

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

March 2012

Congregations are voting to ratify 2011 NALC Convocation actions

Two-thirds majority has not yet been met; congregations continue to vote

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are voting to affirm two major decisions made by the NALC's 2011 Convocation.

As of March 8, the 144 congregations that have reported their voting results have all voted to approve the Convocation actions. However, the two-thirds majority of those congregations eligible to vote has not yet been reached.

At the time of the 2011 Convocation, the NALC had 250 congregations. Of those 250 congregations that are eligible to vote, 167 must approve the actions to reach a two-thirds majority. The NALC now has more than 300 congregations.

As a part of its commitment to be congregationally-focused, the NALC constitution requires major decisions to be ratified by its congregations before going into effect.

The decision on whether to ratify Convocation actions will normally be part of a regularly scheduled congregational meeting such as an annual meeting.

Two decisions by the Convocation have been sent to congregations for consideration:

+ A Full Communion Agreement with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

+ Amendments to the NALC constitution.

Congregations were sent information on the ratification process including a response form. The information includes copies of the constitutional

amendments and information about the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. The documents sent to congregations are also available on the NALC website — www.thenalc.org.

“Congregational participation is a cornerstone of NALC governance. One element of this participation is ratification. By requiring ratification of certain key decisions, the NALC ensures that NALC members are aware of and broadly support those decisions. Participation in the ratification process is an important responsibility that every congregation owes to its own members and to all other NALC congregations,” explains an information page sent to congregations.

Constitutional Amendments

The constitution and the proposed amendments, as approved by the Convocation, are available online at www.thenalc.org.

Many of the amendments to the constitution remove provisions related to the first year of the NALC's life. The constitution included several items addressing the NALC's first year such as providing leaders for the first year and electing leaders to staggered terms at the 2011 Convocation.

Information detailing the terms of office for officers and Executive Council members was added to the constitution, as was information on how to fill a vacancy in any office. Also added was a process for removing a person from elected office should that become necessary.

Continued on Page 7

The Wilderness is Not Wasted

A Message from Bishop Bradosky

Our Lenten journey begins with the record from Mark of Jesus' baptism. Isn't it amazing that just after affirming the identity of Jesus publically, immediately the Spirit "drove" him out into the wilderness?

While on the surface it may seem unfair, unjust and contrary to the work of a loving God, the wilderness experience is not wasted.

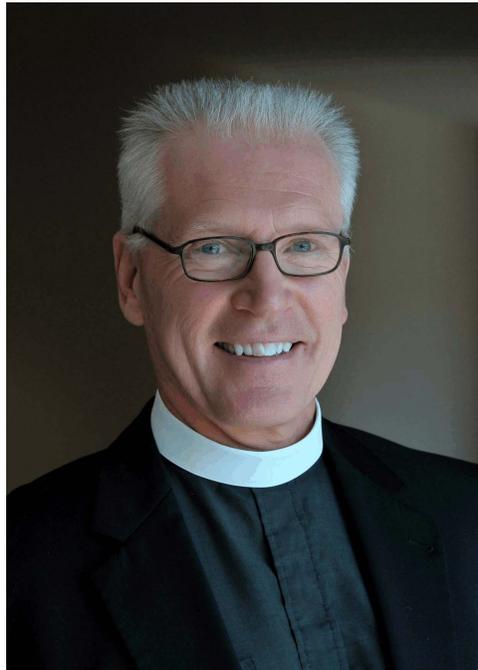
Many of our pastors and congregations have endured a wilderness experience in order to become a part of the North American Lutheran Church. Some are just beginning that journey. Others are immersed in it, and others are emerging from it. Let me share several observations about the wilderness.

First, the witness of the Scriptures is that most every leader God prepared to accomplish His purposes was required to journey through the wilderness.

Abraham responded to God's call to the promised land, but the journey led him through the wilderness of the death of his father and nearly a lifetime without a child.

Jacob possessed the blessing of his father, but he had to experience the wilderness, fleeing from his home fearing a brother who would have killed him.

Joseph was to be a leader of his family, but his wilderness



Bishop John Bradosky

experience included being sold into slavery and spending time in prison.

Moses was living a royal life in the palaces of Egypt, but he was forced to run for his life as a murderer, living as a shepherd in the wilderness.

John the Baptist experienced life in the wilderness as a way to prepare for his role of one who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

As Jesus began his public ministry, He was led into the wilderness and tested by Satan for forty days.

After the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, he spent several years in isolation preparing for his ministry.

If none of those leaders — chosen by God — were spared the wilderness experience, why should you and I be exempt?

Second, the wilderness is a place where God can speak and we can hear.

Our lives are cluttered with business and busyness, obligations and relations, careers and calamities. We have little time left to spend with God or to hear His voice.

When God leads us to the wilderness, we are forced to leave behind our past, our schedules, the idols we worship, our materialism, and our relational difficulties.

When all that is stripped away, we have time to hear the voice of God speaking. In the wilderness, we can experience His powerful presence, undistracted, and undisturbed by all the other voices and demands for our time, energy and focus. He speaks more profoundly because we can listen more closely.

Third, through the wilderness experience, God provides for our security and protection. He guards us and guides us as He speaks and instructs our hearts.

In the wilderness we are vulnerable, and God works overtime to provide for our needs so we can learn and grow.

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

Consider the reflection on Israel's time in the wilderness from Deuteronomy 2:7:

“The Lord your God has blessed everything you have done and has watched your every step through this great wilderness. During these forty years, the Lord your God has been with you and provided for your every need so that you lacked nothing.”

They had food, water, clothes, and shoes that never wore out. In the wilderness, we are reminded of God's care and provision for our every need. We can depend on Him completely.

Fourth, the wilderness is a great place to learn important lessons that can only be learned there.

1. The first is humility or obscurity. We tend to see ourselves as the center of the universe and the wilderness helps us to see ourselves from God's perspective.

