

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

November 2012

Congregational Renewal Conference *'Authentic Discipleship for Congregational Renewal and Growth'*

"Authentic Discipleship for Congregational Renewal and Growth" was the theme of the North American Lutheran Church's Congregational Renewal Conference Nov. 7-9 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio.

Speakers and workshop leaders focused on renewing congregations through raising a culture of discipleship.

NALC Bishop John Bradosky was the keynote speaker. He addressed "Authentic Discipleship for Congregational Renewal and Growth."

Professor James Nestingen spoke about the "Lutheran Confessions as the Fundamental Basis for Church Renewal."

Also featured at the conference were Pastor Gemechis D. Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, and Pastor Yonas Yigezu, Director of the Mission and Theology Department of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Evangelists from the church in Ethiopia also shared their renewal experiences.

Attendees were given the opportunity to process their experience in small groups and to create plans for taking the conference experience home to their congregations.

The conference was balanced among learning, worship, and fellowship. In addition to practical workshops and inspirational speakers, the conference was bathed in daily prayer and worship. Breakout sessions included:

+ Prayer for Church Renewal and Revival - Pastor Dave Keener.

+ Renewing Family and Youth Ministry: Beginning with the End in Mind - Pastor Scott Ness.

+ Stewardship Grows Disciples - Pastor David Wendel.

+ Moving from Management to Missional - Pastor Todd Kornahrens.

+ Growing Disciples, Not Programs - Pastor Ray Scheck and Valerie Hobbs.



Participants take part in a commissioning service at the conclusion of the NALC Congregational Renewal Conference.

NALC responds to Hurricane Sandy

The North American Lutheran Church is assisting in the response to Hurricane Sandy which hit the eastern United States on Oct. 29.

NALC congregations are providing relief supplies and volunteer labor. Jeanne Wallace of the Women of the NALC has been gathering quilts and personal care kits from church women's groups.

Saint Andrew By The Sea Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Atlantic City, N.J., sustained little building damage. But many members, including the pastor, suffered flood and wind damage at home. Losses ranged from total loss to minor damage. The congregation is assisting members and others to rebuild, especially those without flood insurance.

Semi trailers are being loaded in Caldwell, Ohio, with blankets, nonperishable food, water, hygiene



Deaconess Marybeth and Fred Howe from First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Ill., bring disaster relief supplies to help those recovering from Hurricane Sandy. The supplies were collected at the NALC Congregational Renewal Conference at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio.



This home is among those in Atlantic City, N.J., that were damaged by water and will be reconstructed by volunteers.

kits, school supplies, cleaning supplies and flood buckets. The first 48-foot trailer went to Brooklyn, N.Y., on Nov. 13 and helped serve many families on Staten Island. A second truck will leave on Nov. 30. The most requested items are gift cards from national chain discount stores or building centers. These items are being collected through Dec. 21. Building supplies will continue to be collected for long-term rebuilding and recovery.

Volunteer Reception Centers are open on the East Coast. Volunteers are needed for debris removal, rebuilding, and distribution of food and blankets.

Volunteers may call 1-800-Jersey-7 to volunteer immediately or contact the NALC's Disaster Response Coordinator Mary Woodward at 740-509-1132 or mwoodward_1@msn.com. Volunteer labor will be needed well into 2013.

Monetary gifts to support disaster relief efforts may be given online at www.thenalc.org or sent to:

NALC Disaster Response
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Full Communion Agreement is signed

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and NALC formalize partnership in mission

A Full Communion Agreement between the North American Lutheran Church and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus was signed Nov. 11 in Hilliard, Ohio.

The signing came as a result of decisions by both church bodies to enter into this agreement. The 2011 NALC Convocation unanimously approved the full communion relationship. It was then ratified by NALC congregations.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, the Lutheran church in Ethiopia, is one of the largest and fastest growing Lutheran church bodies in the world. The church has more than 5.9 million members.



Bishop John Bradosky of the North American Lutheran Church and the Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa, President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, signed the Full Communion Agreement on behalf of their church bodies.



The church leaders posed following the signing of the Full Communion Agreement.

Pictured are, front row, from left: Pastor Gemechis Buba; President Wakseyoum Idosa; Bishop John Bradosky; and Pastor Dereje Jemberu. Back row: Pastor David Wendel; Pastor Dawit Yohannes; Pastor Yonas Yigezu; and Almwari Gari.



The people have been worshipping outside while they await the construction of their church building.

Churches are emerging from the ashes of persecution

Church buildings in Ethiopia were destroyed in violence by Islamic radicals in March 2011.

Many NALC members and congregations contributed to a relief fund established by the North American Lutheran Church in cooperation with Lutheran CORE and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ to help with reconstructing the church buildings.

These photos and the message of thanks on the next page update the progress in replacing the destroyed church buildings.



Groundbreaking for a new church in Dimtu.

Donations to support the rebuilding of the churches may be sent to:

Ethiopian Church Relief Fund
NALC Financial Administration
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

A Word of Thanks

The following letter was received from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus expressing gratitude for NALC support to rebuild churches destroyed by Islamic radicals.

