for ... a willing mind is required for

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

discharging one's religious obligations. It certainly would be considered absurd were one man compelled by another to honor gods whom he ought to honor of his own accord and for his own sake" (Apology 28).

Tertullian pressed his argument even farther by insisting that the emperor's power is limited by God and subject to God's higher authority:

"I do subordinate [Caesar] to God; I do not make him His equal. I will not call the emperor God. ... If he is a man, it is to his interest as a man to yield precedence to God" (Apology 33).

It is nothing short of an intrusion by the state and the usurping of God's authority when it attempts to either direct or coerce an individual's religious decisions.

Perhaps Tertullian's most powerful and insightful protest against religious intolerance is found in his letter to Scapula, the proconsul of Africa. In addition to asserting that the freedom to worship is a fundamental human right he wrote:

"One man's religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion — to which free-will and not force should lead us. ... You will render no real service to your gods by compelling us to sacrifice. For they can have no desire of offerings from the unwilling, unless they are animated by a spirit of contention, which is a thing altogether undivine" (Ad Scapulam 2).

*The basis for
religious freedom
is found in the
nature of the
relationship that
God seeks.*

+ + +

*If God does not
coerce or force
people to believe,
then neither
should the state.*

Tertullian does not attempt to make his case on the basis of the practical, that coercing people into religious practice is ineffective. Instead, he argues that it is wrong because it is contrary to God and the nature of faith. If God does not coerce or force people to believe, then neither should the state. His premise is theological, an understanding of the nature and will of God — that the faith God expects and deserves cannot be offered without such freedom.

It is also fascinating that he broadens his argument to not only speak about Christians or God as worshiped by Christians but to characteristics that apply to any or all deities.

He is making the case that this tolerance should be available to all people. His arguments had broad appeal. Yet in pursuing this religious freedom, he did not suggest that he was any less committed to his belief in the One True God.

He was able to promote a faith that was both exclusive and yet tolerant of those who disagree. No matter how exclusive Christian faith is, it cannot be promoted by forcing others to accept it.

As Tertullian made his case against his Roman persecutors, its immediate effect was limited, but he provided the foundation for other Christians who followed.

The framers of our country's documents in providing for religious freedom did so on the basis of a very rich and ancient heritage. It is one that is important for us to study and treasure. Even more important is the fact that no one else will make the case for us if we don't.

With you serving Christ,



Bishop John F. Bradosky
North American Lutheran Church

*You may reach Bishop Bradosky
at jbradosky@thenalc.org.*

Free Exercise of Religion: Putting Beliefs into Practice

An Open Letter from Religious Leaders in the United States to All Americans

Dear Friends,

Religious institutions are established because of religious beliefs and convictions. Such institutions include not only churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship, but also schools and colleges, shelters and community kitchens, adoption agencies and hospitals, organizations that provide care and services during natural disasters, and countless other organizations that exist to put specific religious beliefs into practice. Many such organizations have provided services and care to both members and non-members of their religious communities since before the Revolutionary War, saving and improving the lives of countless American citizens.

As religious leaders from a variety of perspectives and communities, we are compelled to make known our protest against the incursion of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) into the realm of religious liberty. HHS has mandated that religious institutions, with only a narrow religious exception, must provide access to certain contraceptive benefits, even if the covered medications or procedures are contradictory to their beliefs. We who oppose the application of this mandate to religious institutions include not only the leaders of religious groups morally opposed to contraception, but also leaders of other religious groups that do not share that particular moral conviction.

That we share an opposition to the mandate to religious institutions while disagreeing about specific moral teachings is a crucial fact. Religious freedom is the principle on which we stand. Because of differing understandings of moral and religious authority, people of good will can and often do come to different conclusions about moral questions. Yet, even we who hold differing convictions on specific moral issues are united in

the conviction that no religious institution should be penalized for refusing to go against its beliefs. The issue is the First Amendment, not specific moral teachings or specific products or services.

The HHS mandate implicitly acknowledged that an incursion into religion is involved in the mandate. However, the narrowness of the proposed exemption is revealing for it applies only to religious organizations that serve or support their own members. In so doing, the government is establishing favored and disfavored religious organizations: a privatized religious organization that serves only itself is exempted from regulation, while one that believes it should also serve the public beyond its membership is denied a religious exemption. The so-called accommodation and the subsequent Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) do little or nothing to alleviate the problem.

No government should tell religious organizations either what to believe or how to put their beliefs into practice. We indeed hold this to be an unalienable, constitutional right. If freedom of religion is a constitutional value to be protected, then institutions developed by religious groups to implement their core beliefs in education, in care for the sick or suffering, and in other tasks must also be protected. Only by doing so can the free *exercise* of religion have any meaning. The HHS mandate prevents this free exercise. For the well-being of our country, we oppose the application of the contraceptive mandate to religious institutions and plead for its retraction.

Sincerely yours,

This open letter was signed by 25 religious leaders including NALC Bishop John Bradosky. The letter with the complete list of signers is available online at www.thenalc.org.

NALC Convocation is Aug. 16-17

Seven people are nominated for NALC leadership positions

Six people have been nominated to fill two positions on the Executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church.

One pastor and one lay person will be elected to four-year terms on the Executive Council at the NALC's 2012 Convocation Aug. 16-17.

The Executive Council functions as the board of directors for the NALC, providing leadership for the church body between Convocations.

Three people are nominated for the lay position: James Hansen, Hurricane, W.Va.; Bruce Leep, Highland, Ind.; and Frank Polkowski of East Amherst, N.Y. Dr. Hansen is the incumbent.

The clergy nominees are Pastor Nila Cogan, Friedens, Pa.; Pastor Victor Langford, Seattle, Wash.; and Pastor Mark A. Werner of Latrobe, Pa. Pastor Langford is the incumbent.

Richard F. Currey of Colorado Springs, Colo., has been nominated for re-election to the NALC Court of Adjudication. He is the only nominee for the single position on the Court of Adjudication up for election in 2012.

Congregations were asked to submit nominations for the positions. Additional nominations may be made from the floor at the Convocation.

Biographical information provided by the nominees is printed on Pages 6-9.

In addition to the elections, the Convocation will hear reports from NALC leaders and consider a budget for 2013.