2. The wilderness teaches us patience. Life is not always easy nor is it always fast. That is a hard lesson to understand in a microwave culture.

3. The importance of solitude is another lesson from the wilderness. We need to find a time and place where we can spend time with Jesus without distractions. We can easily fill our lives with regret as though we are missing something by spending time in the wilderness, but if Christ is with us we are complete and fulfilled.

4. The wilderness reminds us that discomfort is not always a bad

thing. Jesus cares less about my comfort and more about my growth and maturity. If I stay comfortable, I will often resist the growth that is good for me.

*The wilderness
experience
is not wasted
because
through it
God is
training you for
what is ahead,
equipping you
for greater
service
in mission
and ministry.*

Finally, if you have had to go through a wilderness experience, stop regretting it. If you are in the wilderness now, don't resist it. Don't be embarrassed or filled with regret; embrace it and learn from it. God will use it to enrich and bless your life. The wilderness experience is not wasted because through it God is training you for what is ahead, equipping you for greater service in mission and ministry.

Going through the wilderness is never easy. There are days when you are not sure you are going to make it, when it is both painful and depressing.

It was through the wilderness experience of grieving the death of my son that Jesus prepared and propelled me into the work of discipleship.

It was through a wilderness experience in the congregation I was serving that He prepared me for this office of caring for pastors and congregations as your Bishop.

It is the wilderness experience that strengthens our witness. People out there in the world want to know that you know what it is like to be there! They want to hear from someone who has been tested — not from someone who can only speak theoretically about how this applies to life. They need real life application. They want to know that faith in Christ is worth it!

This is our mission to share this Gospel with the entire world. This is our witness to the world of the difference Jesus has made in our lives, especially through the wilderness. This is the faith the saints who came before us have shared with us. This is the primary work of every congregation.

It has everything to do with the values that shape the North American Lutheran Church: Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded, and Congregationally-Focused.

May the Lord bless your Lenten journey, especially through the wilderness.

Bishop John Bradosky

NALC, ELCA leaders meet for the first time

In response to a resolution passed by the 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), seeking conversation with the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), four representatives of each church body met on Feb. 6-7, 2012, in Indianapolis for discussion of areas of disagreement, interest and concern.

The NALC representatives were: the Rev. Dr. David Wendel, Ministry Coordinator and Ecumenical Relations Officer; the Rev. Dr. Michael Tavella, Dean of the Atlantic Mission District; the Rev. James T. Lehmann, Dean of the Great Rivers Mission District; and Mr. Ryan Schwarz, Treasurer.

The ELCA representatives were: the Rev. Donald J. McCoid, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop; Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations; the Rev. Dr. Marcus Kunz, Assistant to the Bishop; Executive for Theological Discernment; the Rev. Dr. Marcus C. Lohrmann, Bishop of the Northwestern Ohio Synod; and the Rev. Kathryn

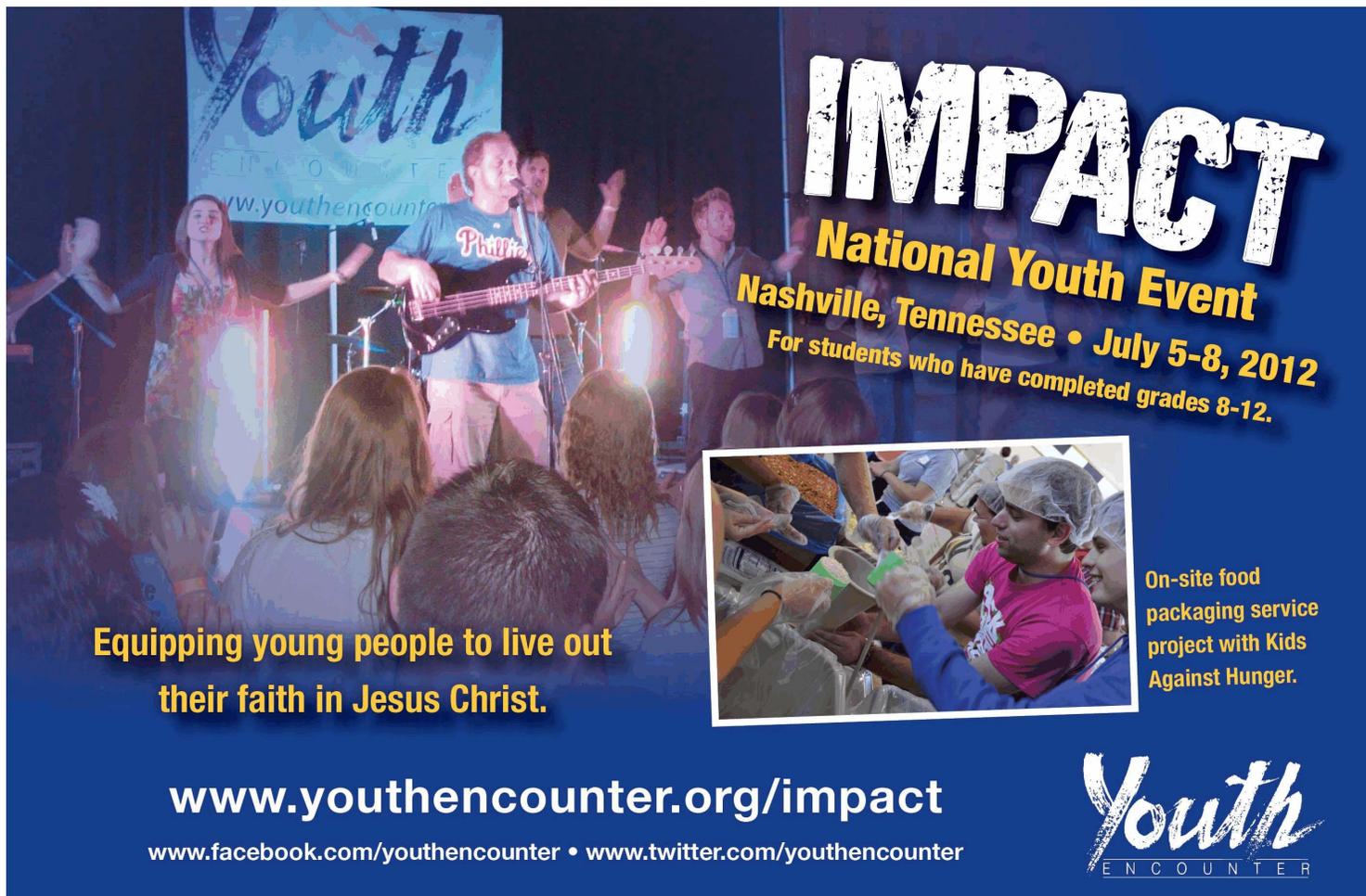
Tiede, pastor of Living Waters Lutheran Church and member of the Church Council.