Dear Bishop John,

Grace and peace in the precious name of Christ our Lord and Savior.

On behalf of the EECMY congregations in the Jimma area I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the North American Lutheran Church for the grant we have received toward reconstruction project of church buildings that were burned down in three Districts of Jimma Administrative Zone. Thanks to your generosity, we have been able to start reconstruction of five congregation buildings and are now praying to launch two more.

I have, together with some staff members of the Department for Mission and Theology, visited the construction sites several times. At our recent visit, we have witnessed that the work is making remarkable progress. Four projects have reached 60 percent completion while one is about half-way of completion. The following phase will be roofing work which might take a while as the structures are to be made in Addis Ababa out of metal materials. A few pictures from my recent visit are here attached only to illustrate the current status of the projects.

Last week many Christians in Ethiopia celebrated “*mesqel*,” the Ethiopian holiday commemorating the finding of the true cross of Jesus. We pray that God will open the eyes of even more people that they may one day boast of the saving cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14).

In His service,

Rev. Yonas Yigezu
Director, Department for Mission and Theology
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus



Men pose in front of progress on rebuilding the church in Akko.



The people worshipping outside while they await the rebuilding of their church building.



Progress on reconstruction of church at Goodeyie.

Thanksgiving is about Grace

My dear pastors and congregational leaders of the North American Lutheran Church:

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Last month, just before our brothers and sisters in Canada celebrated their national day of Thanksgiving, I sent this letter to them. Several who read it suggested I send it to all of our congregations.

Paul writes, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

As you celebrate Thanksgiving these words express my hope for you. On this national day of pausing to give thanks to God for the many blessings we have received from the hands of a loving God, we also give thanks for the greatest gift of all, the Grace of God that is ours through Jesus Christ in whom we have forgiveness, redemption, salvation and new life that is eternal.

Thanksgiving is a perfect time to assert that the Gospel we proclaim is all about Grace! In fact, in Canada the French name for this holiday asserts that truth, *Jour de l’Action de grâce*. Together we are celebrating a day of Grace, the source of our true joy.

The second reason I believe the French name for the holiday is so appropriate is the inclusion of the word “action.” Thankfulness is not a passive state of feeling good or feeling fulfilled, or feeling appreciation. Grace is love in action. It is God’s action for our redemption and salvation. It is what God has accomplished for us in Jesus Christ that we could not do for ourselves, atone for our sins and secure for us the promise of eternal life. Love is never passive, neither is thanksgiving.

Paul encourages us to pray. There is nothing passive about prayer. It requires our devotion, our attention, and our heart, mind and soul. It is a way to give ourselves completely to God, to place ourselves in His presence. It is my hope that during



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

this day of Thanksgiving you take action and engage in prayer.

It is not always easy to give thanks in all circumstances. I know that some of you have experienced profound grief and pain during these past years, others are now in the midst of such grief, and still others can see the storm clouds forming. Our joy is never found in our circumstances. Our joy is found in the One to whom we turn in prayer. Our faith is not in a God who makes everything in our life easy and wonderful, even during this season of celebrating the harvest.

I am reminded of the story of Pastor Martin Rinkart, who served the church in Eilenburg, Germany, many years ago. In the first half of the 17th century, Germany was in the midst of wars, famine and pestilence. During an especially oppressed period, Pastor Rinkart conducted up to 50 funerals a day as a plague swept through the town and as the Thirty Years War wreaked its own terror. Pastor Rinkart buried members of his own family.

Yet during those years of darkness and despair, when death and destruction greeted each new day, Pastor Rinkart wrote 66 sacred songs and hymns. Among them was the song, *Now Thank We All Our God*. Pastor Rinkart wrote,

*Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers’ arms,*

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*Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today."*

Pastor Rinkart's circumstances were filled with great grief and despair, yet he was able to focus on the One who was with him in the midst of it. Christ is both our consolation and present help. His promise is to be with us always, even to the close of this age. And He is!

Finally, we celebrate Thanksgiving by offering thanks to God and by giving. The acts of thanksgiving invite us to share with others from the abundance we have received.

This is a perfect time of the year to say "Thank you" for your faithful financial support of the NALC. You have turned your love into action by your support and we are continuing to do all we can to turn your support into loving actions that strengthen the mission and ministry of our congregations in the North American Lutheran Church. I am praying for your continued financial support, prayers and participation in this ministry we share.

Thanksgiving calls us to give of ourselves, our time, our talents and our financial resources. It calls us to give of ourselves sacrificially for the sake of Christ and His Church, to demonstrate His love to those in need and boldly proclaim the Gospel of His eternal love and salvation. As you celebrate this Thanksgiving may you find an opportunity to offer the love of Christ by giving to those around you.

May your hearts be filled with true joy, taking time for prayer and turning the Grace you have received into action for others.

Jour de l'Action de grâce expresses the heart of our celebration.

Have a blessed Thanksgiving!

