

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

August-September 2013

NALC Convocation approves establishing NALC seminary

The 2013 NALC Convocation overwhelmingly approved establishing a seminary to provide for the theological education of future pastors for the North American Lutheran Church.

The Convocation, which met Aug. 8-9 at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pa., approved two resolutions: The first authorized the establishment of the North American Lutheran Seminary. The second authorized raising \$1 million to fund the seminary.



Delegates to the 2013 NALC Convocation consider the NALC Seminary proposal. More than 700 people attended the Convocation in Pittsburgh, Pa.

The proposal for the North American Lutheran Seminary was the result of the work of the NALC's Task Force for Theological Education.

There will be two components of the NALC Seminary: a Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., and Houses of Studies located within NALC Mission Districts.

"We are proposing to establish the North American Lutheran Seminary so that we in the North American Lutheran Church may have a seminary of our own, under our direct supervision," said the Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville III, chair of the Task Force for Theological Education.

"This is a beginning. This is a start. But I believe it is a good beginning. And we need to begin now

because there is actually a sense of urgency for a number of our seminary students who desperately need an orthodox seminary immediately," he said.

There will be one NALC seminary with one curriculum and one focus, but many possible locations. The plan is sort of a hub-and-spokes system with the Seminary Center at the hub and possible Houses of Studies dispersed throughout North America.

Both components will make up the whole of the North American Lutheran Seminary. This will allow NALC students who wish to study at the Seminary Center to take classes in a traditional setting with other NALC students or to attend one of the Houses of Studies nearer to their homes.

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North American Lutheran Seminary

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“This seminary network will have both residential and distance-learning components to it. But even those distance-learning components will contain face-to-face gatherings of students and professors because we all value those marvelous connections of direct fellowship in order to train our future pastors,” said Dr. Harrisville, who serves as pastor of New Life Lutheran Church in Menomonie, Wis.

All NALC seminary students and faculty will gather in one location once or twice each year. The purpose of these gatherings is “pastoral formation, the further training of candidates for NALC ministry, and to help establish a spirit of collegiality and fellowship among the students,” the proposal explains.

The entire NALC Seminary system will offer one coordinated curriculum so that all students are receiving the same theological education regardless of whether they are studying at the Seminary Center or a House of Studies.

“The unique thing about this seminary plan is that rather than investing in bricks and mortar, we can make an investment in people. We’ll be making an investment in faithful, distinguished faculty. We’ll be making an investment in our students — who will receive faithful teaching, the chance to grow and mature and fully develop their leadership capacity. And we’ll be making an investment in our congregations to provide pastors and leaders who will faithfully proclaim the confessional Lutheran witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the sake of future generations,” said NALC Bishop John Bradosky in a video prepared to introduce the seminary to congregations.

Trinity School for Ministry was selected for the Seminary Center “because of its evangelical spirit, strong traditional values, and accommodating ethos,” the seminary proposal explains.

Trinity School for Ministry is an Anglican seminary. Some Convocation delegates asked whether NALC students would be receiving an Anglican education



The Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville III, chair of the NALC Task Force for Theological Education, introduces the proposal for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

rather than a Lutheran education. It was explained that the NALC seminary will include Lutheran faculty who will be teaching NALC students.

“We will insist that for those essential Lutheran courses that our professors — vetted by our people — will be teaching our students,” Dr. Harrisville said.

“We will insist, and we are working on and have already developed an essential curriculum that is already in operation, so that we can ensure a thoroughly and thorough-going Lutheran education for our Lutheran students,” he said.

“We are committed — absolutely committed — in the way we will choose our faculty, in the way we will vet our faculty, and in the way we will call our faculty, and develop a curriculum, that it retains a confessional, orthodox Lutheran character,” Dr. Harrisville said.

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Dr. Harrisville said he originally shared some of the concerns about having Lutheran students trained in an Anglican school, but he said his experiences at Trinity relieved any concerns he may have had. “When I met President Terry, the leadership of Trinity School for Ministry, faculty, members of the staff, and students, what I found there warmed my Lutheran heart. I found a community with shared faith, values and mission. I found an evangelical spirit that I deeply appreciate. And I did ask the question, ‘Are you prepared to be changed by us?’ And the immediate answer was, ‘Yes.’ And with that all of my misgivings were laid to rest,” he said.

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, a member of the Task Force for Theological Education and a newly elected member of the NALC Executive Council, also expressed her confidence that Trinity School for Ministry is a good match for the NALC.

“At Trinity (School for Ministry), we have members of the Anglican Church in North America — those who have been forged through a very similar fire that we in the NALC have been forged through. We are coming through this together. We are together the faithful witnesses to the historic, apostolic Christian faith in North America at this time and place. And we could ask for no better companions on the journey than the Anglican Church in North America right now,” she said.

“When I visited with the faculty there — and I have been in and around Lutheran seminary faculty for a long time — the word that I want to use to describe them is *beautiful*. And it has to do with the beauty of their hearts. They are evangelically orthodox. They have a love for Jesus. They know how much God loves them, and they know how much God loves the world. It would do us well to partner with them,” said Dr. Schifrin, who serves as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Monona, Iowa, and Mission in Christ Lutheran Church in Strawberry Point, Iowa. “We come from these different paths, and we are going to walk side-by-side into the future together. Not only am I 100 percent for this; I am thrilled.”

Any remaining doubts about the North American Lutheran Seminary Center being located at Trinity School for Ministry were relieved when the Very Rev. Dr. Justyn Terry, Dean and President of



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin addresses the Convocation during the discussion of the proposal to establish the North American Lutheran Seminary. The Rev. Dr. Nathan Howard Yoder is standing in line behind her. Both are members of the NALC’s Task Force for Theological Education.

Trinity, spoke to the Convocation. “We are very excited about this new partnership as the Center for the North American Lutheran Seminary,” he said. “We are very aware of the great tradition that you have as Lutherans in very highly educated pastors. I have always admired that about your tradition. We are very privileged at the decision you made yesterday ... and very honored and thankful for the privilege that we will have in working with you in the years that lie ahead.”

“You will be glad to know that we do have a very high opinion of the Holy Scriptures. We believe the Bible is God’s Word written. ... It is one of the things we require of all of our trustees, of all of our faculty — when they first come on board and on a regular ongoing basis — that they affirm our Statement of Faith,” he said.

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The Very Rev. Justyn Terry, Dean and President of Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., addressed the Convocation after Trinity was approved as the site for the North American Lutheran Seminary Center.

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“We are people who believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone, and we are very much admirers of Martin Luther in particular,” he said.

“We are very excited about the partnership, but I want to first affirm our deep commitment to the Holy Scriptures. God has spoken. God has revealed Himself. We’re not just left groping in the dark, the Light has shown. The person of Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. But the great way in which we come to know Him and learn to be His disciples is through His Word written.

“We have from our earliest years had a great commitment to the Great Commission. ... We are very committed to world mission,” he said. “One of the great excitements about Trinity is that we believe that we are forming Christian leaders for mission. Wherever they are, they are going to be on the mission of God. We are committed to that. We love the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we want to take it into all the world. That is very much in the heart of our DNA.”

“We are very mindful of the importance of forming people in a tradition and in your case the North American Lutheran Church. We want our graduates who are coming to serve your church to be formed in your tradition,” he said.

“We know the importance of traditions in the way in which we live out our Christian faith, so we understand the need for those who will be serving in the North American Lutheran Church to know about the Lutheran Confessions, to know about Law-Gospel hermeneutic, to learn about the great tradition of Lutheran preaching, and the great opportunity to really immerse yourself in the Lutheran tradition.

“We want North American Lutheran Church pastors who really understand the tradition that they are being raised in and that they are going to go out and serve. We really appreciate that, and we are excited about the chance to really work with you on that,” he said.

“What we are seeing here, in part, is one of these new alliances that’s coming out in these days of seismic shifts in the life of the Christian Church. The way in which we have been able to come together around the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a great excitement to me. It does seem that once again in this new reformation era that we are being called together to contend for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the faith once delivered to the Church,” Dr. Terry concluded.

Dr. Harrisville explained the need for a NALC seminary system in the seminary video: “Currently our seminary students are at a variety of seminaries, but many of them are not Lutheran. Some of them are, but the difficulty is in the consistency. So in order to insure this, we need to establish our own seminary training program so that our students and indeed our congregations can be assured that when they call a pastor they can then feel very confident that that pastor has had a very basic curriculum that is commensurate with our mission and values.”

The first NALC House of Studies is already in operation at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.

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In response to an immediate need for NALC students to move from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, an ELCA school in Columbia, S.C., the Carolinas Mission District secured funding from a donor to establish a Department of Lutheran Studies at Gordon-Conwell. The Rev. Dr. Mary Havens was called to be the director of the department, with Dr. David Yeago and Dr. Schifrin as adjunct faculty. Dr. Havens and Dr. Yeago were highly-respected orthodox professors at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary until 2012 when their positions were suddenly eliminated.

“We hope in years to come to establish other Houses of Studies across the country where resources and means are available to us. It is hoped that this network of sites will serve our Lord Jesus Christ so that we may always hear the good news of Jesus Christ in all its beauty,” Dr. Harrisville said.

Another exciting part of the proposal is the intention to integrate a global component into the NALC Seminary through online courses. The hope is that NALC students will be able to participate in classes offered by NALC partner churches in other parts of the world and that their students may be able to take classes from NALC professors.

The NALC Executive Council will call a Seminary Director as soon as possible. This person will serve both as administrator of the North American Lutheran Seminary and the Seminary Center. It is expected that the Seminary program will begin operation in 2014.



Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C., hosts the first NALC House of Studies. Houses of Studies may be established in other parts of the United States and Canada.



Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., will host the North American Lutheran Seminary Center.