In the 24 hours spent together, the representatives prayed, had Bible study and devotions, and engaged in cordial and candid conversation.

This meeting was not intended to, nor did the participants seek to, resolve issues between the two church bodies. Rather, the participants sought to share and clarify disagreements to improve mutual understanding.

Practical matters related to local mission and ministry were also significant topics of discussion, with hopes of future resolution.

This meeting, which was the first between the two bodies since the formation of the NALC in 2010, constituted an opening of lines of communication between the two churches. The representatives discussed the possibility of future meetings.



Youth
ENCOUNTER

IMPACT
National Youth Event
Nashville, Tennessee • July 5-8, 2012
For students who have completed grades 8-12.

Equipping young people to live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

www.youthencounter.org/impact
www.facebook.com/youthencounter • www.twitter.com/youthencounter

On-site food packaging service project with Kids Against Hunger.

Youth
ENCOUNTER

Mission Districts continue to organize

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are organizing regional Mission Districts. Two new Mission Districts formally organized in February — bringing the total number of Mission Districts to 13. Other Mission Districts are in the process of organizing.

Congregations from Indiana and Kentucky met on Feb. 18 and formed what they named the Heartland Mission District. They elected Pastor Larry Gember of St. James Lutheran Church in Greenfield, Ind., as Dean. Pastor Mark Chavez was the speaker for the Convocation.

The Mid-South Mission District met Feb. 18 at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Hoover (Birmingham), Ala. Pastor William (Bill) White of Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Memphis, Tenn., was elected as Dean. The Mid-South Mission District includes Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and the panhandle area of Florida.

Other Mission Districts that have formally organized are:

Atlantic Mission District

(Eastern Pennsylvania, eastern New York, eastern Maryland, New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.)
Dean: Pastor Michael Tavella, Abington, Pa.

Carolinas Mission District

Dean: Pastor Carl M. Haynes, Salisbury, N.C.

Eastern South Dakota Mission District

Dean: Pastor Randy Eisenbeisz, Hayti, S.D.

Sonshine Mission District of Florida

Dean: Pastor Christopher Byars, Dade City, Fla.

Great Rivers Mission District

(Illinois)

Dean: Rev. James Lehmann, Thomasboro, Ill.

Iowa Mission District

Dean: Pastor Ken Kimball, Waterville, Iowa.



Map of NALC Mission Districts

Mid-Northeast Mission District

(Western Pennsylvania, western New York, and western Maryland)

Dean: Pastor Eric Riesen, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Minnkota Mission District

(Minnesota and eastern North Dakota)

Dean: Pastor Tim Lundeen, Erskine, Minn.

Ohio Mission District

Dean: Pastor Dan Powell, Springfield, Ohio.

Western Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming Mission District

Dean: Pastor David Baer, Whitewood, S.D.

Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Mission District

Dean: Pastor Roy A. Harrisville III, Menomonie, Wis.

The NALC constitution explains the purpose of the Mission Districts as: “Congregations shall join in collaboration to fulfill most effectively the ministry and mission of the NALC.”

Each Mission District will elect as Dean a pastor who will work with the NALC Bishop in conducting similar ministry to the Bishop in their regional area.

“Deans shall serve as pastor to ordained ministers, their families, and congregations, and will conduct a ministry of teaching and visitation with ordained ministers and congregations,” the constitution says.

NALC is Traditionally-Grounded

Ministry Coordinator's Corner

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."
— 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

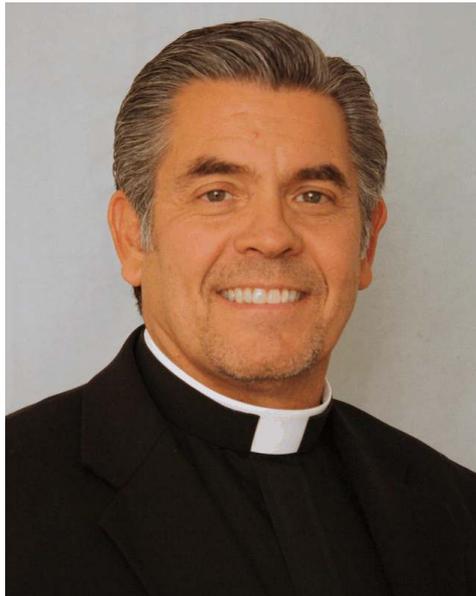
When did *tradition* become a four-letter word?

I suppose my generation bears much of the guilt, since one of the mantras of the '60's and '70's was, "don't trust anyone over 30!" That would certainly imply that we shouldn't trust their ideas, beliefs or rituals, either. "Hey, they're over 30, what could they possibly pass on to us that could be relevant and meaningful to us?"