Delegates will also consider a proposal for the NALC to apply for membership in the Lutheran World Federation. Faithful Lutheran church bodies in Africa and Eastern Europe have encouraged the NALC to join the LWF to add to their voice within the global Lutheran body.

Voting delegates for the NALC Convocation — the annual meeting of the NALC — include lay people elected by their congregations and all NALC pastors. Each congregation is entitled to at least one lay delegate. Those who are not delegates for the Convocation are welcome to attend as visitors.

The \$90 registration fee for the Convocation includes supper on Thursday and lunch on Friday.

The NALC Convocation is one of three events that will take place Aug. 14-17 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn.

The NALC Convocation will be preceded by Lutheran CORE's Convocation on Aug. 14 and by the annual Theological Conference sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the NALC on Aug. 15-16.

Lutheran CORE's Convocation will gather Aug. 14 under the theme, "God's Future for Us." The Convocation — Lutheran CORE's annual meeting — will feature keynote addresses by Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, and Dr. Robert Benne of Roanoke College in Salem, Va.

You can register online for all three events. Online registration is the preferred method of registration. The Convocations and Theological Conference are open to visitors as well as voting delegates.

"Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God" is the theme for the Theological Conference sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the NALC. The annual Theological Conference is held between the Lutheran CORE and NALC Convocations.

Speakers for the theological conference include: the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten; the Rev. Dr. Michael S. Horton; the Rev. Dr. Steven D. Paulson; the Rev. Dr. Jared Wicks; Dr. Stephen Westerholm; the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky; the Rev. Dr. Piotr Malysz; the Rev. Dr. Larry J. Yoder; and the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin.

Nila G. Cogan

Nominee for Executive Council - Clergy

Name:

Nila G. Cogan

Home:

Friedens, Pennsylvania

Congregations:

Dunmyer Lutheran Church
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

St. Thomas Lutheran Church
Hooversville, Pennsylvania

Current Call: Pastor

Dunmyer Lutheran Church, Johnstown, Pa.
St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Hooversville, Pa.

Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:
Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

Before the NALC I served on the Allegheny Synod Council, I was chairperson of the Congregations in Ministry Team and I served on the Leadership Team and Youth Team. Presently I serve on the Mid-Northeast Mission District Council and I am part of the Youth Team. I helped the Dunmyer Lutheran congregation discern the facts from the 2009 CWA and led them to be one of the original congregations to form the NALC. In September 2011 when a neighboring congregation left the ELCA for the NALC, St. Thomas Lutheran, they did so with the knowledge that their pastor would stay with the ELCA. Dunmyer Lutheran supported St. Thomas by letting me be their interim pastor. The relationship worked well and St. Thomas called me as their pastor in the spring of 2012. Both congregations are doing well as I guide them to search for what mission God has planned for them.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

I have a passion for God's people, both in and out of the congregations. I love working with youth from the cradle to the young at heart. I love worship whether it is high church traditional or contemporary



with drums and guitars. God has given me the gift of communicating well with people and remembering names and also the gift of energy to multitask. I have compassion for those in need, the sick and the elderly. Coming to the ministry as a second career, I have lived life as a farmer and as a business owner and understand the life of the person in the pews.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

— Philippians 4:13.

I have faced many struggles and difficulties throughout my adult life. Just with a marriage of 38 years, four adult children and three grandchildren, there have been times I needed to say this verse to remind me that Christ is with me and gives me strength daily. But add a life time of farming, operating a floral shop for 20 years, serving, in the past, as president of the local hospital auxiliary, serving the county farm bureau, serving on the state board of directors of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, caring for elderly parents, and a lifetime of serving God and the church (I heeded the call to ordination later in life). I daily and constantly repeat this verse from Philippians knowing what needs to get done God will help me do it, and what doesn't need done God will let me place it aside.

NALC Congregational Renewal Conference

*Authentic Discipleship for
Congregational Renewal and Growth*

November 7-9, 2012

Hilliard, Ohio

www.thenalc.org

Victor C. Langford III

Nominee for Executive Council - Clergy

Name:

Victor C. Langford III

Home:

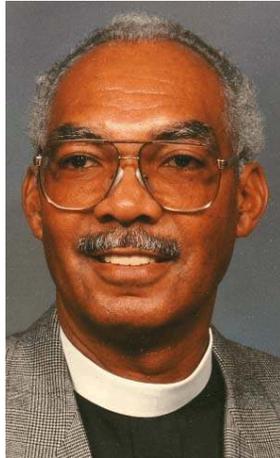
Seattle, Washington

Congregation:

St Mark's Lutheran Church
Seattle, Washington

Current Call: Pastor

St Mark's Lutheran Church
Seattle, Washington



Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

Served Lutheran congregations for 47 years, in New Orleans, LA, Houston, TX, and Seattle, WA.

Served in leadership levels in local clergy groups, synod council and church-wide organizations.

Nearly 30 years as an Army chaplain (retired at the rank of Brigadier General).

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

God has given me a love for all people and the heart to care and share with them. Also, I have a love for God's Word and the knowledge and skill to preach and teach the Word to both young and older adults.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

Don't worry about anything. Instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all that he has done.

— Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

This verse keeps me focused in both my life as a person and as a pastor.

Mark A. Werner

Nominee for Executive Council - Clergy

Name:

Mark A. Werner

Home:

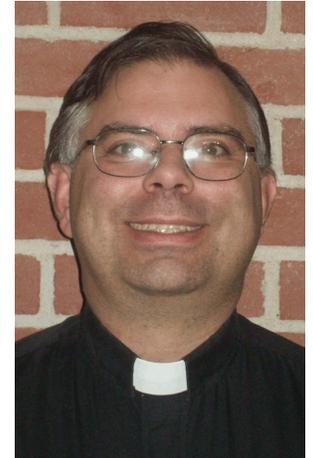
Latrobe, Pennsylvania

Congregation:

St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran
Latrobe, Pennsylvania

Current Call: Pastor

St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran
Latrobe, Pennsylvania



Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

While serving as Pastor in the Lower Susquehanna Synod, (ELCA) I have served as a Conference Dean and Chair of the Committee of Deans. Since 2010 I have served as a member of West Penn Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. I currently also serve as Secretary of the Mid-Northeast Mission District of the NALC.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

My strongest spiritual gifts are teaching, service and evangelism. I have used these gifts in consultation work with congregations as a Mission Consultant in the Lower Susquehanna Synod. I would use these gifts in the NALC's value to be Mission Driven.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

— Romans 10:15

This verse, which is a quote of Isaiah 52:7, speaks of the beautiful feet of those who bring good news. This is meaningful in that God has given us the good news of salvation through faith in Christ to share, whether we are clergy or lay persons.