The Convocation authorized raising \$1 million for the establishment of the North American Lutheran Seminary. Funding for the seminary will come from support from NALC congregations and from individual gifts. NALC leaders are committed to developing a plan for raising the significant amount of money necessary to begin the seminary as quickly as possible. They believe that the congregations and members of the NALC are ready to step up powerfully to support this exciting, innovative program for theological education.

Donations to support the seminary system may be made to the NALC Theological Education Fund. They may be given online or sent to: NALC Theological Education Fund; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112.

The Convocation also approved a resolution asking that the NALC invite the boards of the Institute of Lutheran Theology, St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, and other independent Lutheran theological schools to enter into conversation with the NALC Theological Education Task Force to explore ways in which they may participate in the theological education ministry of the NALC.

“When we ask the question, ‘where will our pastors come from for the future,’ we must turn that question back on ourselves and confess our responsibility to raise up leaders from our congregations who are open to Christ’s call to serve in Word and Sacrament Ministry. And we must provide them with the educational experience that insures their competence and confidence to faithfully lead our congregations in Word and Sacrament ministry,” Bishop Bradosky said. “It is my prayer that you will join me in supporting this most important endeavor.”

NALC to begin partnership with The Navigators to encourage discipleship

Delegates to the NALC Convocation heard about a partnership that the North American Lutheran Church is beginning with The Navigators to encourage Christian discipleship in local congregations.

“This is new territory for The Navigators. It is the first time that they are working with an entire denomination,” said Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary.

The partnership will involve working in NALC congregations starting with a pilot phases in Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, Texas, and eastern Pennsylvania. It will later be expanded throughout the church.

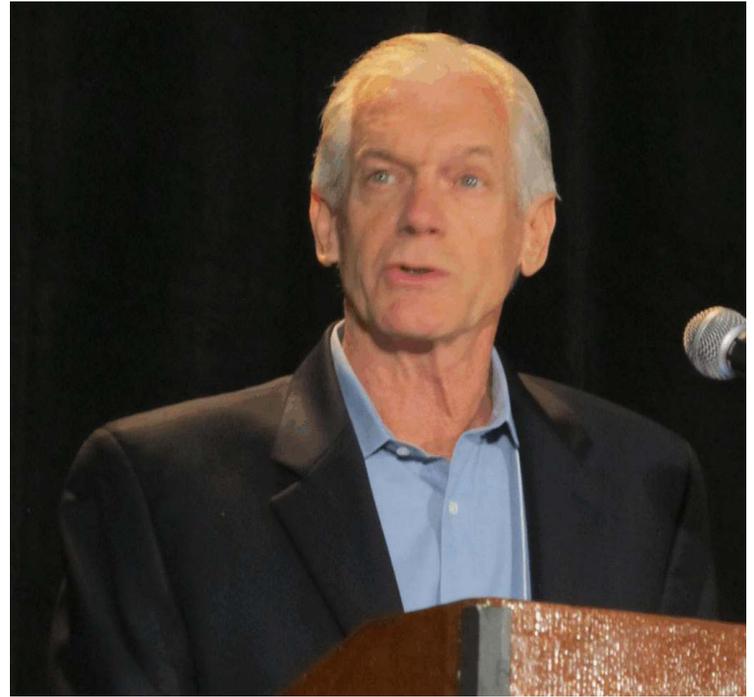
“This is a pilot phase of what will be an ongoing partnership with The Navigators where they will help us transform our congregations into being disciple-making congregations,” Pastor Chavez said.

“We are really excited in Church Discipleship Ministry — which is the Navigator entity that works with local churches — to partner with the North American Lutheran Church in intentional disciple-making,” said Sam Hershey of The Navigators.

“God has given me and our other Church Discipleship Ministry staff a deep passion about making disciples and partnering with church leaders to develop intentional discipling cultures in local churches. I believe a disciple is one who, out of a deep relationship with God, refreshes others,” he said.

“In The Navigators’ Church Discipleship Ministry, this is what we’re passionate about: partnering with church leaders to develop churches full of refreshing disciple leaders who impact children, youth and adults. In turn, these disciples multiply, impacting the lost in their networks of relatives, friends, work associates and acquaintances.

“We cannot be more motivated to partner with the North American Lutheran Church in equipping leaders and staff in the pursuit of developing disciples of Christ,” he said.



Sam Hershey of The Navigators explains their Church Discipleship Ministry and partnership with the NALC.

Margaret Fitzwater of The Navigators explained the process of working with local congregations. “Our Navigators Church Discipleship Ministry staff come alongside churches and leaders as friends and coaches to facilitate their listening to God and discovering their unique ways of expressing the life of God in and through them. We do this through the Intentional Disciple-making Church Process.”

“We don’t come with stock answers. ... The way that this looks in every church is different,” she said.

“It’s our Lord Jesus Christ who is still making disciples. It’s not The Navigators. The Navigators help point us always to the Word of God and the power of prayer so that Christ can be at work within us,” Bishop John Bradosky said.

“Imagine, if you will, a whole church filled with people willing and ready to be held accountable to one another and then to reach out to others to draw them into that same kind of life-giving relationship with Christ.

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Matthew Burkhart, Amy Schifrin are elected to Executive Council

Matthew Burkhart and Pastor Amy Schifrin were elected to four-year terms on the NALC Executive Council by the NALC Convocation which met Aug. 8-9 in Pittsburgh, Pa.



Matthew Burkhart



Amy Schifrin



Jon Evans



Jeffray Greene

Mr. Burkhart is an attorney in Columbus, Ohio, and a member of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus.

Pastor Schifrin serves as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Monona, Iowa, and Mission in Christ Lutheran Church in Strawberry Point, Iowa. She is also a member of the Task Force for Theological Education.

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

Thirteen people were nominated to fill the two positions.

Jon Evans and Pastor Jeffray Greene were reelected to the NALC Court of Adjudication.

Mr. Evans is an attorney in Pittsburgh, Pa., and a member of Zion Lutheran Church.

Pastor Greene serves American Lutheran Church in Rantoul, Illinois.

The Court of Adjudication hears appeals from disciplinary decisions; resolves questions of interpretation of NALC governing documents; and decides claims that a person or entity has violated these governing documents.

Five members of the 2014 Nominating Committee recommended by the Executive Council were confirmed at the Convocation.

The members of the 2014 Nominating Committee are Harvey Hengst of Fredericksburg, Texas; Pastor Theresa Jacobson of Menno, S.D.; Pastor Russell Saltzman of Kansas City, Mo.; Pastor Hilbert Schultz of Prairie Farm, Wis.; and Pastor Mike Tamorra of Rockford, Ohio.

The Navigators

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“I have looked at this. You’ve already heard me speak about discipleship. There is no one out there who does it better than these folks,” he said.

“One of the most important elements of this process is coaching for the pastor,” he said. “We’re not asking any of our pastors to participate in something that we’re not already doing.”

Bishop Bradosky, Pastor Chavez, and Assistants to the Bishop, Pastor David Wendel, and Pastor Gemechis Buba, are all working with Dennis Blevins of The Navigators in a discipleship coaching relationship.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania signs agreement with NALC

An agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the North American Lutheran Church was signed during the NALC Convocation. The Memorandum of Understanding is a step toward an official Full Communion relationship.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania by Bishop Israel-Peter Mwakyolile, of the Konde Diocese of the ELCT and by NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

The NALC is already in Full Communion with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. These are two of the largest Lutheran church bodies in the world, each with more than 6 million members.

“Recognizing that relationship and the unity that already exists in Jesus Christ, we now seek to nurture that relationship and strengthen our partnership in mission and ministry by establishing a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ that initiates a time of learning about one another, sharing in on-going conversation and exploring ways that we might develop our relationship further in the future. To that end, we will initiate this time by acknowledging that any relationship is mutual, with the goal of listening to each other, as well as speaking with each other. We acknowledge our mutual needs as well as the gifts each partner has to share for the sake of building up and strengthening the Church, for the sake of our witness to the world,” the agreement states.

At this time the two churches agree to:



Bishop Israel-Peter Mwakyolile of the Konde Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and Bishop John Bradosky of the North American Lutheran Church sign a Memorandum of Understanding between their two church bodies. Looking on are Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism; Ambassador Richard Mariki, ELCT General Secretary; Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary; and Pastor Herb Hafermann and Kirsten Hafermann, former missionaries to Tanzania.

- + Encourage local parishes and Mission Districts and dioceses to be in conversation with one another, developing individual partnerships that might include but not be limited to: mutual learning and visitation, shared ministry for the sake of education and care for the poor and those in need, shared Bible study and cultural exchange experiences.

- + Encourage leaders of the NALC and the ELCT to regularly invite and visit the meetings of the other for the sake of learning more about one another and bringing official greetings and, when appropriate, preaching the Word of God.

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Convocation receives update on NALC's application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation

The NALC's application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) continues to advance in the LWF process for membership, the Convocation was told in a report on the NALC's 2012 decision.

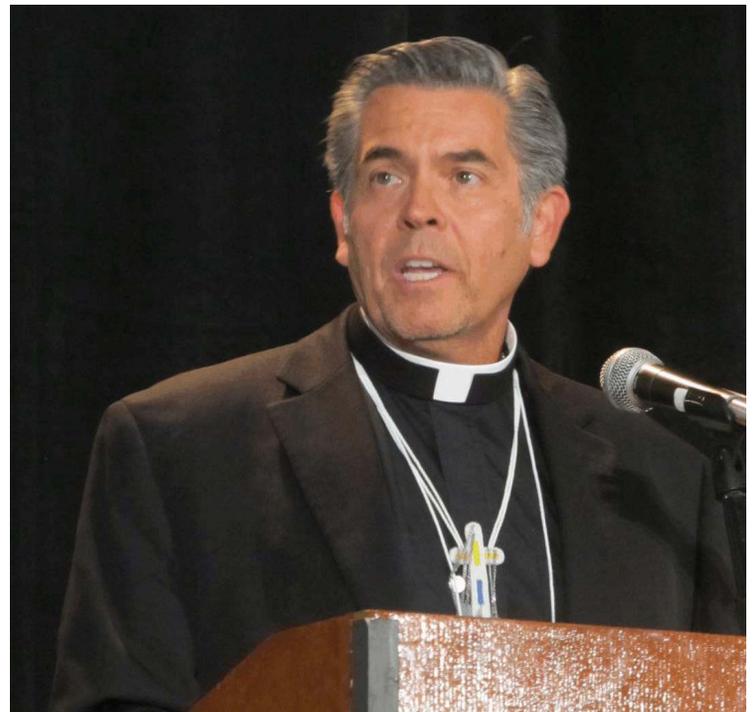
"The membership application process takes time," Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, told the Convocation.