Fortunately, there seems to be a renewal of appreciation among youth and young adults for tradition, as there is a resurgence of interest in liturgy, chant, depth in worship, authentic belief, and faith.

And why wouldn't that be the case? A culture or society without tradition, without the passing on of belief, statements, and ritual is groundless and without foundation.

A culture or society without tradition is without a rudder — tossed to and fro with every wind and storm, without direction, off course, and in danger of capsizing! And isn't that true of the Church and churches, as well?



Pastor David Wendel

The North American Lutheran Church affirms and embraces four core values. While we are quite open about them and publish them frequently, I am surprised that congregations and pastors are often unaware of these values.

I recently had a conference call with a congregation council from Texas which was exploring the NALC. One of their questions was, "we've heard that the NALC isn't confessional. Is that correct?" I want to publicly thank those folks for asking, because we certainly want to clarify that "Yes, the North American Lutheran Church is solidly confessional!"

This falls under the NALC core value that states that we are *traditionally-grounded*.

In the NALC, we are not fearful of "tradition," nor do we see tradition

as negative. Rather, being *traditionally-grounded* means we have received from our forebears in the faith that which we are also to pass on to generations who come after us.

We dare not discard or dismiss what we have received, nor do we dare change it, or adapt it, or reshape it in such a way that it is no longer recognizable. What we have received, we also must pass on — intact, of a whole, without corruption.

It would be the height of arrogance for us — or any generation — to think ourselves so smart, so enlightened, so far above those who have gone on before us that we take what we have received, reshape it to our own liking and pass on to future generations something new and different. How could future generations trust such beliefs, teachings or ritual? How could we be sure that what we are passing on is indeed saving?

If we are concerned for the forgiveness, life and salvation of those who come after us — children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren — we owe it to them to pass on what we have received of the deposit of faith without reshaping it to suit our own ideas, attitudes or values.

With regard to the North American Lutheran Church, this means that we are committed to passing on

Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6

what we have received, in particular, with respect to the Holy Trinity, the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions, and Word and Sacrament as the means of God's grace.

It means that we do not worship a doctrine or a theological construct (the Trinity), but we worship God — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

It means that we hold fast to the Holy Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God, which comes to us as both Law and Gospel, proclaiming salvation only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It means that we confess and uphold the Apostle's, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

It means that we believe, teach and confess the Lutheran Confessions as right interpretations of the truth proclaimed in Holy Scripture.

*Being
traditionally-grounded
means we have
received from our
forebears in the faith
that which we are
also to pass on to
generations who
come after us.*

With regard to our public witness in worship, it means being grounded in both Word and Sacrament, the means through which God gives us His love, mercy and grace.

It means there will normally be a called, ordained minister of Word

and Sacrament preaching and presiding.

It means — regardless of musical style — our worship will be Lutheran: not performance but dialogue; not focused on “me,” but on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; not “generally-Protestant,” but grounded in the tradition that has been passed on to us, as Lutherans.

Being *traditionally-grounded* means we are Lutherans! We are Biblical, confessional, and sacramental in the Lutheran sense of those words, as we seek to remain faithful to our Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — and as we seek to pass on that faith to those who come after us in the Body of Christ on earth!

I hope this answers the question, “Are we confessional?” And I hope this explains why we are confessional, as a *traditionally-grounded* Lutheran body.

Pastor David Wendel
NALC Ministry Coordinator

Congregations consider Convocation actions

Continued from Page 1

There were also style and typographical changes to the constitution. For example, references to “pastors” were changed to “ordained ministers” and references to the annual Convocation are now capitalized rather than lower case.

Full Communion with Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

The 2011 Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church unanimously approved a Full Communion relationship with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, the Lutheran church in Ethiopia, is one of the largest Lutheran church bodies in the world, with 5.6 million members. It is also among the world's fastest growing churches — adding 300,000 members in 2010.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Desta Buba, NALC Missions Director, is a native of Ethiopia. He is widely respected among Ethiopian Lutherans and was instrumental in building the strong relationship between the EECMY and the NALC.

You can learn more about the EECMY online at www.eecmy.org.

Bishop Bradosky meets with leaders of Augsburg Lutheran Churches

Bishop John Bradosky of the North American Lutheran Church met with leaders of Augsburg Lutheran Churches to discuss closer cooperation between the two church bodies. The meeting took place Feb. 15 in Houston, Texas.

Augsburg Lutheran Churches (ALC) was represented by Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) John Rasmussen of El Paso, Texas, Executive Chair of Augsburg Lutheran Churches; the Rev. Timothy J. Swenson of Arnegard, N.D., Doctrine and Church Relations Chair; and the Rev. Lenae Rasmussen of El Paso, Texas, Communications and Outreach Committee Chair.

Building on their previous cooperation in securing Augsburg Lutheran Churches and Pastor Lenae Rasmussen as the endorsing agent for NALC military chaplains, she announced that Augsburg Lutheran Churches has been approved as an ecclesiastical endorsing body by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Bishop Bradosky was pleased to hear this news and invited Pastor Rasmussen to address the NALC Convocation in August as the NALC's official endorsing agent.

The NALC will establish a liaison to work with Pastor Rasmussen to provide for the orderly flow of memoranda and certifications regarding military chaplains.



Chaplain John Rasmussen and Bishop Bradosky invited one another to bring greetings from their church body to the other church body's annual meeting.

Pastor Swenson and Chaplain Rasmussen proposed ongoing dialog between theologians of both church bodies — a conversation centering on the cross and its impact upon the various loci of church dogmatics. Bishop Bradosky agreed and expressed interest in extending such a dialog to other Lutheran church bodies as well.

In terms of closer structural ties between the NALC and Augsburg Lutheran Churches, Bishop Bradosky suggested that a more organic relationship than full communion is possible because the two bodies are of such close kinship theologically.