Bishop John F. Bradosky

NALC Bishop John Bradosky can be reached at jbradosky@thenalc.org.

NALC to be at Break Forth Canada

Join 15,000 people from more than 1,000 churches for Break Forth Canada 2013 January 25-27 in Edmonton, Alberta. Break Forth Canada is the largest equipping and renewal conference in North America.

Break Forth Canada includes a stunning array of world-renowned speakers, major concert and worship artists, and leading teachers.

The event will feature powerful worship, heart-renewing keynote speakers, and stunning concerts. There will be more than 180 classes and workshops as well as late night events, clean comedy concerts, and much more.

The North American Lutheran Church will have an exhibit and a special gathering at the event.

For more information or to register online go to registrations.breakforthministries.com.

Missionary suffers losses in robbery

Pastor Didi Panzo, a NALC pastor serving as a missionary in Equador, recently suffered the loss of ministry equipment and his family's rent money in a car robbery. Among the equipment lost was a laptop computer and projector.

The robbery happened when they were in a grocery store. Equador has a very high rate of crime.

If you would like help restore some of the losses suffered by Pastor Panzo and family, you may send a gift to:

World Mission Prayer League
232 Clifton Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55403

Ethiopian evangelists visit NALC

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus sent four evangelists to the United States to share their witness to the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in the life of their church body and their experiences in critical areas of mission, evangelism, prayer, and church growth with members of the NALC.



Evangelists from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus participate in an NALC Missions Conference at First English Lutheran Church in Mansfield, Ohio.

The delegation includes Pastor Yonas Yigezu, director of the EECMY's Department for Mission and Theology; Almar Gari, a successful businessman and lay leader who has planted 20-30 churches and serves as treasurer for the EECMY; Pastor Dereje Jemberu, a seasoned pastor and now EECMY Vice President; and Pastor Dawit Yohannes, senior pastor of Tabor Mekane Yesus Church, a congregation which has planted 75 new mission churches.

During their month-long stay in North America, they traveled across the United States and spoke at conferences, prayer services, and in local congregations. Among them, they visited nearly 30 congregations and spoke at seven conferences in 12 states: California, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.



From left, Pastor Teshome Deingede, Pastor Dawit Yohannes, Pastor Gemechis Buba, Pastor Yonas Yigezu, and Pastor Deжере Jemberu.

Pastor Yigezu spoke about the history and present ministry of the Mekane Yesus church. Mr. Gari talked about the power of lay leadership and his experience going out on weekends and planting churches. Pastor Jemberu spoke on prayer. Pastor Yohannes shared his experience of the dynamic power of congregations planting other congregations and share the experience of Tabor Mekane Yesus Church in planting over 75 churches.

Word *and* Sacrament

A few years ago, a pastor visiting in worship at my congregation in Colorado Springs asked me, “Do you have weekly communion?” To which I answered, “Yes, every Sunday, every service. Doesn’t your congregation?” His response was “No.” “Why not?” I asked. “Because no one ever asked for it,” was his reply.

In this month of November — when we begin with the Festival of All Saints and end with Christ the King Sunday — it seems appropriate to consider our celebration of the “foretaste of the feast to come.” And this is appropriate because on these two liturgical festivals, our minds are drawn to consider the marriage feast of the Lamb and our participation in it.

Both liturgical days are “eschatological” celebrations when we consider the “already, but not yet” character of our lives in the Church. We are already participants in the heavenly banquet where Christ is both Bridegroom of the Church and Host of that heavenly banquet.

Though we have been invited and welcomed to that feast through Holy Baptism, we celebrate it now, not around the throne of God in the New Jerusalem, but still at our earthly altars where we yet live and move and have our being. We are already participants in the heavenly banquet — though we eat and drink here.

It is for this reason that Christians have, since the very beginning, worshiped in services offering both Word and Sacrament — preaching and the Lord’s Supper each and every Sunday — as we hunger and thirst for the incarnate presence of Jesus Christ. We anticipate His coming again in power and glory as we gather around Him in our midst as the Word is proclaimed and His Body and Blood are broken and poured out for us — each and every week!

In this way, every Sunday, and in some congregations during the week, the faithful may come and receive God in the flesh, in the Word, received aurally — through the ears — but also in



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

the bread and wine that become Christ’s Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper, which they receive through touch and taste and swallowing and digestion.

Many believe this is why Jesus says in John 6, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you ... for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”

Jesus intends that in His supper, His flesh and blood will be true food and true drink which bring His life, His very presence into us. Now, far from having to experience Jesus in some supernatural, ethereal way through our own spiritual sensitivity or skill, He comes to us through the earthly elements of the Lord’s Supper.

Now, leaving the altar, you will know — know that Jesus lives in you, literally, in your mind and thoughts, but as well, in your stomach, your blood and each and every cell of your body! Because Jesus incarnates Himself in the Lord’s Supper, when we struggle and suffer in life, when we feel abandoned, when we doubt and fear and believe Jesus has left us alone and lonely, His sure and certain presence in Word and Sacrament promise us and assure us that He is here, and not just here, but with us and in us — His life in you and you in Him.