The 2012 Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church approved a resolution seeking full membership in the Lutheran World Federation by a two-thirds majority. The NALC Constitution requires such a decision to be ratified by NALC congregations.

As of the Feb. 17, 2013, voting deadline, 167 congregations had voted to ratify the Convocation's action, while 61 congregations had voted not to ratify the decision. The LWF resolution was supported by 73 percent of the 228 congregations that voted, exceeding the constitutionally required two-thirds majority of the congregations voting for ratification. Congregations had six months from the close of the 2012 Convocation to complete their vote on ratification.

The updated NALC application for full membership and letter certifying completion of our ratification process was sent to the appropriate LWF officials on March 13. These materials were received and presented to the LWF membership committee and were reviewed by the committee and LWF Council during their annual meeting in June. Clarification of several issues has been requested, and an appropriate response is being prepared, Pastor Wendel explained.

"The next step will be an on-site visit by an LWF representative for the purpose of developing a personal relationship and a deeper understanding of the life and work of the NALC. At this time, we do not expect action before the next meeting of the



Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, addresses the Convocation.

LWF Council in June 2014," he said. "This is the normal process of membership application, so we will continue to work through this process in accordance with the LWF resolution adopted by the NALC convocation and ratified by congregational action."

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+ Explore the possibility and encourage development of a shared global theological education program to include the NALC and the ELCT, as well as other national and international Lutheran bodies.

After two years of living under this "Memorandum of Understanding," the two church bodies will consider whether to take steps toward a Full Communion relationship.

1517 NALC congregations by 2017

The 2013 NALC Convocation approved a resolution setting a goal of growing to at least 1517 NALC congregations by the year 2017. The goal was set as a way to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation by reaching out with the Gospel and growing as a church body.

Often considered the symbolic beginning of the Reformation, October 31, 1517, marks the day Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

The resolution notes that “our mission field is 500 million people in North America and the Caribbean” and that “as Lutherans who believe in the priesthood of all believers we each bear personal responsibility as priests for evangelism and the Great Commission.”

The resolution also invites NALC members and Christians worldwide to join in an international day

of prayer on Monday, Sept. 2, asking God to send His Holy Spirit to help and guide us.

“Now is the time. We need to move from maintenance to mission. We are called to be a mission church and not a country club. A challenge to every congregation in the North American Lutheran Church: to start new churches,” said Pastor Brad Hales of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpepper, Va., which brought the resolution.

“That’s a core value of the North American Lutheran Church — to make Jesus known,” he said. “The challenge is not mission impossible — but mission possible with Jesus Christ.”

Pastor Pam Thorson of House of Prayer Lutheran Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., described the growth of her congregation and reminded the Convocation, “It’s not just the number of congregations, it’s the number of people that God is bringing.”

Convocation adopts 2014 budgets

The 2013 NALC Convocation approved a \$1.5 million operating budget for the NALC and budgets for two of the church body’s designated funds for 2014.

The Theological Education Fund budget for 2014 was set at \$312,500. This marks a significant increase reflecting the NALC’s commitment to start the North American Lutheran Seminary. In addition to support for the seminary, the Theological Education Fund also provides support for NALC seminarians and for theological conferences.

The Great Commission Fund budget is \$155,000. This fund supports mission congregations, global missionaries and mission

projects, and leadership development and congregational renewal.

Individuals and congregations are welcome to support both funds.

Congregations are encouraged to give 5-8 percent of their offerings to the NALC operating budget. Congregations are encouraged to directly support other ministries — including several ministries specifically recommended by the NALC and the NALC’s two designated funds — with the remainder of their benevolence giving.

The hope is that congregations will develop partnership relationships between their

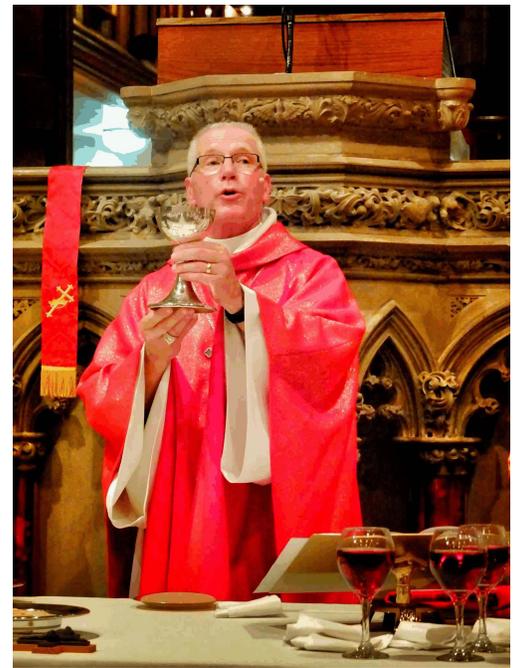


Ryan Schwarz, NALC Treasurer, explains the 2014 budgets to the Convocation.

congregation and other ministries — both domestic and global.



A highlight of the NALC Convocation was a Festival Service of Holy Communion at First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh.



Bishop John Bradosky presided at Holy Communion. (Photo by Pastor Samuel Nieva)



Bishop Israel-Peter Mwakyolile of the Konde Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania preached for the worship service.

2013 NALC Convocation

Festival Service of Holy Communion



The Westmont College Choir from Santa Barbara, Calif., delighted those attending the Convocation and theological conference with their singing. Dr. Michael Shasberger, their director, is among those instrumental in starting an NALC mission congregation at the college.

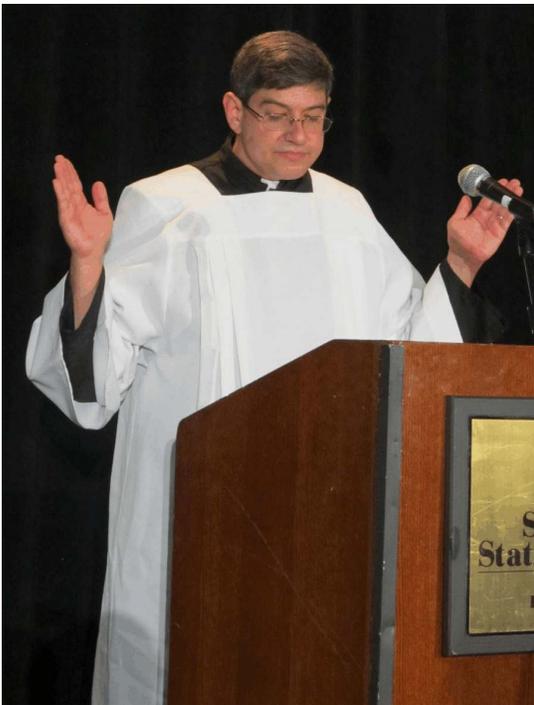


Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, addresses the Convocation.

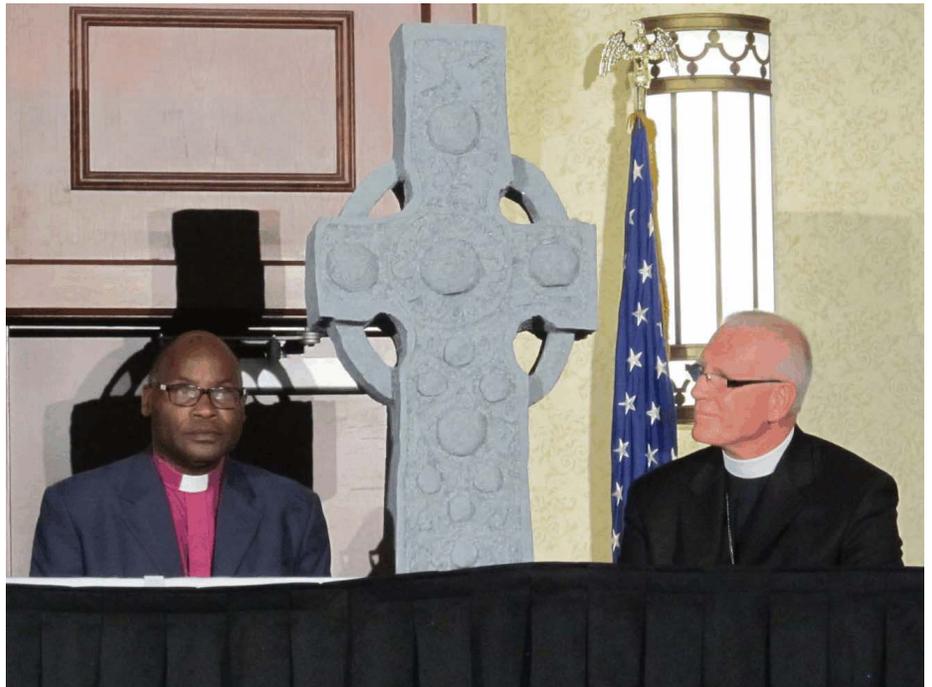


The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen speaks during discussion of the NALC seminary proposal. Pastor Scott Ness of St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City, Ohio, and a member of the NALC Candidacy Committee, and Pastor James Lehmann of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Flatville, Thomasboro, Ill., and a member of the NALC Executive Council, are behind him.