Dual rostering of pastors and of congregations already exists. Dual rostering is the situation when pastors and/or

congregations are members of both church bodies. As the relationship matures, Bishop Bradosky suggested that it could lead to a more direct form of organic unity between Augsburg Lutheran Churches and the NALC.

Looking to the future and the annual conventions this summer, both the NALC and Augsburg Lutheran Churches will explore these opportunities further.

Bishop Bradosky will greet, preach, and lead a break-out session at Augsburg Lutheran Churches' convention in July at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in El Paso, Texas, where Dr. Robert Benne of Roanoke College will be the keynote speaker.

Chaplain Rasmussen will bring greetings from the ALC to the NALC Convocation Aug. 16-17 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn. He and Pastor Swenson will lead a break-out session on the *Societas Crucis*.

Much good will and theological fellowship was shared between the representatives of these two church bodies working to bring about the reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism. Both the NALC and Augsburg Lutheran Churches are members of Lutheran CORE, an umbrella organization bringing together confessional Lutherans throughout North America.

German theologian Oswald Bayer to speak in U.S. lecture tour this month

The Rev. Dr. Oswald Bayer, an internationally recognized Luther scholar and Lutheran theologian from Germany, will be speaking at several locations in the United States this month.

Prof. Bayer's lecture tour is sponsored by the theological journal, *Lutheran Quarterly*, to commemorate its 25th anniversary.

Prof. Bayer "will visit several Lutheran seminaries across the U.S. so that a new generation can hear him in person," organizers explain.



Oswald Bayer

His main address on those occasions is entitled, "A Public Mystery." Bayer will address the nature of the word of God, building on Isaiah 40:8 — "The word of God remains forever" — a theme Scripture verse and important slogan of the Reformation. That verse forms the logo of *Lutheran Quarterly*.

"The word of God, which remains forever, enters the public realm, apocalyptically, and yet it remains a mystery. The mystery is that of the divine name, which unlike all other mysteries, especially the agonizing mystery of evil and the hardness of heart, is not a riddle that once solved is put aside. It is the mystery of the eternally rich, living and therefore inexhaustible God," Prof. Bayer says in a preliminary text of the lecture.

Oswald Bayer, 72, is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen. He is particularly engaged in research on Martin Luther and Johann Georg Hamann and serves as the academic leader of the Luther Academy in Sondershausen-Ratzeburg. He is an ordained pastor of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Württemberg.

Prof. Bayer champions a Lutheran theology that is creative and eager to engage philosophical thought.

His life's work has been the exploration of the often polemical engagement of Reformation theology with modern thought. He is particularly concerned to ascertain the place and task of Lutheran theology in our time, organizers explain.

Prof. Bayer is the author of several books in German. Some of his books which have been translated into English include:

+ *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification.*

+ *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation.*

+ *Theology the Lutheran Way.*

+ *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightenment.*

All of the lectures are open to the public. Here are the dates and locations:

March 21 - 9:45 a.m.
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

March 23 - 1 p.m.
Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

March 26 - 11:30 a.m.
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

March 28 - 1 p.m.
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

"We are delighted to welcome Dr. Bayer to our campus. He is certainly one of the most outstanding Lutheran theologians of our day," said Prof. John Pless of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. "I am very pleased that our community will have this opportunity to hear him in person."

More information on *Lutheran Quarterly* and the series of lectures by Prof. Bayer is available online at www.lutheranquarterly.com.

Baptism: A Journey of a Lifetime

By Pastor John Hopper

“In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life.”

— Martin Luther

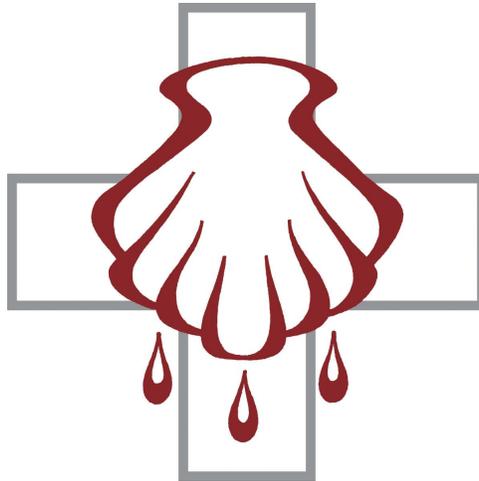
I am daily impacted by Martin Luther’s basic understanding of Baptism. The more I read of Brother Martin, the more deeply I am simply overwhelmed by God’s grace!

Personally, I cannot go into a new day without remembering how Luther responded to the very real presence of Satan in his own life. As I rise each morning, I “remember” who I am and Whose I am. As I make the sign of the cross, I announce the work of God’s grace in my life.

“I am God’s child, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! You cannot have me, Satan!” These are not unlike the words Luther spoke as he flung an ink well across the room at the devil by whom he felt tempted.

Whether that is legend or not does not matter to me. I begin my day graced by God as I live in my Baptism. I know that I am protected from the evil which seeks to crush and destroy me. This is not a magical incantation; no hocus-pocus. Rather, it is the truth grounded in God’s promise of which I am ever so thankful!

I share these simple words with you because I believe “remembering” God’s presence gives me the strength to face



each day. That has not always been easy. I have lived with Crohn’s Disease for 45 years, which has included numerous surgeries. I am a survivor of four cancers and the treatments for them. I continue to live every day with severe pain. I do need God’s grace daily. And, as with Paul, I believe God’s grace is all I need to live!

That is one reason why Lutheran baptismal theology is so important to me — and, I believe, to all children of God. And the more I read of Martin Luther, I am convinced that the “precious jewel” of Baptism — as Luther describes it — reminds me that I am never without God’s grace and strength. But for the grace of God — I am lost and I am nothing!

As I shared last month, I hope all of God’s children could remember what Baptism is and does for us as members of the Communion of Saints. Luther’s clear teaching on Baptism is key to our understanding of who we are as God’s chosen and beloved children.