And this we Lutherans affirm and offer more than any other Christian tradition! Most Christians —

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even other sacramental Christians — often don't understand and don't proclaim Christ's real presence in the means of grace as Lutherans have learned it in Luther's Small Catechism. Rather, they talk in abstract terms about God who is always with us, somewhere — if only you feel Him in your heart, if only you sense Him with you, if only you are open to Him. For Lutherans, there is no ESP or extra-spiritual perception needed. God in Jesus Christ comes to you and feeds you with His presence, literally, physically, in Word and Sacrament.

As our chief Lutheran confessional document, the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV, states, "the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. The people are instructed more regularly and with the greatest diligence concerning the holy sacrament, to what purpose it was instituted and how it is to be used, namely as a comfort to terrified consciences."

Similarly, in the Apology (or Defense) of the Augsburg Confession, it is asserted, "we do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it..." Melancthon adds, for good measure, "we also keep traditional liturgical forms, the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things."

Some Lutherans used to think that the full service — both Word and Sacrament — shouldn't be celebrated every Sunday because it was less special. In recent years we've been told that young people, the unchurched and seekers don't connect with or understand the Lord's Supper, so, for the sake of mission, if offered at all, it should be offered apart from the chief Sunday service.

As Lutherans, we trust the tradition that's been passed on to us that indeed, the full Sunday liturgy of Word and Sacrament feeds us with daily bread to nourish us with Christ's presence, to give to us, through His presence, forgiveness, life and salvation — courage for daily living, and the assurance of God's love, grace and mercy, day-by-day. And far from young people and seekers being put off by mystery — what we are finding today is

that they are drawn to mystery — that the mystery of Christ incarnate among us will actually draw people to Him, and to an incarnational church that celebrates His presence in Word and Sacrament.

As we celebrate the month that comes between the Festival of All Saints and Christ the King Sunday, let us hunger and thirst for the Word made flesh, Jesus, in Word and Sacrament. Let us commit ourselves to being the Lutheran Church that has weekly Word and Sacrament as the norm. And if your pastor isn't offering both the Word and the Lord's Supper every Sunday — ask for it!

Pastor David Wendel is Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism. He can be reached at dwendel@thenalc.org.

Theological conference to feature Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen

Renowned Lutheran theologians Dr. Carl E. Braaten and Dr. Robert W. Jenson are the featured speakers for the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference April 8-13 in Canmore, Alberta. Canmore is about 50 miles west of Calgary near Banff National Park.

"Noted theologians Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson will share with us their thoughts, concerns and hopes regarding the Church of Christ around the world especially in relation to what it means to be a Lutheran nowadays," organizers explain.

The conference will also feature Pastor Greg Musselman, vice president of outreach for Voice of the Martyrs, who will address "the state of affairs in various countries and his heart for the persecuted Church around the world."

More information on the conference is available on the NALC website — www.thenalc.org — or by contacting Pastor Phil Gagnon at 780-458-6012 or pastorphil@me.com.



Christian leaders cross denominational lines

Ecumenical Leadership Summit builds working relationships

An ecumenical summit of leaders from Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian churches and organizations affirmed common theological ground and sought practical ways of working together during a conference Oct. 22-25 in Dallas, Texas.

In their statement — titled “Jesus Christ: Our common ground and common cause” — the leaders said: “Even as we fully acknowledge the imperfections of Christian institutions and the broken nature of our collective witness to the world, we commit to strive together for a faithful way of being the Church together. Our hearts are burdened for the millions of our neighbors who are estranged from God and the Church.” *(The statement is printed on Pages 12-13.)*

The gathering formed working groups and listened to plenary sessions on ecumenical relations and theological education, engaging North American culture, church planting and mission as well as social witness during the four-day meeting. Participants affirmed an ecumenical statement that addresses each of these subjects on the summit’s final day. The leaders agreed to explore working together in areas of church planting, theological education and training. They also committed to

meet again for a second summit in 2013. While each of the participants endorsed the statement they were not necessarily doing so on behalf of their respective churches or organizations.

The group of 32 included leaders from the following churches and organizations:

- + Lutheran CORE.
- + North American Lutheran Church.
- + The Presbyterian Lay Committee.
- + Presbyterian Church in America.
- + The Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
- + The Evangelical Association of Reformed and Congregational Christian Churches.
- + ECO: a Covenanted Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.
- + The Institute on Religion and Democracy.
- + Good News (United Methodists).
- + The Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church.
- + Lifewatch (Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality).
- + American Anglican Council.
- + Anglican Church in North America.
- + The National Covenant Association of Churches.

Jesus Christ: Our Common Ground and Common Cause

As 21st century Christians, we are both heirs of the faith once delivered to the saints and living witnesses to the transforming power of Jesus Christ for life.