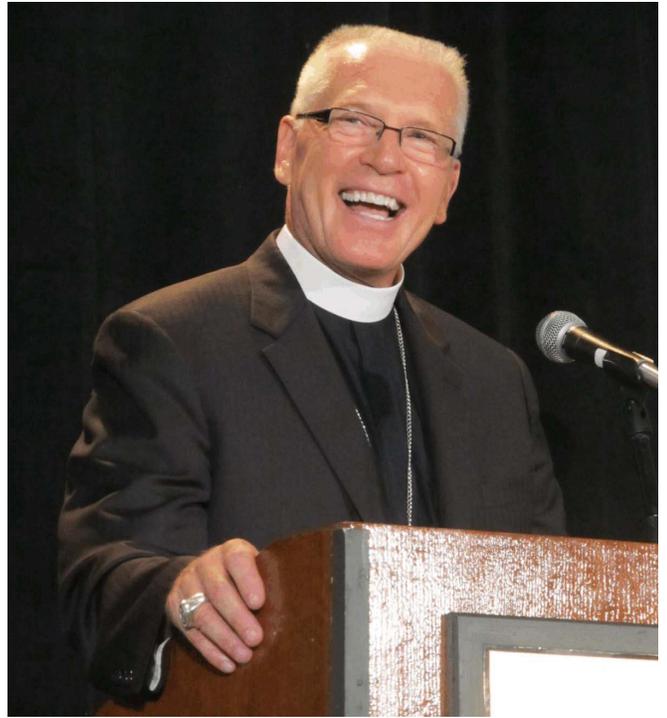
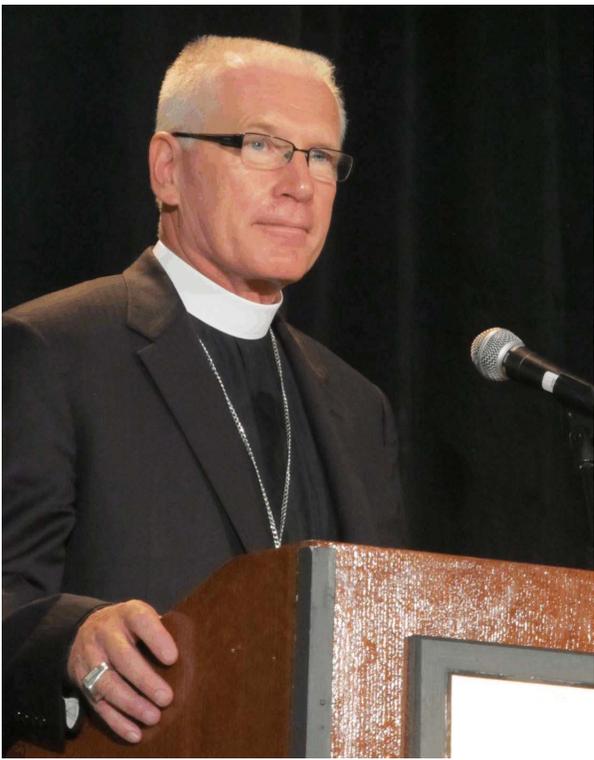
NALC Convocation



Pastor Maurice Frontz III of St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh coordinated worship and led devotions throughout the Convocations and Theological Conference.



Bishop Israel-Peter Mwakyolile of the Konde Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and NALC Bishop John Bradosky listen as the agreement between their two churches is read.



Bishop John Bradosky addresses the 2013 NALC Convocation. (Photo by Pastor Samuel Nieva)



Kevin Herr explains the ministry of Water Missions International.



Pastor Eddy Perez of San Pedro Lutheran Church shares information about NALC Hispanic congregations. He introduced Pastor Samuel Nieva and Ana Nieva of Pueblo de Dios in Compton, Calif., a congregation in need of mission partners.



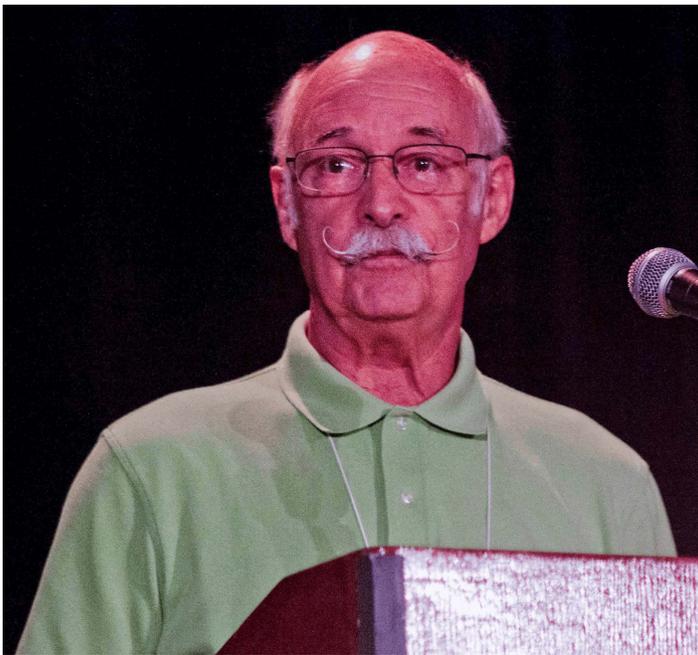
Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, introduces representatives of the NALC's ministry partners.



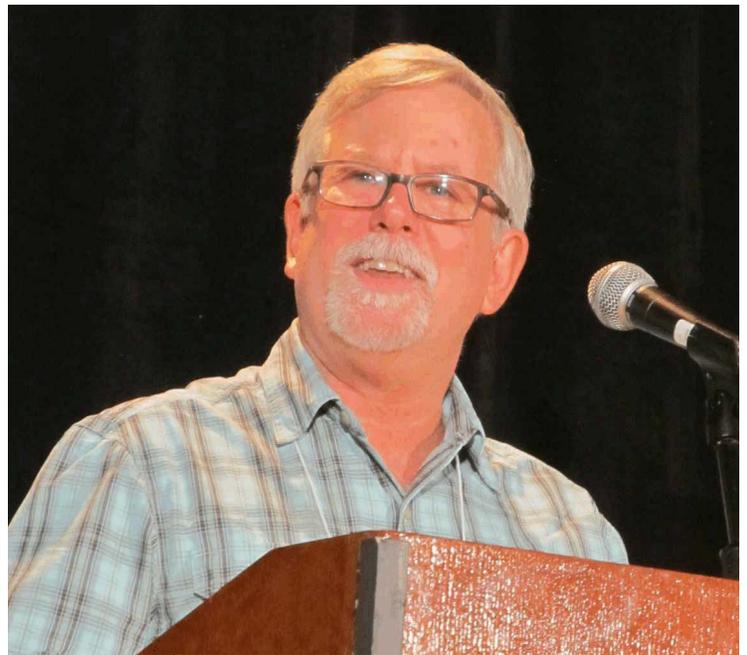
Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, shared his excitement about the mission opportunities God has provided to the NALC.



Representatives of Doma International report on the ministry of Hidota Health Center in Ethiopia. (Photo by Pastor Carter Askren)



Pastor Paul Borg talks about NALC Discipleship Events and the significant on-going networking among leaders that follows them. (Photo by Pastor Carter Askren).

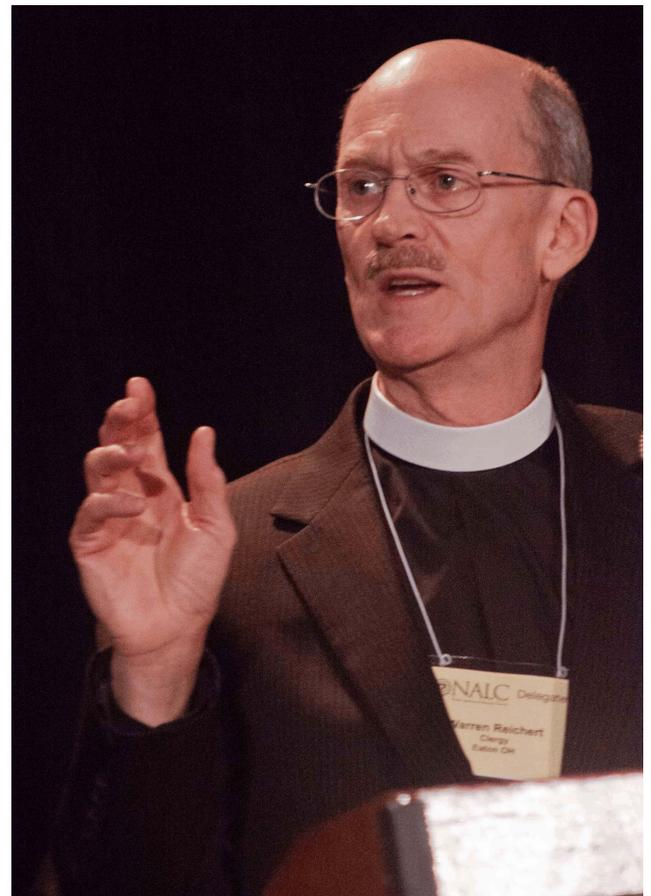


Pastor David Keener of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga., shares information about the NALC Missions Festival Nov. 7-9 in Hilliard, Ohio.

Mission-Driven



Pastor Joshua Ong of Church of the Living God in Houston, Texas, shares information about his ministry to Chinese people and their need for support as they seek a building. (Photo by Pastor Carter Askren)



Pastor Warren Reichert of Grace Lutheran Church in Eaton, Ohio, shares his testimony about how NALC congregational renewal events have made a difference in his congregation. He also shared his excitement about new partnership with The Navigators. (Photo by Pastor Carter Askren)

Herb Hafermann honored for 50 years as missionary in Tanzania

Pastor Herb Hafermann was honored for 50 years of missionary service in Tanzania by the 2013 NALC Convocation.