James L. Hansen

Nominee for Executive Council - Lay

Name:

James L. Hansen



Home:

Hurricane, West Virginia

Congregation:

St Timothy Lutheran Church
Charleston, West Virginia

Occupation:

Retired

Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

Long-time congregation member, congregation president, served in several positions on church council.

Served as synod vice-president of West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod (ELCA).

Current member of NALC Executive Council.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

He has given me the gifts of leadership, discernment, and math and financial skills.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.

— 1 Peter 1:24-25

This verse reminds me of the NALC stand that Scripture is the basis of our faith and the assurance of God that his Word will last forever.

Bruce Leep

Nominee for Executive Council - Lay

Name:

Bruce Leep



Home:

Highland, Indiana

Congregation:

First United Lutheran Church
Hammond, Indiana

Occupation:

English Professor
Trinity Christian College

Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

Service as a lay worship leader, deacon, and church council chairperson.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

Teaching and administrative experience.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

— Psalm 51:10-12

It is my constant prayer for my life.

Frank C. Polkowski

Nominee for Executive Council - Lay

Name:

Frank C. Polkowski

Home:

East Amherst, New York

Congregation:

Christ Lutheran Church
East Amherst, New York

Occupation: Business and
Life Coach, Consultant,
Motivational Speaker



Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

President, Zion Lutheran Church (6 years). Various council, committee and volunteer positions, Zion Lutheran Church (24 years). Human Resources, Zion, counseled pastors in leadership issues (18 years). Vice President, Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center (6 years). Board of Directors, Lutheran Charities (2 years). Council and volunteer positions, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Carlisle, Pa. (3 years) and Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Canoga Park, Calif. (6 years). Taught communication skills, Lutheran Leaders, Lutheran Conference western New York. Taught presentation skills, Knights of Columbus, world-wide leadership and Baptist ministers of western New York. Counseled numerous non-profit agencies, organizations and corporations in meeting their needs and providing guidance when needed. Lutheran CORE member attending 2010 Convocation and voted on ratification of NALC constitution.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

Ability to powerfully speak to all-size audiences on numerous topics. Taught Sunday church school, 20-plus years. Involved in numerous stewardship campaigns. Led numerous strategic planning exercises. Orchestrated a major (\$2.5 million) church expansion involving finance, building needs and outreach. Management, leadership, consulting, personal development and facilitation skills.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

Psalm 23. Many times I am placed in difficult situations. This psalm helps me keep my focus and gives me quiet support.

Richard F. Currey

Nominee for Court of Adjudication

Name:

Richard F. Currey

Home:

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Congregation:

Saint Luke's Lutheran Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Occupation:

Attorney



Experience within the body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

I have 35 years of experience as an attorney, and I go to church regularly.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

I'm not sure this question applies to a trial lawyer, but I would like to think that the skills I have developed over time are truly gifts from God.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

— Psalm 46:1

This is comforting, and undeniably true.

Colorado fires bring opportunities for ministry, hope for new creation

The banging on the door came loudly and forcefully. A woman opened her door and found a police officer standing before her.

“Ma’am, you need to leave now,” ordered the officer. The woman and her husband had just returned from out of town. She looked at her neighbors’ cars loaded down with their belongings.

“Sir, I don’t have any of my things. Please just give me a few minutes,” pleaded the woman.

“Ma’am, you have five minutes.”

The woman and her husband had to leave their home with little more than the clothes on their backs. Unfortunately, they were not alone.

Thirty-two thousand people were evacuated from the Colorado Springs area on Tuesday, June 26, but the reach of the fire consumed the whole city.

Fear was rampant as people drove their cars over to the local gas stations to fill up in the event that they too would need to leave their city.

Cars lined up on ridges to watch the flames roll down the hills into Colorado Springs.

All discussions fell away from the problems or joys of the day. It seemed that everywhere anyone went all the talk was the talk of fire and whether or not it would be stopped before it came to his or her home.

That night there were many in the city praying and crying as fervently as ever for the place that they called home. It was most apparent when news came that the Colorado icon, The Flying W Ranch, had burned to the ground.

Even the seasoned newscasters were not immune to this as they too shed tears and tried unsuccessfully to maintain their composure.

Pastor Josh Hansen and Deaconess Kathy Berrill spent the evening on the phone trying to contact the members of Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church who lived in the evacuated areas.

Calls were made to make sure that all members had a place to sleep that night so that they would not have to stay with strangers, but with friends and family.

One member was in a car accident during the evacuation. Another couple from the church was unable to be contacted. Worries ran high as members inquired about their safety.

It was a night when households around the area stayed glued to the news and radio. Few eyes were able to get much relief from their fears through sleep.

Yet Wednesday came, and, although most people were shell-shocked, somehow, some way, life had to go on. There were jobs to be done, people to take care of and for those at Saint Luke’s, Vacation Bible School to put on.

The flames were still there and more evacuations were issued. Those who had prayed the night before to be spared evacuation had to join those they knew as members of the displaced. Fear still had a tight hold on the community and those at Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church.

Fire can have a fierce and destructive power. However, fire is often nature’s way of leading to a new creation. Fires burn to clean out overgrowth in forests, and the fire and ash of volcanoes can cause new islands to form. Is not God, the Holy Spirit, depicted as a fire? Have we not heard phrases such as “on fire for God” or “the Refiner’s fire” and “baptism by Spirit and fire”? Even the depiction of Pentecost uses the flames of fire to show the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit.

Continued on Page 11

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The Waldo Canyon fire was the most destructive fire in Colorado history. However, it was a tremendous opportunity for creation. Even as fears ran high, the response of those all over the area was that of “how can we help?” Those all over the Pikes Peak area took in friends and family and friends of friends who had been displaced. Restaurants donated food to those who found themselves living in a shelter. Pledges to help rebuild the Flying W Ranch came in. Even the fear of Tuesday night led neighbors to stand side by side, to talk and console each other during such a time of fear. Complete strangers reached out to one another with words of prayer and encouragement whether they were in the line of fire or not. The Pikes Peak region seemed a little closer, a littler smaller.