Called together from diverse streams of the Christian tradition, we acknowledge the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace that exist among those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone for salvation. Even as we fully acknowledge the imperfections of Christian institutions and the broken nature of our collective witness to the world, we commit to strive together for a faithful way of being the Church together. Our hearts are burdened for the millions of our neighbors who are estranged from God and the Church.

As leaders in the Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Reformed traditions, we hold in common the historic faith of the Church, around which we come together. In light of our context of mission and ministry, we affirm the following:

1. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

We affirm that there is unchanging truth that is known through Jesus Christ and God’s revelation in Scripture.

2. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20a).

We affirm that the one God is Triune, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world who died and was bodily raised for the salvation of sinners as a gift received by grace through faith; therefore, salvation is through Christ alone.

4. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

We affirm that the Bible is God’s written word — inspired, truthful, and the final authority for faith and life.

5. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21).

We affirm that the Church, as the community of baptized believers whom our Lord has called and sent to make disciples of all people in His name, is essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

6. Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

We affirm that the Church is called to seek justice for all, to extend God’s compassion for those in need, and to work for peace among all nations and peoples.

7. Jesus said, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’?” (Matthew 19:4-5).

We affirm that God created us male and female, and that marriage is a divinely ordained lifelong covenant of fidelity between one man and one woman. God’s gift of sexual intimacy is to be expressed solely within this bond of marriage.

8. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). And in the Psalms we read, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” (Psalm 139:13).

We affirm that every human life is a gift from God to be cherished and respected from conception to natural death.

Engaging Culture

Recognizing a climate increasingly hostile to the living out of a faithful Christian witness, due to trends which include pervasive secularism, changing ethical norms, the challenge of effectively proclaiming the Gospel in a pluralistic context, and the vacuum created by the decline of Protestantism:

1. We proclaim and defend the faith that uplifts Jesus Christ as the Way, and the Truth, and the Life and confronts the ethical and theological relativism of our day.

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2. We earnestly pray that all believers will deepen their commitment to the historic Christian faith, engage worldviews intolerant of Christianity with insight and compassion, and reassert the Gospel's influence throughout society.

3. We desire to see all persons transformed by the Gospel, equipped through discipleship, and accepting personal responsibility for the fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission. Relational evangelism through person-to-person discipleship is the mission.

4. We sincerely and humbly seek to fulfill our Lord's desire expressed in John 17:21: That we become one, "that the world may believe." To that end, we invite our congregations to find ways to express that unity through church planting, missions, and social witness together.

Church Planting and Missions

We are on common ground in obeying the Great Commission in reaching people for Jesus Christ through the salvation of souls both at home and abroad. We covenant together to communicate, cooperate and collaborate in living out our missional identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. We will look for ways, as God blesses and matures our relationships, to make authentic disciples who have a heart for following Jesus into the world. Therefore, we will explore together cooperatively planting churches and sending missionaries through:

1. Sharing training opportunities.
2. Sharing information and resources, including the use of web-based technologies.
3. Engaging in joint ministries and offering incubator facilities to support new church plants.
4. Providing theological education, including remote theological education domestically and globally.
5. Identifying locations where we can encourage catalytic leadership toward collaborative church plants.
6. Sharing space with dislocated congregations

Social Witness

We are grateful recipients of Scriptural teaching and heirs of great Christian traditions that insist that following Christ means loving our neighbors and taking

responsibility to advance their well-being. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, instructed His exiled people to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7). The primary social witness of the Church is in our proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament, challenging the sins and idolatries that hold so many captive and building worshiping communities that demonstrate God's kingdom. We are called to act with justice and charity toward others within and outside our churches. The Church also serves society through the Christian formation of laypersons who exercise their religiously-based moral convictions as citizens, political leaders, and participants in voluntary associations.

We share the Biblical understanding of government as "God's servant for [our] good," appointed to encourage righteousness and restrain evil (Romans 13:1-7). Further, we affirm that the Church at times needs to address government and act publicly in matters related to society and its governance. We wish to do so in ways that evince humility, respect for biblical authority, careful study, reasoned judgment, and consistency between our words and actions. In our view, the Church should speak only on the issues that follow directly from core Christian moral convictions. These include:

1. Upholding the dignity of each human person as created in God's image.
2. Protecting human life at all stages.
3. Addressing the needs and expanding the opportunities of the poor.
4. Strengthening the marriage of man and woman and the bonds between parents and children as the necessary building blocks of society.
5. Defending the free exercise of religion in North America and around the world.

We commit ourselves anew to Christ and to one another. We recognize that the Holy Spirit has called us together, and that only through the Spirit can we hope to accomplish what we have set forth today.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Congregation partners with Numana to package meals for the hungry

A couple of years ago, God planted a seed in a few members of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in St. Joseph, Ill. There was a growing desire to help feed the starving. God seemed to be calling the congregation to something out of the ordinary; just what that meant was a mystery.

The seed lay dormant until Church Council member June Kopmann led an organizational meeting of the Stewardship Committee.