It is clear that Baptism, for Luther, was the single most important comfort God can give His children through the *good news* of Jesus the Messiah, our Savior. Luther believed that Baptism was the daily pattern of the Christian life.

The daily death of the old and the resurrection of the new creation in the drowning and life-giving waters of our Baptism is the word of comfort we need, and God is good enough to give us this “grace” in which we live.

Baptism, for Luther, is a journey of a lifetime.

One of the wonderful things Luther wrote about Baptism was written very early in his career. In 1519 he wrote three short treatises on the sacraments. For Luther those three were Penance, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. The treatise, “The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism” is wonderfully free of polemic and it clearly presents, in 20 short paragraphs, a Biblically-sound theology of Holy Baptism.

Luther says, Baptism “is a covenant of comfort which places us under the judgment of grace and mercy!” He says further: “the forgiveness of sin and the driving out of sin is the work of Baptism. So long as we remember that God does not hold our sin against us, our Baptism is in force and our sins are forgiven.”

Continued on Page 11

Continued from Page 10

Later, he says, “Baptism is the greatest vow anyone, including God, can make.” It is the greatest because Baptism is a covenant of grace, first and always. The experience of God’s grace is what shapes who we are and how we come into salvation. There is no doubt for Luther that this covenant of grace is a “precious jewel” we are called to practice and experience every day of our earthly journey.

In “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” treatise Luther says, “Our whole life should be Baptism . . . that is, death and resurrection.” The pattern of death and new life is for God’s children a gracious existence. “We have vowed enough in Baptism, more than we can ever fulfill; if we give ourselves to the keeping of this one vow, we shall have all that we can do.”

Yes, Baptism is a life-long journey. We are called by our God to administer this “precious jewel” for what it is, God’s covenant of grace. In his treatise on “The Order of Baptism of 1523,” Luther reminds the church, “Ah, dear Christians, let us not value and administer this unspeakable gift so indolently and indifferently; for Baptism is our only comfort and admits us to every blessing of God and to the communion of saints. To this may God help us!”

Gift. Grace. Covenant. Vow. Precious Jewel. Baptism is a journey of a lifetime. This gracious journey begins as soon as we bring a little child to the font. Luther had no doubts about administering Baptism to the

smallest and the weakest. It’s Biblical. Jesus himself invites the smallest and the weakest, blesses them, and claims: “*Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.*” (Mark 10:14)

*Baptism,
for Luther,
was the single
most important
comfort God
can give
His children.*

Luther tells Philipp Melanchthon in a letter dated January 3, 1522: “To present a child for baptism is nothing else but to offer it to Christ who is present on earth and opens His hands of grace towards the child.” Why would any of us not seek such a gracious gift? And, why would we who are charged with “administering the sacraments rightly” fail to administer baptism with indolence and indifference?

Baptism is a journey of a lifetime. This gift of grace gives us all we need for salvation for it presents us with the Christ whose life, death, and resurrection have carried us into the presence of “Abba, Father” — a Father so loving that none could be more loving.

As the water is splashed over us, and the Word is spoken, the Holy Spirit of our Lord comes and begins a new work in us. The old Adam and Eve are drowned, and the new persons in Christ are raised, and we are invited into a wondrous covenant of grace that sustains us every day we have on earth. And our journey of salvation, begun in our baptism, is completed in death.

Until then, we live with hope. The grace of God is all we need to live each day. This gift of grace gives us the strength to face anything that comes our way as the devil continues to prowl, looking to kill us.

The power of this sacrament is the power of God for eternity. Luther was so confident of this power that he could write to his mother, Margaret, when she was near death: “You possess God’s seal and letter of His calling, namely the gospel you hear preached, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, so that you should have no trouble or danger.”

“I have been baptized; Satan cannot have me for I am a child of God!” May we know such grace! And may we, by our practice, teach all of God’s people about how gracious our God is to us in this “precious jewel” of hope!

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, 888-887-9840, www.solapublishing.org.

Moving from Reactive Conflict to Proactive Mission – Part 2

In Pursuit of the Great Commission

By Pastor Don Brandt

Last month I posed the question as to how congregations can move from reactive conflict to proactive mission. This is a crucial challenge currently facing hundreds of Lutheran congregations in the United States and Canada. While there have always been Lutheran congregations in conflict, never, in recent history, have we seen anything like the level of conflict resulting from the ELCA's policy changes of August 2009.

First, some additional thoughts from Peter Steinke's recent book, *A Door Set Open*.

One observation made by Steinke is that people have a deep psychological need, individually, for direction in their lives. He writes that this need is more basic than either their craving for social power or their desire for possessions. He sums this up by writing that "having a clear path forward is basic to life" (p. 64). Needless to say, what is true for individuals is also true for groups and congregations.

Steinke also writes of the importance of a congregation coming to a consensus as to its mission — i.e., its primary purpose as a church. He then goes on to mention New Testament theologian Paul Minear's study of 90 words used by the first-century church to describe its mission. Most of these images — including light, salt, vines and leaven — describe "outward activity." In other words, each of these elements "completes itself by expanding itself" (p. 68).

Even the word *mission* implies movement. The Latin word *mission* is defined as "sending." Sending requires movement. As Steinke reminds us, "When movement stops, life ends" (p. 96). However, movement — ideally — needs direction. And as Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there."

To conclude this month's column, I have a specific strategy to suggest. This strategy is perhaps the single most effective and pragmatic way for a congregation to move from a reactive focus due to conflict to a proactive focus based on Christian mission.

This is a single strategy involving three components. The overall *strategy* is to organize a ministry team (or task force) that will lead your congregation, over six to 12 months, to endorse and embrace particular mission initiatives.