The members of Saint Luke’s were no different. Money collected during Vacation Bible School would go toward those directly affected by the fires. Pastor Josh sent out e-mails to the congregation to keep everyone informed of ways that the church was there to help.

The members were led in prayer even before the fire hit Colorado Springs, and during the crisis the call to prayer continued. The church reached out to their partners, Mercy’s Gate and Lutheran Family Services, to see how those at Saint Luke’s Lutheran could help their efforts.

The following Sunday, as members arrived with bags upon bags of food and other needed items for the food pantry in tow, they also took time to be with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Hugs were exchanged, as were words of concern and encouragement.

There was also a collective sense of relief for the safety of the members of Saint Luke’s who had been evacuated. In the security of the church, members were able to exchange stories and even laughter was heard. One joked at how happy they were to not have to go home to a fridge of rotten



Cars flee parts of Colorado Springs as the Waldo Canyon fire approaches. (Photo by Jessica Shafer, a member of Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church)

food while another joked that their dog probably wouldn’t want to go home.

While the fire rained down on Colorado Springs and Teller County, those at Saint Luke’s Lutheran found a renewed spirit to connect with their fellow members and to nourish their spiritual friendships.

As the fire is contained, along with the destruction, there will be a chance for a new creation. New homes and offices will replace those burned; trees will be planted and grass will begin to grow. There may be those who look to return to their faith or discover the God that they thought of very little before.

Churches around the Colorado Springs area will be given a new chance to minister and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as relish in the goodness that God provides for us. The scar of the land will serve as a reminder to all of the opportunity that God has supplied for His Church to reach out to those in the Colorado Springs community as well to lend a hand to the friend in the next pew.

We thank Pastor Josh Hansen, Karen Hansen and Bonnie Clark of Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church for sharing this story. Saint Luke’s is one of two NALC congregations in Colorado Springs. The other is Black Forest Lutheran Church.



Celia Whitler



Bread of Stone was one of the musical groups that led the youth in song.



The youth at Impact took part in a service project learning more about hunger around the world and packaging food for Kids Against Hunger.

IMPACT

National Youth Event



Youth from St. John's Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Columbus, Ohio, made hundreds of buckeye necklaces to share with participants at Impact.



Pastor Jonathan Swenson moved the youth with portions of his dramatic one-man show, "Witnesses."



Dr. John Van Epp presented "How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk."



Pastor Bill Yonker was the event pastor. He inspired the youth with his stories and preaching.



Echelon was one of the musical groups that led the youth in song.



Youth were divided into small groups to meet youth from other churches and to process their experience at Impact.

July 5-8

Nashville



Youth from Immanuel Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Whitewood, S.D., were among those who enjoyed sightseeing in Nashville.

East European Missions Network

Partnering together to rebuild and equip the Body of Christ in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union

The young boy in Petrozavodsk, Russia asked a simple question to his youth leader Vika as the English Bible Camp team had wrapped up its work this year, and was preparing to leave on the evening train.

“When the Americans leave is God going with them? If God is leaving with them I want to go too!”

Vika assured him that God was not leaving!

The experience that young boy had of God’s presence with Eastern European Mission Network short-term team members is a testimony to the power of the Gospel at work through His servants in a region where Christianity was virtually eliminated, except for scattered remnants of believers, for more nearly two generations.

Short-term teams are only one aspect of the ministry of EEMN as it works in the former Soviet Union. EEMN is an approved mission partner of NALC.

East European Missions Network is an independent, Biblically-based Lutheran mission agency, celebrating its 20th year of ministry.

EEMN began in 1992, founded in the wake of the fall of communism. In the early morning hours of Christmas Day 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as the General Secretary of the Soviet Union. That night, the Soviet flag over the Kremlin was lowered for the last time. The unthinkable had happened! The Soviet Union was finished, ending 74 years of its atheistic communist experiment. Freedom came to millions, including the freedom to hear the Gospel, own a Bible, and attend church.

Untold millions died, over 100,000 churches were closed and destroyed, and atheism was strictly enforced for those 74 years. But the Soviet Union also preached its own religion.



Pastor Scott Ryll, a NALC missionary sent through East European Mission Network, is serving in Budapest, Hungary. He is pictured here with his wife, Cecilia, and children, Liza and Levente.

Children were taught how “Uncle Lenin” was always watching, how he lived a perfect life, never disobeyed his parents and never had anything but straight As. Teachers said, “Lenin was, Lenin is, Lenin will always be.”

Continued on Page 15

Continued from Page 14

But as the Soviet Union collapsed, the truth came out about Lenin's viciousness. For example, he executed whole cities, just so the neighboring cities would be afraid. As he wrote to Trotsky, "what is needed is remorseless destruction."

When people learned the truth, their beliefs — their worldview, in fact, their whole lives — fell to pieces. They didn't know what to think or believe anymore.

Missionaries started pouring in and speaking into that void of belief, and many people accepted Christ.

Since 1991, various former Soviet countries have taken many different paths. Countries like Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Hungary have all joined the European Union and have striven to become "European" countries.

Other countries, like Russia and Belarus, have returned to more authoritarian systems of government following the chaotic 1990s.

In the more European countries, there is more freedom. But in some other former Soviet countries, believers face fierce religious persecution. However, one thing remains the same in all of the former Soviet countries: practicing Christians remain a tiny minority of the population.



2012 Eastern European Mission Network Team in Petrozavodsk, Russia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many people in former Soviet countries began identifying themselves with the traditional religion of their country but more as a way of regaining identity than to embracing the faith. For instance in Russia, over 70 percent of people claim to be Russian Orthodox, but only 0.5 percent of Russians attend church regularly.

So the need for mission work in the former Soviet Union remains. And it has actually increased in urgency because of the growing restrictions on freedom in some countries.

EEMN is the only Lutheran mission agency working throughout the former Soviet Union. EEMN has residential missionaries in Latvia, Hungary, Ukraine and Turkey that are in need of congregational support in prayer and finances.