At the end of a brainstorming session to gather suggestions for activities, the idea of packaging meals for the hungry was proposed. The group had a desire to see the church's stewardship go beyond the local area, and even beyond the country. The seed was beginning to germinate.

During the following months, the Stewardship Committee felt nudged to pursue the packing program. They contacted Numana, Inc., which is a

nonprofit hunger relief organization with the mission to empower people to save the starving.

Numana works in partnership with the Salvation Army and other organizations, and specializes in organizing events where volunteers serve together in assembly-line fashion to package simple, nutritious meals. You can learn more about Numana at www.numanainc.com.



Representatives from Numana were excited, but to make it worthwhile for them to travel from Kansas, they needed a commitment to package at least 10,000 meals. The commitment involved providing volunteer labor to package the meals, and also paying for supplies, shipping and handling. At 30 cents per meal, a financial commitment of \$3,000 was necessary.

To say the least, the Stewardship Committee was skeptical of their ability to raise the funds. The economy, unemployment, people's struggles to pay

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bills; all the odds seemed stacked against the project. Raising the funds seemed impossible.

But they were nudged to give it a try, starting with a simple fall fundraiser during which people were asked to donate loose change. However, loose change quickly turned into bills and checks, and during the first weekend \$125 was raised.

Surprised and encouraged, the committee raised additional funds through silent auctions, candy bar sales, and a project led by Prince of Peace member Linda LeRette, in which Prince of Peace's 12 stained glass windows were beautifully described in a series of brief presentations that were then incorporated into a book and calendar.

As momentum continued to build, letters were sent to neighboring churches and to sister NALC



congregations in the area, asking them to partner in the project by donating money and sending volunteers. Over \$3,000 had been raised. But the group decided not to stop there, The response from area churches was overwhelming.

Finally, the Numana truck rolled in from Kansas. The church had raised \$8,550, and there were 140 volunteers from Prince of Peace, local congregations, and organizations like the FFA and Girl Scouts. The excitement and activity in the fellowship hall was electric. By the end of the morning 26,136 meals were packed and loaded on the truck.



Thanks be to God, who planted the seed and produced the fruit! Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Prince of Peace is a community of believers who through their actions were able to reach out and help others. They are grateful for the giving spirit of the congregation and community, and to the Numana organization, which works tirelessly to provide food to a world in desperate need.



Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. — Ephesians 3:20-21

Tell a story of your congregation's mission or introduce your congregation to others in the NALC by sending a story to news@thenalc.org.

The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is an ecumenical statement of our faith.

The Nicene Creed is one of three ecumenical creeds that were placed first among the confessions of the Lutheran Church in the *Book of Concord*. The word, *creed*, comes from a Latin word, *credo*, that means “I believe.”

The Nicene Creed begins with “We believe.” It originally was a corporate statement of faith from the bishops meeting together; but, later “I believe” displaced “we” in its recitation in the liturgy. The original corporate “we” was restored in the translation used in *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

The Nicene Creed is a product of the Ecumenical Councils of the fourth century: the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.). For this reason, it is sometimes called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It was at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. that the Nicene Creed was officially adopted.

Like the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed consists of three articles, each devoted to a person of the Holy Trinity. While the Creed had traditionally been divided into 12 parts, Martin Luther in his catechisms explained the Apostles’ Creed in three articles — one for each person of the Trinity — to make them more understandable to children.

Both the Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed begin with the affirmation that God created heaven and earth. Unlike the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed tells of God’s creation, not only of things seen, but also of things unseen. The older form of the Nicene Creed in the *Service Book and Hymnal* translates the Greek words with the English words, *visible* and *invisible*. Whatever exists, God has created. Only God Himself is the Uncreated One.

The First Article addresses the Gnostic notion that the world was created by a being other than the one and only God. The Gnostics of the early Christian centuries believed that the physical world was



Words on Worship

Pastor Michael G. Tavella

made by or resulted from a being or beings hostile to the high god. In this and everything else, they believed what is contradictory to the catholic faith.

In its length and special non-Biblical terminology, the Second Article manifests the controversies of the Fourth Century. In the Gospel of John and 1 John, Christ is called the only-begotten Son from the Father. The same Greek word used in the original text of the Nicene Creed is translated in the older English version with the term, only-begotten. This translation of the Nicene Creed follows with “Begotten of his Father before all worlds.” The LBW translation reads, “eternally begotten of the Father.” The Son of God existed before the world was created. The Ecumenical Councils rejected the Arian idea that the Father created the Son.

The Son is of one being or substance (*homoousios* in Greek) with the Father. *Homoousios* is not a Biblical term; nonetheless, it is a term that upholds the Scriptural confession that Jesus Christ is God.

In the Gospel of John, we read, “the Word was God.” Christ is not a creature, but He is one with the Father and is God. The Nicene Creed also states that the Son is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.” It is through the Son of God, who is the Word, that all things were made as John’s Gospel proclaims. Paul writes, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6).

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The Son of God “became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man.” The incarnation of the Son of God was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Second Article mentions the events pertaining to our salvation: Jesus’ crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father. It ends with an affirmation of the coming Kingdom.