The three *components* of this strategy are as follows:

First, ***Recruit and organize your mission (or ministry) team.*** One principle behind this overall strategy is that in most congregations your elected leaders are too consumed by the month-to-month operations of the church to consider long-term goals. Also, some of your more visionary leaders might have avoided becoming members of your Council and standing committees. *You want these people on your mission planning team! (And the more visionary the better!)*

The single most important factor in whether this team makes a significant, positive impact on your congregation is recruiting the right people. How long a commitment are you asking for? I suggest one year. How large a group? Including the pastor, no more than eight or nine people. How often will this group meet? Perhaps monthly. However, also plan on a one or two-day retreat shortly after you organize. What about content for your retreat and meetings? Consider a book you will read together. If you have been through recent congregational conflict read, as a group, Steinke's *A Door Set Open*. Otherwise, check out one of two books by

Continued on Page 13

Continued from Page 12

Mike Foss — either *Power Surge* or *Members to Disciples*. After you have completed reading your book, contact me. I can send you free materials to help you begin a strategic planning process based on your congregation's strengths and your ministry context. And your monthly meetings should always be less than two hours, including refreshments. (Always have refreshments!)

The second component of this strategy is to be clear on your **thematic emphasis** as a mission team. Convey to your group, at the outset, that their focus is going to be *mission*, not *maintenance*. You also want to emphasize, once you've finished your book, "new groups and ministries for new people." This team, after all, will be exploring opportunities for outreach. Never allow your people to forget that focus.

One other point regarding this second component: If your congregation has recently been through significant conflict — or is still engaged in controversy — then your team will need to process this before talking about the future. But be sure, in this case, that all your team members are in agreement regarding the controversy. This group needs to focus on mission, not conflict management.

The third component of this mission-team strategy is an over-arching goal of helping your congregation **move from membership to discipleship**. While this theme might, like outreach, have programmatic elements, discipleship is something much more central to your congregation's spiritual health than "new groups for new people."

However, specific strategies for helping your people transition from members to disciples might include concrete and specific program initiatives. For example, you might be developing plans that include a congregation-wide emphasis on prayer, Bible study, faithful worship attendance, and small (covenant?) groups.

The end-goal of this process is for your team to have specific and measurable ministry strategy proposals to present to your council and/or congregation. These proposals should, when implemented, help your congregation become more intentional and proactive in its mission outreach.

Pastor Don Brandt serves as senior pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Salem, Ore. You may contact him at DonB@oursaviorssalem.org. Part 1 of this article ran in the NALC News for February.



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

The Church joins the Heavenly Host in Song

By Pastor Michael Tavella

From the Holy Scriptures we know that the heavenly hosts sing praises to the Lord God. The canticle, *Gloria in Excelsis*, is called the Angelic Hymn, because it begins with the angels' song that the shepherds heard at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth." (*Luke 2:14*, translation taken from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*). When we sing these words, we are joining the angels in their heavenly song.

These words are then elaborated in the canticle that has had a place in the entrance rite of the Eucharist of the western Church for well over one thousand years. The *Gloria in Excelsis* is sung at Matins (called *Orthros* in the Greek Orthodox liturgy) in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The form of the canticle is Trinitarian, beginning with praise of God the Father, the heavenly King. We worship, give thanks, and praise Him for His glory. In the hymn we directly address the Father, followed by a direct address to the Son. The canticle proclaims the deity of the Son, who like the Father is called "Lord God."

The *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God), included in the *Gloria in Excelsis* and sung as a separate chant at the distribution of Holy Communion, recalls the words of St. John the Baptizer, recorded in the Gospel of John, when Jesus came to him at the Jordan River. In the chant, addressed to the Lamb of God, we plead that He may have mercy on us, that is, that he may answer our prayers.

We ask the Lord Jesus Christ to have mercy on us; and then — after acknowledging that He sits at the right hand of the Father — we repeat our request for Him to have mercy on us in different words, "receive our prayer." Jesus is then addressed, in a crescendo of titles, as alone the Holy One, alone the Lord, and alone the Most High "with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father." The affirmation of the Church that the Son of God is one with God the Father and true God is made quite clear.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned, but never directly addressed, nor is His deity elaborated or praised. But He is associated in this canticle with the Father and the Son as the third member of the Holy Trinity. In the ancient Church, the controversy over the deity of Christ resulted in the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. Debate regarding the Holy Spirit came late. His deity was affirmed by the bishops at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. St. Basil, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, wrote a book in defense of the deity of the Holy Spirit and was instrumental in the affirmation of this doctrine at Constantinople.

The canticle, *Gloria in Excelsis*, speaks mostly of Jesus Christ, as do the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. Note the length of the Second Article in both creeds compared to the First and Third Articles, but especially note the length of the Second Article of the Nicene Creed.

The canticle ends with ". . . in the glory of God the Father." The canticle begins with the theme of the glory of God where glory pertains to the praise of God by angels and human beings. The two other uses of the word *glory* in the canticle refer to the radiance and splendor of God. In the canticle, we glorify the glory of God.

The rubrics (rules guiding the use of the various services of the Church) in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* regarding the appropriate times for the singing of the hymn of praise (*Gloria in Excelsis*, *Worthy is Christ*, or some other hymn) recommend that it be omitted in Advent, Lent, and Holy Week as a way to set off these seasons as preparatory and penitential. Over the centuries, a liturgical rhythm emerged in the life of the Church. These rules for the use of the liturgy are the result of centuries of liturgical development, practice, and reform. While we may be tempted to change the order prescribed by them, we should be careful in doing so. They embody good liturgical practice that reflects the Great Tradition of the Church.

Continued on Page 15

Worthy is Christ is the alternative canticle suggested in the Entrance Rite. In it, we sing words from the book of Revelation sung by the heavenly host with all of creation joining in.