In addition, we have strategic partnerships with key indigenous Lutheran leaders in places where missionaries can't live and work, like Russia and Belarus.

We provide prayer support, discipleship, mentoring and training, financial support, evangelistic tools and encouragement for pastors and leaders. We are helping to equip future leaders who can work to reestablish Christianity and rebuild the Church.



Bible School and Youth Center (Phase 1) in Odessa, Ukraine

Continued on Page 17

Help stop human sex trafficking

By Pastor Todd M. Kornahrens

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. — Isaiah 1:17

As we celebrate the liberties afforded to us living in a free nation, it is important for Christians to realize that there are individuals within the borders of our country who are not free, and it is the responsibility of the Church to hear the cries of the oppressed and speak out in their behalf.

Many know that sex trafficking — modern-day slavery — is a major issue around the world. The International Labor Organization, an agency of the United Nations, estimates that 12.3 million people around the world are involved in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor and sexual servitude.

The United Nations also reports that “Human Trafficking is the second largest illegal enterprise in the world, followed by illegal drug sales.” However, what many people do not realize is the large role that America plays in the sex-trade industry.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that there were between 100,000 and 150,000 sex slaves in the United States. However, current statistics have shown that this number has risen drastically in the last seven years. The CIA estimates that between 45,000 to 50,000 people currently living in this country have been victims of sex trafficking.

A 2009 study by the Ohio Trafficking in Persons Study Commission showed that the United States has played a significant role as a consumer of sex trafficking and is currently the world's second largest destination country (following Germany) for women and children trafficked into the sex industry.

Studies have also shown that there is a direct connection between the rise of sex trafficking and pornography. As people are being exposed to more readily available and graphic pornography, what is needed to feed their addiction grows and many turn to sex slaves.

According to the website Internet Filter Review, \$3,078 is spent on pornography every second, and over 28,000 Internet users are viewing pornography. A new pornographic video is created every 39 minutes, and every day there are over 100,000 online searches for child pornography.

This is too big of an issue for God's Church to remain silent any longer. As Hebrews 13:3 reminds us, “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

Here are 10 things your local congregation can do to help abolish the sex trade.

1. Pray. Include human sex trafficking in the prayers of your congregation as well as in your personal prayers. Early Church father, Tertullian, commenting on Mark 4 and the power of the Church's prayer wrote, “But that little ship presented a figure of the Church, in that she is disquieted in the sea, that is, in the world, by temptations and persecutions, the Lord patiently sleeping, as it were, until roused at last by the prayers of the saints he checks the world, and restores tranquility to his own.”

2. Learn. Learn the realities of the sex trade around the world by watching the online video at <http://vimeo.com/14676960>. If you are able, share this video in worship on Sunday.

3. Educate your youth group and children on the reality of sex trafficking and how to guard against it. Teach them about the dangers of social media, older boyfriends or girlfriends, people posing as talent agents, “grooming” by neighbors or older adults, etc.

4. Work to alleviate poverty in your community. Though it is not only the poor that are exploited, exploitation seems to be more prevalent among impoverished people. Often prostitution is not about sex for the individual selling his or her body, but about food and providing for his or her family.

Continued on Page 17



Petra and Peter, youth leaders with SEM Slovakia, serving through East European Missions Network.

East European Missions

Continued from Page 15

Over the years, EEMN has started Bible schools, training centers and a Christian college. In September we will open our newest Bible School in southern Ukraine, which will serve Lutheran congregations and train future pastors and lay leaders for the Russian-speaking world.

EEMN also sends short-term mission teams annually, most of whom lead English Bible Camps in public schools and churches in partnership with our missionaries and local partners.

Since 1996 hundreds of people and many thousands of students have attended an EEMN camp! In 2012, nearly 100 people served on an EEMN short-term team.

We also have opportunities for personal relationship and direct involvement with sister congregations in the region. There is much important ministry yet to be done and we need your help in carrying out and expanding the ministry.

In 2007 EEMN Director Bill Moberly and the EEMN Board founded Awakening Lutherans to World Missions — www.alwm.org — with a vision to assist congregations in raising global missions awareness and to learn how to get personally engaged with obeying the Great Commission. His book, *Igniting a Passion for Missions: A Guide for Church Leaders*, has become a

key resource for many congregations and church councils.

EEMN and ALWM staffs are available to personally help you in this important transition.

For more information about EEMN and how your congregation can get involved please visit www.eemn.org or contact EEMN Executive Director Bill Moberly at 505-990-1639. The EEMN staff collectively has more than 60 years of missions experience and first-hand ministry in the former USSR.

Help stop sex trafficking

Continued from Page 16

5. Support an agency working to rehabilitate those who were victims of sex trafficking. Our congregation supports Gracehaven House in Cincinnati, Ohio (gracehavenhouse.org) and Abolition International (abolitioninternational.org).

6. Host a congregation event. Have a speaker from a local anti-trafficking ministry, show a video on the realities of the sex trade or find another way to make your congregation and community aware of this growing epidemic.

7. Write a letter to your local and state representatives.

8. Speak out against internet pornography in your congregation and youth group. It is not a victimless crime.

9. Gather items for your local sex trafficking rehabilitation house.

10. Support anti-trafficking ministry organizations.

God has not called his Church to be silent, but to speak out for the “the poor, the alien and the widow.” This is a growing problem in the borders of our country and it is time for the Church to speak out and make a difference.

Pastor-parish relationship is like marriage

Ministry Matters

I'm often asked about the nature of the pastor-parish relationship. It would seem this is the reason for much conflict and disagreement in congregational life.

Some have the idea that the congregation council "hires" the pastor, must provide "supervision" as with any employee, and should be allowed to "fire" or "terminate" the pastor.

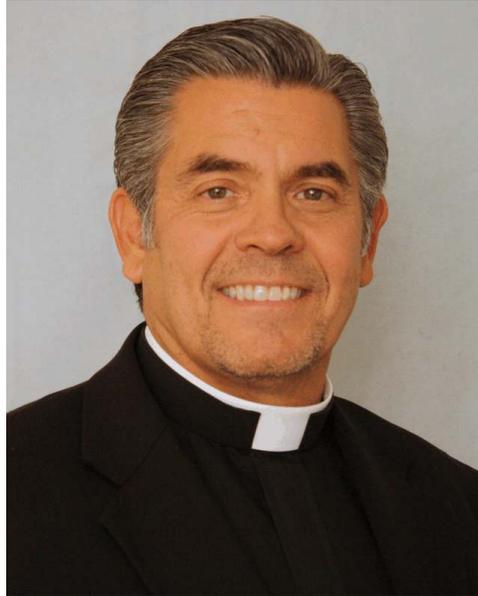
Other congregation councils (and congregations!) have no idea about the nature of the pastor-parish relationship, how to develop a healthy relationship, and how to deal positively with issues and concerns that arise in this relationship.