Pastor Hafermann was called to serve as a missionary in Tanzania just after his graduation from seminary in 1963.

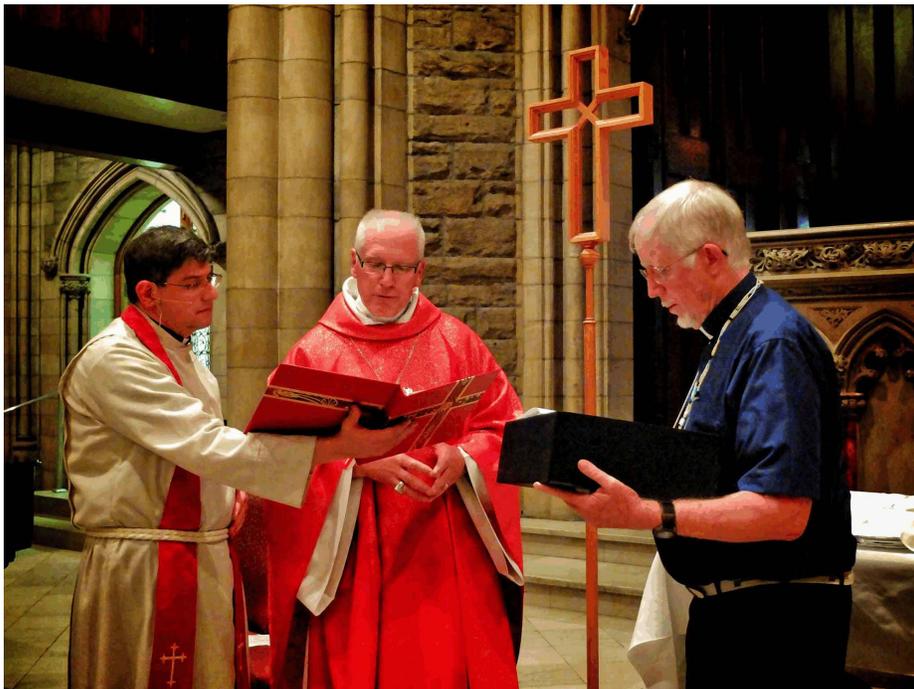
He served as a district pastor in the highly Islamic area of Kisarawe until he was elected to serve as president of the Uzaramo-Uluguru Synod from 1966 to 1970. He met Kirsten Christensen from the Danish Mission Society in a Swahili language course right after his arrival in Dar es Salaam, and they were married on July 25, 1964.

In 1972, Pastor Hafermann received a call to serve the Lutheran Junior Seminary in Morogoro where he served in various capacities, which always included teaching in Bible and Biology. He was chosen to lead a Mission District of the Morogoro Diocese from 1999 until 2011.

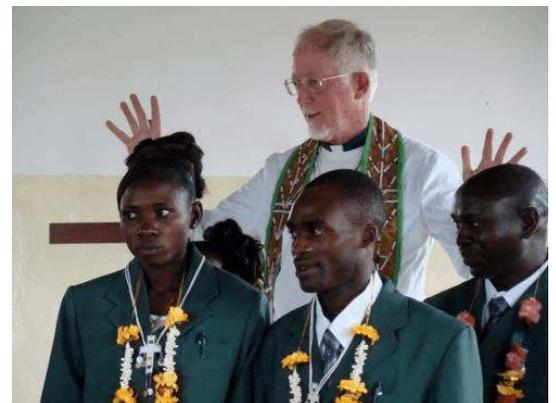


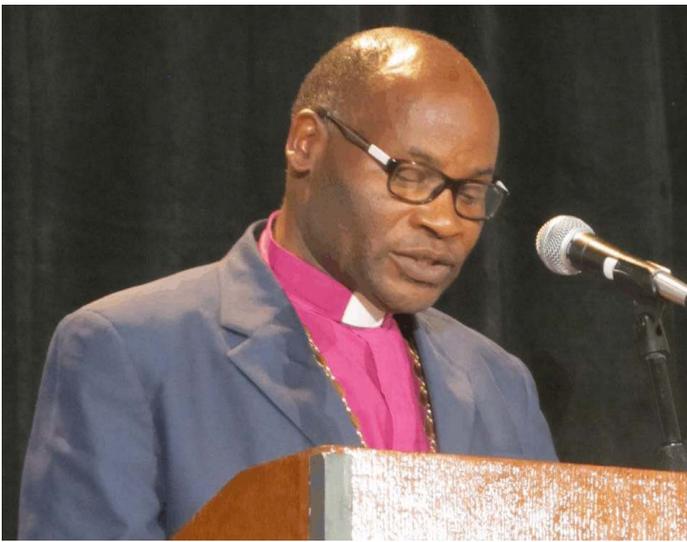
Pastor Herb Hafermann led a Bible study and shared his experiences in Tanzania during the NALC Convocation.

In retirement, he has continued doing volunteer work in the mission outreach of the diocese.

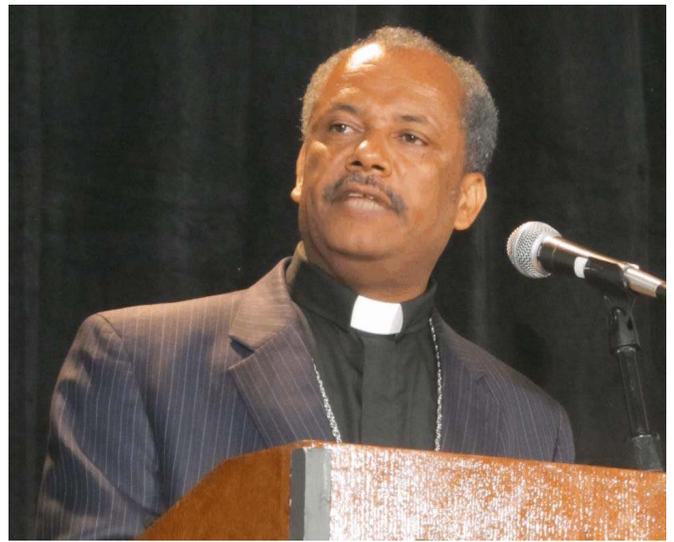


Bishop John Bradosky presides at a formal recognition of Pastor Herb Hafermann during the Festival Service of Holy Communion. Pastor Maurice Frontz is assisting minister. (Photo by Pastor Samuel Nieva)





Bishop Israel-Peter Mwakyolile
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania



The Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Ecumenical Greetings

Representatives of other church bodies and organizations brought greetings to the NALC Convocation.



The Rev. Canon Daryl Fenton
Anglican Church in North America



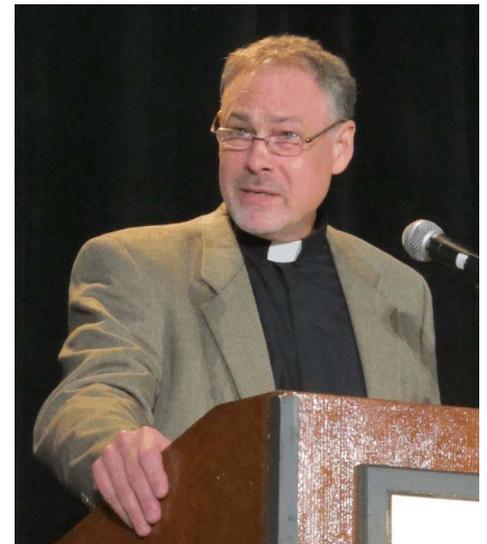
The Rev. Nolan D. Astley
Lutheran Church—Canada



The Rev. Don Rooney
Roman Catholic Church



The Rev. Dr. John Nunes
Lutheran World Relief



The Rev. Joel Lehenbauer
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Bishop's Report to the Convocation

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve you in this capacity as Bishop. It is an honor and a privilege.

Let me begin by expressing my continued appreciation to Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring. He has been a great resource of encouragement, support and wisdom in navigating a clear pathway as we move ahead. There are always challenges that require consultation and a collegial style for effectiveness. At this point in my ministry I have little concern about appearances and much greater concern about the reality and effectiveness of our ministry and mission. I have never attempted to lead as one who has all the answers or from a need to appear as one who does. I have always taken great consolation in being surrounded by those who are gifted and willing to offer sound advice and counsel. Bishop Spring and other former Bishops Ken Sauer, Ron Warren, Ralph Kempinski and Henry Schulte have provided that for me, and I am truly grateful for their service.

As I told you last year, this is still new territory for me. Every week brings new circumstances, each with its own set of challenges. This is not a role one learns in a few months or even a few years. I am bound to make many mistakes along the way and pray for your understanding, forgiveness and patience.

My written report is included in your packet and my goal in these brief minutes is not to repeat information regarding completed actions in the past. The greater concern is for our future together.

As many of you know, I am on the road almost constantly, meeting with pastors, congregations, mission districts, deans, ministry partners, and ecumenical partners here in the United States and Canada as well as developing relationships with partners in other nations. In those presentations I always discuss our relentless pursuit of discipleship and it is to that end that I want to speak to you this morning.