The Third Article’s theme is the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. It is the Spirit who makes us holy and enlivens us. He is called Lord, which means that He too is God with the Father and the Son. In the Fourth Century, in addition to the challenge to the deity of the Son, there was also a challenge to the deity of the Holy Spirit. Those who denied His deity were called *Pneumatomachoi*, Spirit-fighters. Basil mentions these heretics and the name applied to them in his great work regarding the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not begotten but proceeds from the Father. The word, *proceeds*, describing the relationship of the Father and the Holy Spirit, derives from the Gospel of John (See John 15: 26).

In the original version of the Nicene Creed, the text reads, “who proceeds from the Father.” This remains the usage of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The *filioque* — meaning “and the Son” — was added to the creed in the West. We confess that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son, a confession of the Spirit’s deity. The Third Article makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God along with the Father and the Son.

In his *Small Catechism*, Luther explains the activity of the Holy Spirit in the individual and the Spirit’s role in the Church. The Spirit calls, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps each of us in the true faith. The Spirit likewise calls, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Church. The Spirit also gathers the Church. In the Church my sins and those of all believers are forgiven. The Spirit-bearing individual is a member of the Body of Christ. No faithful disciple ignores participation in the Church.

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” In the holy catholic Church, we are baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Without the Word, the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy

Communion, and the Office of the Keys (an authority given by Christ to the Church and associated with the remembrance of Baptism in Confession), there is no forgiveness. This does not mean that the word of forgiveness outside of a church service is ineffective. It does mean that forgiveness is always connected to the Church and its ministry. In public assemblies, the pastor announces the forgiveness of sins by virtue of the Office of Word and Sacrament.

The Nicene Creed ends with the affirmation of our belief in the resurrection of the dead. In the last day, our souls will be united with our bodies. This belief is unlike a common view in Greek philosophy that the body after death is shed while the soul exists forever. Our souls will be bodiless only between our deaths and the last judgment. As Christ was raised from the dead, so we will be raised.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* suggests that the Nicene Creed be used on festivals and on Sundays in Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. At other times, the Apostles’ Creed is to be used. When Baptism takes place within a Communion service, the Apostles’ Creed is always recited.

Why do we recite creeds in worship? For centuries no creed had a place in the Eucharistic liturgy. It was in Baptism that the catechumen recited a creed. The Eucharistic Prayer served as a creed before the use of the Nicene Creed in the Liturgy.

The ancient Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus expresses our basic Christian beliefs in a Trinitarian form. Jesus Christ is confessed as Savior who is the Father’s inseparable Word through whom all things were made. He became incarnate of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. He suffered and died to free us from sin, death, and the devil and was raised from the dead. In this prayer, the Holy Spirit is called upon to come down on the Church’s gifts of bread and wine and upon those gathered. The doxology at the end of the prayer clearly expresses our Trinitarian faith. The Prayer contains much more than is here recounted.

Why can’t we continue this practice? We cannot return to the Third Century. Though the doctrine of the Church never changes, practice does. Inclusion of the Creed makes good sense.

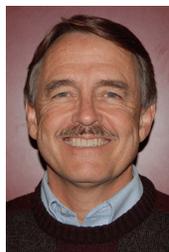
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Caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ

I'd like to share something very personal in this month's column. It's about the importance of *pastoral care* in the broadest sense of that term. Not just the pastoral care given by clergy to their members, but rather the love and compassion members provide one another as part of the priesthood of all believers.

As a pastor, I have, for the first time in my adult life, been on the receiving end of a tremendous amount of compassion and empathy from the members of my congregation. This experience has been a profound reminder to me that one of the most important things we provide in the Body of Christ is love and support for one another. And this is especially needed by those of our brothers and sisters who are — for any number of reasons — in crisis.

Now to *my* crisis. Some of you are already aware of this, because my crisis unfolded during the first day of the Lutheran CORE Convocation in Minnesota. It was on that day I learned (by phone) that my 21-month-old granddaughter, Mya, had a brain tumor.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

It was all very sudden. Mya's symptoms had only become evident a few days before, and her pediatrician had suspected nothing more than an intestinal flu. But on that day — August 14 — Mya had her first CAT scan, was taken by ambulance to the nearby children's hospital, had an MRI of her head, was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and was scheduled for surgery the very next day.

I was able to change my plane reservation, and I arrived at Mya's bedside a couple of hours before she was wheeled away to the operating room, in her adult-sized bed, held by her weeping mother. It was an absolutely heartbreaking scene.

Surgery — just under five hours — went well. A large brain tumor was removed, and we began a five-day wait (vigil?) until the final pathology report was ready on August 20. Only then did we have final confirmation that Mya's tumor was malignant. So my granddaughter is now enduring a six-month intensive chemotherapy course of treatment.

Needless to say, as a parish pastor, I have witnessed similar times of crisis as an outside observer. But being in the middle of this particular crisis has, as you can probably imagine, caught me completely by surprise.