Similarly, pastors sometimes do more harm than good in trying to foster and grow a fruitful shared ministry within the local congregation.

Certainly, the Augsburg Confession, our chief confessional statement as Lutherans, presents what is referred to as a "high view" of the Office of Holy Ministry, divinely appointed and ordained as was marriage from the beginning.

Read the words of Philip Melancthon on the Office of the Ministry, Article V of the Augsburg Confession:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments.



Pastor David Wendel

Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel. Augsburg Confession (Book of Concord, Tappert edition, page 31).

It is clearly stated that the ministry of Word and Sacrament comes from God. God instituted this office that the Gospel might be preached so that the Holy Spirit is given to work faith when and where he pleases in those who hear the Gospel. Faith comes — not by our own merits, not through our own

preparations, thoughts and works, but through the external word of the Gospel proclaimed through the office of the ministry.

This explains why we have an ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament — because God instituted it!

But our confessions do not describe what this relationship looks like in a parish, how it is shaped and developed for the good of all and the furtherance of the Gospel.

When asked these questions, my answer is: the relationship between pastor and congregation is more of a marriage than that of an employee-employer relationship.

How is this a marriage?

First, in the sense that the call process, bluntly stated, is something like looking for the "perfect" spouse. We quickly come to realize there is no such thing! Like members of the congregation, pastors all have strengths and skills as well as, yes, shortcomings and weaknesses.

So we begin the call process first with much prayer and devotion, surrounding a period of "flirtation" between pastor and congregation (initial contacts), then moving to actual "dating" when a pastor is brought on site for a visit. When

Continued on Page 19

the relationship seems to be of the Holy Spirit and the congregation and pastor acknowledge that this is the call of God for them to unite in a relationship of mission and ministry, a call is extended and accepted and the marriage is made.

It is more like a marriage than just in the courting and match-making, however.

The pastor-parish relationship is a marriage in that there is no “boss” — no employer-employee — just as in the healthy marriage of husband and wife there is no “boss.” Rather, spouses seek to work together, to cooperate and to communicate in a spirit of mutual respect and trust.

This is true also of the pastor-parish relationship. It is a continual process of cooperation and communication, always grounded in mutual respect and trust.

The pastor, council and congregation must always communicate honestly and openly about the relationship and the “growing pains” experienced as the marriage deepens and, hopefully, strengthens.

When pastor and parish are not communicating — as with a marriage — problems develop. Issues pile one on top of the other and soon the heap becomes a seemingly insurmountable barrier to productive and fruitful cooperation and communication.

What are we to do in these circumstances? How do we

overcome such barriers between pastors and parishes?

I learned in pastoral care and counseling classes that most couples seek counseling too late in their marital struggles. Husbands and wives most often ignore their problems until the hurt and pain are so great that there really is little hope for saving the marriage. The key is to address issues and concerns early on and perhaps to seek outside assistance before the pile between you is too high!

This is true as well with the pastor-parish relationship. Address issues before they become barriers that keep you from communicating. Seek help early on! Don’t wait until the “marriage” of pastor and congregation seems bogged down by “irreconcilable differences”!

Within the NALC, we have skilled staff, deans and pastors, as well as laypersons in our congregations, who have experience dealing with communal conflict and healing reconciliation.

Again, the key is to address conflict and difficulty quickly and, if necessary, to seek outside help early on.

Small problems in a marriage can be dealt with most effectively when they are small. The larger they grow, the more difficult they are to resolve and overcome.

When parishes and pastors find themselves having trouble with communication, conflict and relational issues that can’t be resolved “in house,” they can

contact their dean, the bishop or me. We can help!

We can arrange for a team of several skilled persons to come assist with communication. We can provide assistance and counsel aimed at strengthening and growing the pastor-parish relationship so that the marriage of pastor and congregation need not end in “divorce,” and the vision and mission of the congregation can once again move forward.

Pastor David M. Wendel, STS
Assistant to the Bishop for
Ministry and Ecumenism
dwendel@thenalc.org

NALC grows in Canada

The North American Lutheran Church continues to grow in Canada. Eight congregations in Canada are now among the 323 congregations of the NALC.

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

The NALC Canada Section is a part of that vision. It enables areas of ministry and addresses legal matters related to the life of the NALC in Canada.

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

Advent Lutheran Church Winchester, Virginia

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

Advent Lutheran Church of Winchester, Va., celebrated its second anniversary as a congregation on June 24 with Bishop Paull Spring as guest preacher.

Advent Lutheran was one of the first churches to join the North American Lutheran Church. It was one of four mission churches among the original 17 congregations to join the NALC and was organized as a congregation several months before the NALC was formed.

Advent Lutheran grew out of the concern that many people within the ELCA were feeling about what might happen at the August 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Because several of these people were active in Lutheran CORE, they were well aware of the issues.

Not being allowed to hold a meeting within their own church building, they met at another church facility and invited Dr. Robert Benne of Roanoke College in Salem, Va., to come and describe how the ELCA has been moving away from a traditional, orthodox, Scripturally-based faith.

Because of the high level of interest they held a second meeting in a firehouse. The meeting was attended by people from all over northern Virginia.



Members of Advent Lutheran Church in Winchester, Va., posed for a group photo after their second anniversary celebration.

After the decisions made at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to ordain persons in same-gender sexual relationships, the group held another meeting and decided to start a new church. They held their first worship service on June 6, 2010.

During the early months, three members of the congregation took turns delivering the sermon.

Wanting to be served by an ordained minister, the church then found several retired Lutheran pastors who were available for pulpit supply. After being served by 15 different pastors over a period of several months, they found Pastor Noel Vold, a retired Lutheran pastor, who was available to preach three Sundays a month. The congregation enjoys his first person presentations by Bible

characters in costume, as well as the music provided by his wife, who is an accomplished organist and pianist.