Those who have looked at Charles Schulz's (a good Lutheran) comic strip "Peanuts," have seen



NALC Bishop John Bradosky speaks at the 2013 NALC Convocation.

the frequent image of Lucy and Charlie Brown playing football. Lucy holds the football for Charlie to kick, and at the last minute she pulls it away. In one of those comic strips, Lucy is begging Charlie to play football, and he absolutely refuses. He says emphatically, "Every time I try to kick the ball you pull it away and I fall on my back." Lucy breaks down in tears and confesses, "Charlie Brown I have been so terrible to you over the years, picking up the football like that. I have played so many cruel tricks on you, but I've seen the error of my ways! I've seen the hurt look in your eyes when I have deceived you. I've been wrong, so wrong. Won't you give a poor penitent girl another chance?" Charlie Brown is moved by her honest confession and grief. He says, "Of course, I'll give you another chance." He steps back and Lucy holds the football. He is running toward the ball and just at the last second Lucy did what she always does and pulls the ball away and Charlie Brown lands flat on his

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back. Lucy's last words are these, "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two very different things, Charlie Brown!"

We must confess that directly or indirectly we all contributed to the place our predecessor body ended up. The path we were on led us to the destination of which we ultimately despaired. When people ask how we got off course, my standard answer is, "Just a little at a time."

When you are piloting an aircraft and you are off course by a few degrees and you are only traveling a few miles, you will still spot your airport. However, if you are traveling 50 miles, you may have to look hard to find it. Go 500 miles, and you may miss an entire city. Go 5,000 miles and you will miss it by a state or two. The point is simple. Being off by a few degrees of compass heading doesn't matter much at first, but without course correction the delta or change becomes overwhelming and sometimes insurmountable.

Staying on course is not easy. So many factors contribute to pilots losing their way. They can become distracted. Wind currents blow them off course. They have to account for compass deviation, magnetic variation. But the most common factor for moving off course is neglect.

As people have asked me what will keep the North American Lutheran Church from becoming just like predecessor bodies in 20 years, I have said we are starting with a different set of values. What I mean by that needs clarification. As I talk with congregations, I ask them what they value. One congregation told me they value evangelism, and I said, "That is great, how many people did you evangelize this year?" They looked at one another and said, "This was a bad year for evangelism." "That's OK, how many?" "Well actually no one!" Then I have to tell them the truth, "That is a noble ideal, but it is not something you value. A value is what you do! It is your behavior. It is how you spend your time, energy, money and focus. You do what you value."

The concerns that led to the formation of the North American Lutheran Church had nothing to do with what predecessor bodies said about themselves in their constitutions and in other places. It had to do

with behaviors — not documents and words. Eventually the behaviors led to changes in Scriptural and doctrinal understandings.

We have spoken and written openly about the Great Commission — the mission Jesus set for His Church. ("All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.").

We know the Great Commandments. ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." and "Love your neighbor as yourself.")

I want to add one other "Great" to your vocabulary. Dallas Willard called it "The Great Disparity." The Great Disparity is the distinction between what we say we believe and how we live. The difference between what we say we value and our behaviors.

I am always troubled by leaders who think that, now that they have been set free from the past, there is no need to be concerned about the direction for the future. Simply changing the letters following your name or the congregation's name to NALC is not the only thing that needs to be transformed. Some just want to go back to doing things the way they always did them, just without the association with a predecessor body. Let me offer this word of caution: If you keep doing everything the same way, you will be embracing the same set of values and end up in precisely the same place.

To overcome the Great Disparity we must not only clarify our values but live them out, act on them, changing our behaviors, not just our thoughts or discussions about our values. The most powerful transformation and course correction for us is the pursuit of discipleship. It is the antidote for over-institutionalization and the much needed course correction. It has been the area of greatest neglect in what we say is the mission of the church versus what we do.

Following Jesus as His disciples always involves us in looking closely at the disparity in our own lives

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compared to life in His Kingdom under his rule. The Great Disparity must be carefully considered in the life of each of our congregations.

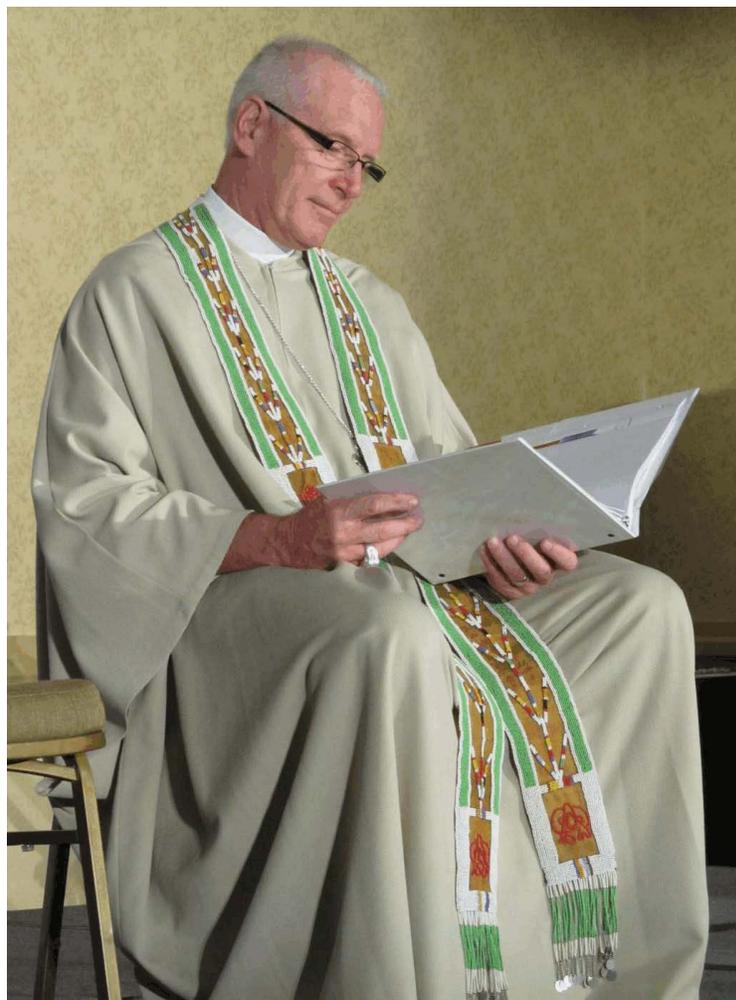
In one of our congregations that has some problems, (That's right, even NALC congregations have problems) I asked some people who had been around for a while about their opinion of life together in the congregation, and they became defensive and protective. Then I asked some newer members about their perspective. One man gave me this evaluation: "This congregation really knows how to reach out with the love of Christ. They touched my life with Jesus' love, and I was drawn close to Jesus and to those people. But now that I'm inside the church watching all the mudslinging and lack of care for one another, I realize I was safer out there than I am in here."

How tragic! It is not the proclamation, nor our beliefs but our behaviors that are unchecked, undisciplined, irresponsible, as though we are unaccountable. This is the Great Disparity. Do you see it in your life and the life of your congregation?

We must be equally committed to making disciples as we are nurturing disciples in a community of faith. It is not a matter of asking, "Do we love our neighbor?" But "What are the behaviors that turn these words into values, this ideal into specific behaviors?"

This Great Disparity is the gap between our current reality and the intended future of Christ's own design and leading. That gap can only be overcome by the power and work of the Holy Spirit within us transforming our behaviors.

One of the most important understandings I have learned in my life is that transformation only happens when we accept that something has to die before something new can be born and come to life. Martin Luther talks about this with regard to our Baptism. It is a battle between the Old Adam and the New Adam. The Old Adam has to die within us so the new Adam can come to life. We complicate the process of transformation when we believe it is possible to change without facing death and loss, imagining that we can make things different and still keep everything the same as it always was. That,



NALC Bishop John Bradosky pauses before the opening worship of the 2013 NALC Convocation.

my friends, is the definition of insanity: "Doing everything the same and expecting different results."

What I also learned in this process is that I wanted things to change but spent most of my time waiting and hoping for God to change everyone else around me while he left me unaffected. I wanted to embrace change so long as I could remain unchanged. Here is what I learned: Nothing will change until you do!

Where is our hope for the future? It is in exactly the same place it has always been — in Jesus! The mission is still the same — to be disciples and to make disciples. To accomplish that will not require less but more from you. It will not mean more of the same but new direction. That change will only come by realizing that something has to die in order for something new to be born and that transformation will only come to this community of faith in so far as

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you permit it to come into each of your individual lives. By pursuing discipleship, I guarantee that you will grow spiritually more intimate in your relationship with Jesus, your faith will deepen and mature and you will grow closer to one another, understanding even more fully the nature of the Church, not as institution but as the body of Jesus.

If you are feeling a little uncomfortable with some of what I have said, let me share with you one insight I have learned in my journey following Jesus. If Jesus has to choose between my comfort and my growth, guess which one he always chooses? My growth! He is far less concerned with my comfort than I am and far more concerned about my growth.

Please understand this is not the pursuit of change for change's sake. It is not the pursuit of transformation for transformation's sake. It is more like pregnancy. A husband and wife enter into this miraculous process for the greater cause of procreation, of bearing the responsibilities for nurturing a new life into faith and full maturity. It is an awesome responsibility. No one is naive enough to think that you can become pregnant and not change your lifestyle. No one who is pregnant ever fully imagines the changes that are bound to occur as a consequence of being pregnant. No book can fully prepare you. You simply have to live it. Live it with the loving support of spouse, family, friends and community of faith.

In Luke 1:26-38 we read the story of Mary visited by the angel Gabriel who tells her about God's plan. She was going to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and bear a Son, name Him Jesus and He will be the Son of the Most High God and His kingdom will never end. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. The Lord is with you." She must have certainly thought, "Well He better be, do you have any idea how others are going to respond to this news? Do you have any idea how this is going to change my life?" That is not what Mary said. Instead she said "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to your word."

Mary's words are a wonderful example for how we need to respond. Those who follow Jesus not only become a part of the Kingdom of God but the Kingdom of God becomes a part of them. They not

only enter the Kingdom but the Kingdom of God enters them. The life we live is the message we proclaim.

Change is never easy — especially for us Lutherans. We are not undeservedly the brunt of many jokes concerning change. Growth and development are never convenient in a world that values quick and easy, fast and efficient. It is much easier to make excuses for our recalcitrance.