The form of the canticle in the Second Setting in LBW has the assisting minister begin with “This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia.” The Lamb, whose shedding of blood on the cross set us free to be God’s people, is the theme of the canticle. To the Lamb, Jesus Christ, are ascribed power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, blessing, and glory. The antiphon is repeated, this time sung by the entire congregation. Then, we are called on to sing with all of God’s people and to join in the hymn of all creation. The canticle ends with the ascription of blessing, honor, glory, and might to God and the Lamb. The Lamb is rendered the same praise as God, which indicates that He is one with God and is God.

Another chant that connects heaven with earth is the *Sanctus* with the *Benedictus Qui Venit*, located in the Eucharistic Prayer. After the salutation and the Proper Preface, this chant is sung. There are grounds to believe that the *Sanctus* was not found in the earliest Eucharistic Prayers. In *The Apostolic Tradition*, a book commending certain liturgical practice, Hippolytus does not mention it.

The *Sanctus* is taken from the vision of the prophet in Isaiah 6. It was sung by the seraphim, as the prophet beheld God sitting on His throne in the Temple in Jerusalem. Like the *Trisagion* (thrice holy), “Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us”, found in the *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom* of the Greek Orthodox Church, this chant has a thrice holy, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*. (The *Trisagion* is found in Responsive Prayer I and II in LBW).

In an older translation of the *Sanctus* in the *Common Service Book* and *Service Book and Hymnal*, we find the Hebrew word *Sabaoth*, translated in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* as “power and might.” *Sabaoth* is the term for the heavenly army of angels. This heavenly host represents the power, majesty, and might of God. In the LBW *Sanctus*, “Lord God” translates the divine Name, *Yahweh*, though the Hebrew word for God does not appear in the text of Isaiah 6:3, the hymn of the angels. In English language Bibles, *Yahweh* is translated *LORD*.

Heaven and earth are full of God’s glory. As in the *Gloria in Excelsis* and *Worthy is Christ*, the theme of God’s glory is mentioned. The chant of the angels in Isaiah speaks only of the filling of the earth with God’s glory. Our hymn adds heaven. Heaven and earth, the entire universe, is full of God’s glory.

The *Benedictus Qui Venit*, “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest,” derived from Psalm 118, was the acclamation of the people when Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. In the *Sanctus* with the *Benedictus Qui Venit*, we join both the angels in heaven and the people of Jerusalem in praise of God, as we anticipate the reception of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

The *Te Deum Laudamus*, a canticle appointed for use in Morning Prayer at the Paschal Blessing, contains within it the *Sanctus*. In this magnificent hymn, the angels, the cherubim, the seraphim, and all the heavenly powers praise God in the words of the *Sanctus*. The apostles, prophets, and the martyrs also praise God as well as the Church on earth. The Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is praised and worshiped in both heaven and on earth. After we praise the Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, for our redemption through Him, we call upon Him to help His people and bring us to everlasting glory. The hymn calls Christ the “eternal Son,” which reminds us of the Nicene Creed where the Son is confessed as “eternally begotten of the Father.” The *Te Deum Laudamus* is a reminder that the voices of heaven and earth join in common song in praise of the Triune God.

When we praise God in divine worship, we are joining our voices with the heavenly host. Heaven and earth are united in the worship of God. When we arrive in heaven, we will experience firsthand the songs of the heavenly host. We will become members of that host and will learn that the music of heaven is ever powerful and sweet to the ear of its citizens.

Next time the *Kyrie*, found in both Holy Communion and Evening Prayer, will be the subject under consideration. We will also examine *The Litany*.

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.

NALC pastor is missionary in Hungary

Pastor Scott Ryll is serving as the first full-time pastor of City Park Lutheran Church, an English-speaking congregation attached to Faszor Lutheran Church, a Hungarian congregation in Budapest, Hungary. Pastor Ryll is a pastor of the North American Lutheran Church serving through East European Mission Network.

In addition to serving as pastor of this English-speaking community, he is also building an international community as a mission and hospitality service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary.

Pastor Ryll's task as a global missionary is to aid the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary in reaching out to English-speaking students, politicians, businesspeople, and tourists in Budapest. City Park has been established as a "home away from home" and as the foundation of a community of fellowship that edifies these brothers and sisters for as long as they are living in Budapest.

City Park also partners with other Hungarian Lutheran Churches to reach out with the Gospel. One way this is done is through English conversation classes at the new Lutheran High School, recently purchased from the Hungarian government. These teens are less than 2 percent churched. When short-term mission opportunities are offered starting in 2013, this mission will be included so others can have the experience of this front-line evangelism.

"The overarching vision God has placed in my heart is to create an international community that reaches out to folks while they are in Budapest, so that through the preaching of the Word some seeds will not only be sown but will also take root, and then fruit will be borne out who knows where," Pastor Ryll said.



Pastor Scott Ryll

"So my vision is this: an international mission within the borders of Budapest that reaches the four corners of the earth. A mission which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary takes a stake in, owns, loves, and understands to be a part of the mission fields in which they labor until the Lord of the Harvest returns," he said.

In addition to Pastor Ryll's call to traditional ministry and evangelism, his wife, Cecilia Ryll, has been called by Eastern European Mission Network to create the first Parish Nurse ministry and training program within Hungary, where nursing is not a respected profession. Cecilia hopes to train nurses and extend the ministry of churches by helping to reveal the healing presence of God. Cecilia has also connected with a fellow nurse who ministers to premature infants and their mothers.

The Rylls are looking for congregations and individuals to provide ongoing support for their mission work. To learn more about their ministry, visit Pastor Ryll's blog — www.fontandtomb.com.

You can learn more about the East European Mission Network at www.eemn.org. Gifts to support the Rylls' ministry may be given online or may be sent to: East European Missions Network; 2111 Golf Course Road SE, Suite C; Rio Rancho, NM 87124. Please note on your check that your gift is to support the ministry of Scott Ryll.