According to Roy Schwarz, president of the congregation, there is a great deal of leadership ability and creativity within the congregation. Roy Schwarz is the father of Ryan Schwarz, a former member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee and currently treasurer of the NALC.

Worship attendance generally runs between 25 and 35 people and has run as high as 60. They meet in the facility of a local Seventh Day Adventist Church, and appreciate that congregation's warmth, friendliness, and accommodating spirit.

Continued on Page 21

Continued from Page 20

The congregation gives six percent of its offerings to benevolence. One percent supports a local food bank, one percent is given to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and four percent is shared with the NALC.

The congregation has three categories of members — regular, full-time members, associate members, and honorary members. Associate members are those who for some reason need to be a member of an ELCA church but who also want an affiliation outside the ELCA. The title of honorary member is given to those who have been an inspiration to the

congregation. When Bishop Paull Spring attended the congregation's second anniversary service in June, he and his wife were given the status of honorary members.

The congregation's single biggest goal is to call a full-time pastor. Members would like to call a younger pastor with young children. According to President Roy Schwarz, "There are enough unchurched people, as well as enough orthodox Lutherans in our area, so that there is a role for us in the future. Because of the teachings of the ELCA, there are enough people who will want an option like us."

The congregation recognizes the disadvantages of not owning their

own building, such as not having a permanent sign and not having a place for a reception after a member's funeral. There are some who would like to see them own their own building, while others feel that they already have their hands full doing what they are doing.

President Schwarz said, "I have been a part of somewhere between 17 and 19 congregations. But I have never been a part of a church where everyone is so willing to do what needs to be done to make the church work." He also stated that America is now a mission field. He thinks that a second Lutheran reformation is beginning. "This is the Reformation all over again," he said.

Second meeting held between Missouri Synod Lutherans and North American Lutheran Church

Representatives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church—Canada met in Hilliard, Ohio, July 19-20 at the NALC offices.

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

LCMS representatives were Dr. Albert B. Collver III, director of Church Relations and assistant to the LCMS President; Rev. John Pless, director of field education and assistant professor in Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.; and Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer, executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations. President Robert Bugbee of the Lutheran Church—Canada attended as a formal observer.

One of the main focuses of the meeting was discussion of areas of practical cooperation, such as the Lutheran Malaria Initiative and disaster relief. The church bodies gave an update on recent developments within their churches.

The group discussed a working agreement on Inter-Lutheran Consultation and agreed on a draft to be presented at the next meeting scheduled for December 2012. The draft identifies the goal of the consultation: "to consider ways by which our churches may work together to make Christ known, and to strengthen the Lutheran witness by word and deed in the church and community." The draft also proposes that Lutheran Church—Canada be a full participant in the consultation.

Plans were made for a series of five dialogues to be held over the next few years. The December 2012 meeting to be held at Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne will focus on the relationship between the Gospel and the Scriptures.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

By Pastor Michael G. Tavella

Eucharist, a word derived from Greek, means thanksgiving. It is one of several designations that refer to the meal instituted by Christ by which we have communion with Him through Word and the physical signs of bread and wine. In the celebration of the Holy Sacrament, we render the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God as a response to the grace He has shown us. “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving ...” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 67, from Psalm 116).

The Eucharistic theme in the Holy Communion is rooted in pre-Christian Jewish practice. The *Hallel* (praise) recited in Jewish worship, including the Passover Seder, consists of Psalms 113-118 and also includes Psalm 136, the Great *Hallel*, which begins “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.” This verse is placed before the post-Communion Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Eucharistic liturgy of the Common Service. The Psalm rehearses the great deeds of God on behalf of Israel with a repetition throughout of the words “for His steadfast love endures forever.”

The post-Communion thanksgiving prayer from Martin Luther’s German Mass follows the first verse of Psalm 136. It is included among three alternative prayers in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. It begins, “We give you thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life...”

The Eucharistic Prayer itself is preceded by the offertory, which includes an offertory song and offertory prayer. “Let the vineyards be fruitful” is addressed to God from whom we ask His generosity and abundance. We pray that the Lord may be present at the altar and that we may receive a foretaste of the feast of the Kingdom. The bread of life has a double meaning. It is both our daily food and the Eucharist.

The second offertory song, “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?” answers the

question it poses. Offered is the sacrifice of thanksgiving. We “call on the name of the Lord,” a phrase repeated twice in the song. Thanksgiving to God is set within the context of offering and sacrifice.

The first offertory prayer begins, “Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us.” Our offering is a response to God’s preceding gifts. Giving thanks accompanies our offering of all that we are and possess. We ask that God may receive our gifts for the sake of Christ who offered Himself on the cross.

The second prayer, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God,” also expresses our thanksgiving for what God has given us, including the gifts of the people brought forward to the altar. We commit ourselves once again to service to the Lord of which we are reminded at the dismissal, “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.” “Blessed are you” expresses our thanksgiving and praise to God for His benefits.

The salutation begins the Eucharistic Prayer. In this exchange, the pastor sings, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” The congregation assents with the response, “It is right to give Him thanks and praise.” The preface before the *Sanctus* continues the theme of thanksgiving. “It is indeed right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places offer thanks and praise to you, O Lord, holy Father, through Christ our Lord...” Thanksgiving and offering again accompany one another. Thanksgiving is an offering of the people.

The ancient Eucharistic prayers found in *The Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Disciples)*, have thanksgiving at their heart. Each of these prayers begins with, “We give thanks...” The first prayer over the cup is a thanksgiving for Jesus Christ of the Holy Vine of David. The second prayer over the bread is a rendering of thanks for the life and knowledge that have come to us through Christ. The prayer continues with a petition that as the Eucharistic bread was made one, so may the Church be gathered together into the Kingdom of

Continued on Page 23

God. A doxology concludes the prayer. The third prayer at the post-Communion is addressed to the Father, as are the other two, and is a thanksgiving for God's Holy Name that dwells in our hearts and for the knowledge, faith, and immortality we have received in Jesus Christ. The prayer continues with thanksgiving for physical and spiritual food and continues with a petition that the Church may be delivered from evil and gathered from all directions into the Kingdom of God. It concludes with a petition for the coming of the Kingdom, "*Maranatha*. Our Lord, come."