In the January issue this year of *Forbes* magazine there was an article titled, "The Eight Most Damaging Excuses People Make for Their Unhappiness." The author writes it in honor of those who have dared to make substantial changes in their lives and careers. He notes that those who are willing to make such changes have four key ingredients: clarity, confidence, courage and commitment. They don't start out with these assets, but they develop as they venture forward. Others have the potential for such growth but remain unhappy and unfulfilled because they make excuses. These are the eight most damaging excuses:

Following Jesus as His disciples always involves us in looking closely at the disparity in our own lives compared to life in His Kingdom under his rule.

- 1. I don't have the money to do this. (This is going to cost me something, and I can't afford anything else.)*
- 2. I'm not ready to do the work required to change. (This is going to cost me time and energy that I am not sure I can spare.)*
- 3. I'm afraid of what I don't know. (I may have to learn new things and admit I didn't have it all figured out before.)*
- 4. What if it doesn't work out? (I fear failure and want guarantees before I make the first move.)*

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5. *What would people say if I did this? (I am concerned about what others think of me and looking good in their eyes is important.)*

6. *My family needs me to keep doing what I am doing. (If I change, it may effect those I love the most, and I don't want to upset them.)*

7. *I don't really believe it's going to work out. (I have failed before, why should I see myself with the potential to succeed in this new direction?)*

8. *This is just me — I can't change it. (This is just who I am and my lot in life. I am powerless to change so my best chance at peace is to adjust and accept it.)*

Do you make excuses? How many here admit to making excuses? The article caused me to ask, "Why do we make excuses?" As I looked at my own life I came up with four reasons for my excuse making:

1. *Avoid responsibility and accountability.*
2. *Protect my self-image (making excuses makes me look better).*
3. *Fear.*
4. *Guilt.*

Regarding my excuses:

1. *We cannot be in Christ and avoid living in a responsible and accountable relationship with Him and other brothers and sisters in His Body, the Church.*

2. *We no longer have to protect our self-image. What is the worst that can be said of me? I am a worthless sinner deserving death. I have already accepted that judgment on my life and my worthiness comes from the value Jesus placed on my life from the cross. Through Him and in Him I am of infinite worth and value.*

3. *In Him all fear is gone. His perfect love casts out fear.*

4. *My guilt is gone because my sin is removed. The cross and empty tomb are absolute guarantees.*

Without excuse, I am free to follow Jesus on the only journey that is life-giving now and forever. I am convinced that we need ministry partners who can assist us in this challenging venture. You will be hearing more about that a little later.

Paul reminds us in the first chapter of Romans that we are without excuse.

Luther, wrote this, "For a Christian life consists entirely in the following: First, that we believe and trust in Christ our Savior, being fully assured that we are not deserted by Him, whatever need or danger may betide us. Secondly, that every Christian person also conducts himself toward friend or foe in the same way, as he sees Christ does, who is so willing to help everyone. Whoever does this, is a Christian; but he who does it not, is no Christian, though he calls himself one. For these two cannot be separated; faith must be followed by its fruits, or it is not true faith."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "The only proper response to the word which Jesus brings with Him from eternity is to do it!"

Jesus repeatedly emphasizes doing what He says and not just listening to His words or talking about them. Remember Jesus concludes His sermon on the mount with the contrasting images of the man who builds his house on the sand and the man who builds his house on the rock. One is destroyed while the other stands firm. There is only one thing that separates them. One knows the teaching but refuses to do it. The other knows Jesus' teaching and obeys it.

Let us be about that work of building on the Rock, knowing the truth that is Christ and being obedient to all that He commands and teaches. This is the foundation of discipleship, without excuse our direction for the future that we begin again today.

Thank you for your partnership in this ministry we share. I look forward to sharing with you all that the future holds for us together in the North American Lutheran Church.

Women of the NALC Annual Gathering

The Women of the NALC met for their Annual Gathering on Wednesday, Aug. 7, in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Jeanne Wallace, chair, reported that Operational Guidelines adopted in 2012 had been ratified. Many women's ministries were connecting with others in their regions.

The 2014 budget was presented and adopted. A new item in this budget allows for development of regional gatherings and will help members of The Women's Council work with the individual women's groups.

The group heard from women in the Carolinas and the Mid-Northeast mission districts about how they organized and about their activities and had a brief report from the South Texas gathering.

They enjoyed a devotional activity "What's In Your Bag," presented by Lynn Coughenour. Each participant received a copy of this to take back to their women's group.

Elected to The Women's Council were Brenda Boor, Jessie Phillips, Jeanne Wallace (second term), and Kay Weaver.

Pastor Steven King and Pastor Amy Little from Sola Publishing discussed Bible study offerings, including the new women's Bible study called "Family Matters."

The rest of the day focused on Mission Awareness. The speakers were the Rev. Dr. John Nunes, President and CEO of Lutheran World Relief, and Pastor Joshua Hansen of Saint Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., who discussed how women's ministries can identify and develop a relationship with mission partners.

Serafina Panzo, a NALC missionary in Ecuador, sent greetings and asked for prayers as they continue their mission work.

Pastor John Conrad of First Lutheran Church in Floresville, Texas, provided information about supporting seminarians in Ethiopia.



The Women's Council members, from left, front row: Darlene Deck, Hobart, Ind.; Karen Hansen, Colorado Springs, Colo.; Jeanne Wallace, Fredericksburg, Texas; back row: Brenda Boor, Meyersville, Texas; Sherrie Palan, LaVernia, Texas; Lynn Coughenour, Salisbury, N.C.; Jessie Phillips, Watertown, Wis.; and Kay Weaver, Hickory, N.C.

There were table exhibits with representatives available to discuss various mission opportunities. A documentary video, titled "It's A Girl", about "gendercide" was shown.

The offering was designated for The Great Commission Society in support of NALC missionaries.

Prayers and devotions throughout the day were led by NALC seminarians: Nicole A.M. Collins, Tonya Brittain, Cassie Light, and Deaconess Marybeth Howe.

Documents from the Gathering, including the letter from Serafina, will be available at www.WNALC.org.

The Women's Council had a brief meeting and elected Karen Hansen and Jessie Phillips as co-chairs. The women continue to focus on connecting their sisters in Christ to share God's love. Watch for more information as they get down to the work of God's kingdom through the women's ministries of the NALC.

Lutheran CORE Convocation focuses on identity, mission and discipleship

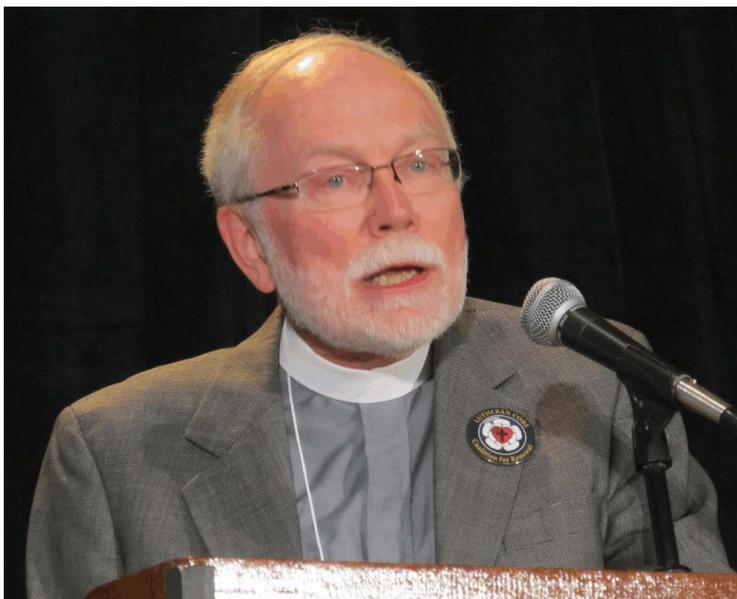
By Pastor Carter Askren
CORE Connection

Issues of identity, mission, and discipleship characterized Lutheran CORE's 2013 Convocation theme, "A Life Worthy of Our Calling," Aug. 6 at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh.

Pastor Paul Uring, Lutheran CORE's Moderator, reflected on the history and future of Lutheran CORE, noting that much had changed within the past years, especially since the gathering at Fishers, Ind., following the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Pastor Uring said Lutheran CORE's challenge will be to keep orthodoxy, and that time will be required for that faithfulness to result in changes. Keeping that orthodoxy will involve facing "the reality that many faithful people are still in the ELCA and the ELCIC. Those who have left are called to faithfulness toward those who have not," he said.

Lutheran CORE members must remain connected, he said, adding that "our hearts must beat for those who are alone — to support and connect to them. Even if we don't 'need' Lutheran CORE, we support it for the sake of others who do." He exhorted the



Pastor Paul Uring, Moderator of Lutheran CORE, addresses the 2013 Lutheran CORE Convocation.



Pastor W. Stevens Shipman, Director of Lutheran CORE, speaks at the 2013 Lutheran CORE Convocation.

group to pray and work together and remain Christ-centered.

Lynn Kickingbird, Chair of the Steering Committee gave a brief history of Lutheran CORE from its beginnings as a movement for reform in the ELCA to a pan-Lutheran movement for renewal dedicated to mobilizing confessing Lutherans to fulfill Christ's Great Commission by making disciples.

She said that finances have declined as members have joined other denominations. "Whatever the future brings," she said, "Lutheran CORE seeks to be faithful to our 'core' — witness to Jesus through the Scriptures, as articulated in the Creeds and taught through the lens of the Confessions, for the sake of bringing the saving Gospel to the world."

Pastor Steve Shipman, Director of Lutheran CORE, reminded the Convocation that Lutheran CORE exists to connect confessing Lutherans across denominational boundaries. "Even if you don't need Lutheran CORE, other people need you, and need you to be involved with us," he said. "We want to get the Word out — God's Word — and mission is in the forefront, not politics," he said.