For days I could not talk to anyone about my only grandchild without choking up.



Pastor Don Brandt and his granddaughter, Mya.

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My wife, Susan, said it's like we are now living in some kind of an alternate universe — one where our lives are upended while the rest of the world continues on, oblivious to our crisis.

However, there is at least one conspicuous exception when it comes to this “new universe” my wife and I, Mya, her parents, and the rest of my family currently inhabit.

The exception is the many brothers and sisters in Christ in my congregation who have chosen to walk along side us during this difficult journey.

Whether it be their constant prayers, their words of encouragement, their hugs, or their financial contributions toward Mya's care, all of these expressions of love have made this journey easier.

What a profound reminder that perhaps the greatest expression of love is our willingness to share in the suffering of others.

I've always appreciated what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:26: “If one part (of the Body of Christ) suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

It's one of the most important things we do as faith communities: Mobilizing to provide the love and support others need in the most difficult and tragic circumstances of life. And fortunately it's an area of ministry that most congregations have traditionally been very good at. The result is often an overwhelming sense of God's loving presence within our faith communities *and* a powerful, potential witness to nonbelievers regarding the love we share in Christ Jesus.

Your prayers on Mya's behalf would be most appreciated.

“If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.” — 1 John 4:12

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

The Nicene Creed

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Some more recently-composed Eucharistic Prayers are statements of faith, but they do not have the ecumenical clout of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is a summary of the orthodox faith in its further development and clarification in the fourth and fifth centuries against the threats of heretical teaching. It reminds Christians every week of what we believe. This is especially important in a time when the faith is being attacked and compromised.

Always beware of creeds other than the three ecumenical ones. An individual pastor or congregation does not have the authority to promulgate a creed nor is such a creed authoritative for the Church. In such individual and local confessions, error is highly possible. Sometimes, it is intended.

It is true that in the early centuries localities had their own versions of the baptismal creed. Nonetheless, adherence to the ecumenical creeds and recitation of the same help protect us from the idiosyncrasies of those who think that they are competent to write a creed — and are neither competent nor authorized — and from false belief.

The Creed is doxology. When we recite it, we are praising God for His gracious and generous acts. Remember the maxim from Saint Prosper of Aquitaine, *lex orandi, lex credendi* — “the law of prayer is the law of belief” or “what we pray is what we believe.”

In these days of drift from fundamental Christian beliefs in many churches, every time we recite one of the creeds we are affirming in a corporate manner the true faith and witnessing to our commitment to this faith. We follow the Great Tradition in our use of them in worship. Their recitation is a shield against error and heresy.

Next time we will look at the Apostles' Creed and its primary context, Holy Baptism.

Pastor Michael G. Tavella serves Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Abington, Pa. You may contact him with comments or suggestions at MGTavella@msn.com.

Association for Church Renewal told religious liberty is under threat

Religious liberty is threatened worldwide, a pro-life leader told the Association for Church Renewal at its Oct. 15 meeting in Washington, D.C.

Efforts to redefine “religious freedom” as “freedom of worship” only, and misunderstandings of what constitutes discrimination, allow governments to exert control over faith groups who oppose the current trend toward abortion on demand, same-sex marriage, or mandatory contraception in health insurance programs, said William J. Saunders.

Saunders is senior vice-president and senior counsel for Americans United for Life (AUL), the nation’s first pro-life organization. AUL seeks comprehensive legal protection for human life from conception to natural death.

A graduate of Harvard Law School and the University of North Carolina, Saunders directs AUL’s international project and writes and speaks on a variety of life-related and human rights topics. A regular columnist for *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, he is frequently quoted by media outlets such as BBC World News, CNN, Fox News, Vatican Radio and National Public Radio.

He noted that there are two types of discrimination, “rational” and “irrational.” Irrational discrimination is represented by slavery and segregation whereas rational discrimination would be exemplified by a ban on same-sex marriage. This distinction is increasingly being rejected as same-sex marriage becomes more and more popular and pro-gay marriage groups equate the ban on same-sex marriages with slavery.

Opposition to religious liberty takes place not just at the federal level but at the state level as well. Saunders provided two examples:

The first consisted of a New Mexico case currently under appeal in which a photographer, for religious reasons, refused to photograph a same-sex union ceremony and was subsequently fined.



William J. Saunders

The second example concerned a “conscience protection” law passed in Missouri that would allow health care workers to refuse participating in abortions if it violated their conscience. However, the extent to who is covered by that clause is being disputed in the courts.

Saunders said that some states have good conscience protection laws, but they may not necessarily extend to pharmacists who are opposed to dispensing abortifacients (the so-called “morning after pill”) or contraceptives. Such contraceptives are required by the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act and, although churches have been given a year to come up with alternative plans, non-profits must comply with the law.

“We are grateful to Bill for providing the Association with an overview of the issues at stake in the ongoing struggle for religious freedom and right-to-life legislation,” said Pastor Mark Chavez, ACR president and NALC General Secretary.

In other business, attendees heard reports from member organizations.