The theme of thanksgiving is also taken up in the Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus which is included in *LBW*. This prayer originally did include a Preface or the *Sanctus*. It begins, "We give you thanks, Father, through Jesus Christ, your beloved Son." An account of the acts of God in creation and redemption is recited. The narrative introduces the Words of Institution with, "...taking bread and giving thanks to you said..."

Jesus' giving thanks at the first Eucharist is recounted in all versions of the Words of Institution in the New Testament. In the *anamnesis* (the remembering) of the Eucharistic Prayer, the theme of thanks appears again, "Remembering, then, His death and resurrection, we lift this bread and cup before you, giving you thanks that you have made us worthy to stand before you and to serve you as your priestly people."

At the conclusion of the Last Supper before departing for the Mount of Olives, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn, probably the Great *Hallel*, Psalm 136.

Praise and thanksgiving in our worship derive from Jewish worship that includes the Passover Seder (order of worship). We too sing a final thanksgiving. *LBW* provides two songs, "Thank the Lord and sing His praise" and "Lord, now let your servant go in peace," the *Nunc Dimittis*.

The first thanksgiving song is replete with praise and thanksgiving. It begins with a call to thank the Lord and tell His mighty deeds. It ends with the Lord's leading us "in joy with shouts of thanksgiving" and two Alleluias, a word meaning "Praise the Lord."

The *Nunc Dimittis* is Simeon's song found in the Gospel of Luke. While Simeon holds the Christ Child in his arms in the Temple, he blesses God with this song. Having seen the Savior, Simeon can die in peace, for God's final salvation has come and His Word and promises fulfilled. We sing these words of Simeon after we have received the Sacrament by which we partake of Christ, our Lord and Savior. We are about to depart from worship in peace, having heard and tasted the salvation of the Lord. The hymn concludes with the *Gloria Patri*, the Lesser Doxology, the *Gloria in Excelsis* being the Greater Doxology.

After the blessing, yet another instance of thanksgiving occurs. The last response of the congregation in the service is "Thanks be to God" in response to the words of the minister, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." In this response, the congregation thanks God for the benefits received and accepts the call to serve the Lord in everyday life.

It is clear that thanksgiving is a central theme in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar. From the offertory through the dismissal, the theme resounds. It is no surprise that the service is often called the Holy Eucharist.

Praise and thanksgiving are sacrificial in nature. They are responses to the generosity of God toward us, especially to the salvation given us in Christ.

Is it better to call the Sacrament, the *Eucharist* or *Communion*? Each describes an aspect of the Sacrament. *Communion* better describes the action of God toward us. *Eucharist* highlights our response to God's gifts. The most important thing to remember is that God comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and we respond to His grace with our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving along with our gifts and our very selves as the liturgy so clearly expresses.

Next month we will look closely at the Words of Institution.

Pastor Michael G. Tavella serves 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.

Characteristics of effective, growing churches

In Pursuit of the Great Commission

By Pastor Don Brandt

A great many of you are probably members of congregations that are in numerical decline. And my guess is that many of your congregations have lost members because of the ELCA policy changes of 2009. For some of you these losses are because you left the ELCA, and for others because you have chosen to remain in the ELCA.

The purpose of this column is to help you — and your congregation — regroup and move forward, focusing on reaching new people for Jesus Christ.

As I have written before, the best single strategy for moving beyond congregational conflict is to discern and proactively pursue God's mission for your congregation.

I recently came across one of the most succinct and helpful articles I have ever read on the subject of congregational outreach. The article, by Dr. Daniel J. Rode, is entitled "Why Do Some Churches Grow and Others Don't?" Dr. Rode writes that growing congregations often share the following *ministry priorities*.

The first is "**having a trained and visionary leadership.**" These congregational leaders are "optimists who precipitate, concentrate, and lead all church activities toward God's vision for that congregation..." Included with this visionary leadership is pastors who "recognize the potential of their laity." This is so crucial. When the laity are denied ownership of our ministries we cannot expect them to be

enthusiastic participants in congregational life.

A second priority for many growing churches is they "**develop ministries according to gifts, and evangelism according to needs.**" Rode quotes Christian writer Christian Schwarz, who states that the leader's role is "to help church members discover and recognize the gifts God has given them, and to find a service (ministry opportunity) according to those gifts. When believers live in consonance with their spiritual gifts they do not work, by their own efforts ... the Spirit of God works in them."

A third characteristic of growing churches, according to Rode, is that they "**follow biblically based priorities.**" Dr. Rode quotes authors Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, who claim that, historically, U. S. churches stop growing when they "reject traditional doctrines and stop making serious demands on their followers." Rode also writes that growing congregations typically make evangelism a greater priority than social involvement.

A fourth initiative taken by growing churches is they "**plan inspiring worship services.**" I encourage you to evaluate your own worship services, giving special attention to not only sermons, but your worship music. The key question in song/hymn selection should be how participatory they are. Also consider the use of multimedia and drama to enhance the quality of your worship celebrations.

A fifth ministry priority mentioned by Dr. Rode is an emphasis on **cell (small) groups**. If you want an in-

depth look at the "nuts and bolts" of a small group ministry, e-mail me. I'll send you a previous column on this subject.

A sixth priority for growing congregations is that, while emphasizing Bible-based *traditions*, they **avoid traditionalism**. This is such an important distinction. It's imperative that orthodoxy to our faith not be confused with a ministry style and structure that appears — to outsiders — as parochial and legalistic. This is especially significant when it comes to our ability to connect with people who have little if any church background.

A seventh initiative among growing churches is **making disciples**. Rode writes, "It doesn't matter which method is used in making disciples, so long as it is motivated out of love and service to create new ministries..." As I have written in previous columns, the best overall ministry paradigm is *the creation of new groups and ministries for new people*.

And now the concluding paragraph of Rode's article: "Growing churches know that only God produces true growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). Natural church growth will continue to be a supernatural work ... Human planning and activity have their place, but the decisive factor will continue to be the mysterious and powerful work of the Holy Spirit. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.' (Zechariah 4:6)"

Pastor Don Brandt serves Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore. You may reach him at DonB@oursaviorssalem.org.