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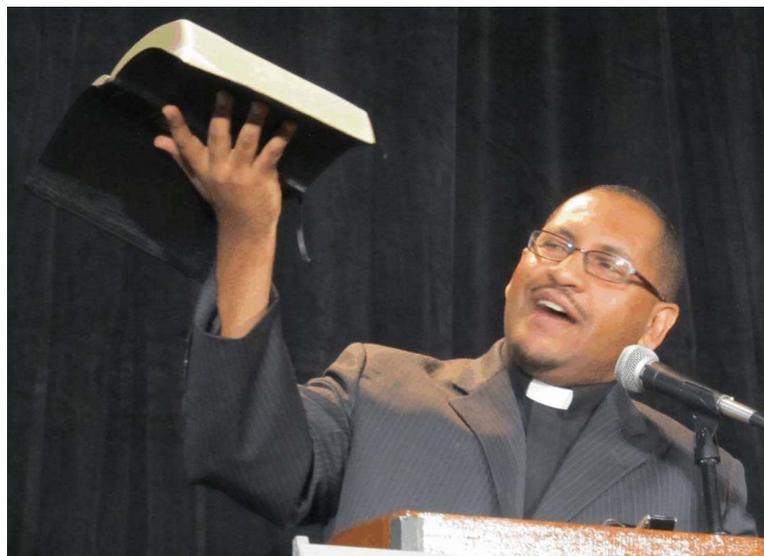
Lutheran CORE's ELCA-Specific Task Force presentation was given by Pastor Cori Johnson, who was a dissenter on the ELCA's Human Sexuality Task Force. She reiterated that Lutheran CORE serves to support confessing, orthodox Lutherans across denominations but also makes a significant presence within ELCA.

This year the task force called on ELCA leadership to include within its 25th anniversary celebrations a time of reflection and self-examination. The committee's strategies include reminding ELCA leaders of their prior commitments to respect disagreement on sexuality and monitoring disrespect of the "bound conscience" within the ELCA.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, made the first keynote presentation, "The Politics-driven Church versus



Pastor Steven Gjerde was a keynote speaker for the Lutheran CORE Convocation.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, was a keynote speaker for the Lutheran CORE Convocation.

the Mission-driven Church" based on Acts 6. He described the first political controversy within the Church, providing food for the widows within the community. The problem came in how the two groups treated one another. The complaint by the Greek Jews against the Hebraic Jews became the main issue rather than gospel preaching. "Food distribution is a justice agenda," he said. "The Greeks want to make this a central agenda of the Church, rather than the Gospel." Dr. Buba said that putting nationalism and group identity and social issue before Gospel, mission and evangelism is the problem.

Dr. Buba said that the apostles had identified "two wings of the bird" — preaching and serving, but those called to these ministries must focus on the Word. ... This is the *only* thing that will bring the Church together today — not agreements, talks, proposals, agendas, initiatives, but the Word enthroned as the main thing. ... The Gospel drives out issues and agendas, makes people Gospel-centered and mission-minded, and the Church will grow."

The second keynote presentation was given by the Rev. Steven K. Gjerde, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in Wausau, Wis. Pastor Gjerde made an analogy of the divisions caused by the formation of the ELCA in 1987 and the divisions post 2009. He raised three questions for consideration: altar and pulpit fellowship with those with whom we disagree, seminary education for future church leaders, and the reclamation of friendship as a means to uphold the Scriptural view of marriage.



Stephan Turnbull



David S. Yeago

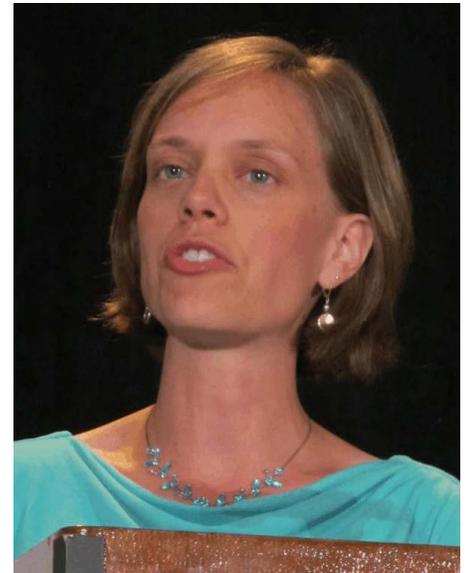


Nathan Howard Yoder

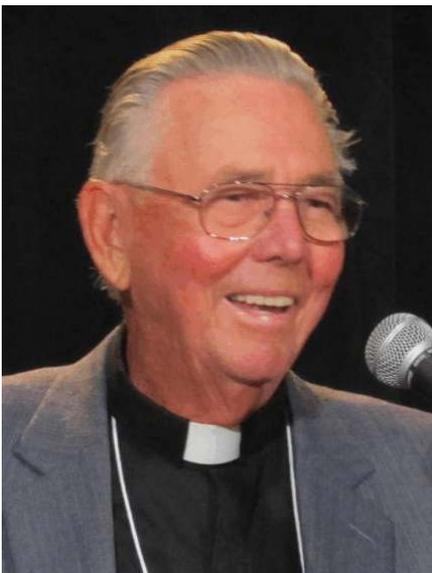
“On Being the Church in These Precarious Times”



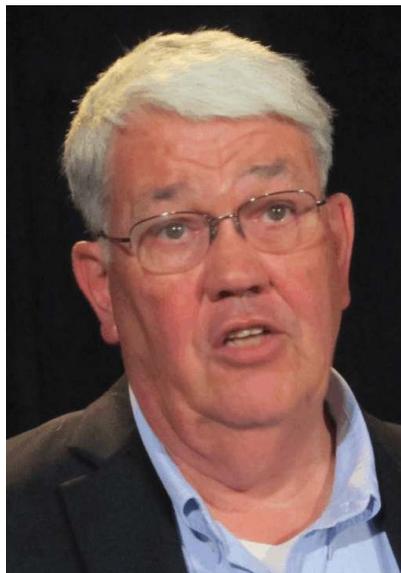
2013 Theological Conference



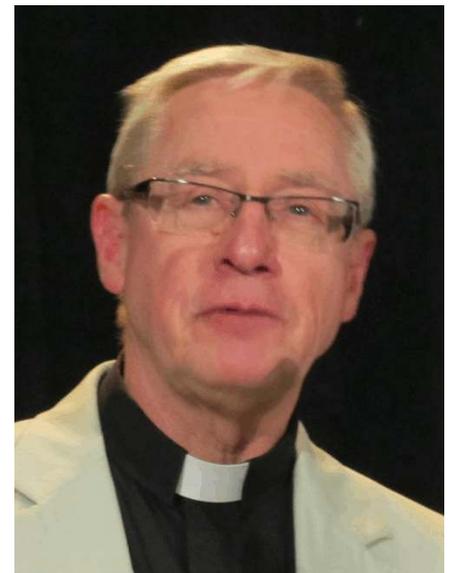
Sarah Hinlicky Wilson



Carl E. Braaten



James A. Nestingen



Frank C. Senn

'Discipleship - It Takes One to Make One' is the theme of NALC Mission Festival

"Discipleship — It Takes One to Make One" is the theme of the 2013 Mission Festival Nov. 7-9 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio.

The goal of the conference, which is sponsored by both the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE, is to inspire and train attendees to make disciples. This will be accomplished with worship, passionate speakers, experienced workshop presenters and time for mutual support.

Featured speakers include NALC Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Charles Lindquist of the World Mission Prayer League. They will be speaking about the early Church and how to apply their experiences to create a culture of discipleship.

The festival will provide time for worship, prayer, inspiration, and mutual encouragement. There will be workshops, and seminars. Small groups will be available for mission planters, international missions, and renewing congregations.

Daily worship will focus on Acts 1:8 and will be led by NALC mission teams, Lutheran CORE, and The Great Commission Society team.

Participants will learn about creating a culture of discipleship by studying Acts 2:42-47 with Bishop John Bradosky of the NALC and Pastor Charles Lindquist of World Mission Prayer League.

Workshop presenters will also share practical tools for transforming lives by following Christ and walking with others in their discipleship. Presenters include:

+ Lutheran CORE - Pastor Steve Shipman.

+ The Navigators - Bill Mowery.

+ The Discipling Church - Pastor Ray Scheck and Valerie Hobbs.

+ Renewing Congregations by Planting Churches - Pastor Brad Hales.

+ Prayer - Pastor Charles Lindquist.

+ House Churches - Pastor Gemechis Buba.

Throughout the conference, attendees will meet in breakout groups based on their ministry focus: mission planters and mission congregations, international missionaries and supporters, and established congregations focused on renewal. In these sessions individuals will discuss the plenary sessions in depth and begin to apply what they heard. It is also a time to share highs and lows in ministry and learn from the group's experience, as well as a time for mutual encouragement and group learning.

The conference will also include time to meet and greet missionaries and mission groups from around the globe.

Registration for the Mission Festival is \$100 and includes lunch on Friday. Watch the NALC website for more details or call the NALC office at 888-551-7254 or e-mail nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org.

Video of Convocation and theological conference is online

You can watch video of the meetings of the NALC Convocation, the Lutheran CORE Convocation, and the Theological Conference at www.thenalc.org.

The lectures from the theological conference will be available in a book to be published next year.

The presentations from the previous theological conferences are available in books from American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. You may order them online at www.alpb.org or by calling 607-746-7511.

‘A Servant is not Greater than his Master’ *A Response to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly*

By Pastor David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism

As you know, our Bishop is the chief ecumenical officer of the North American Lutheran Church. One of my responsibilities as his assistant is to serve, at times, as his representative. As such, I respond to invitations, address concerns, represent the NALC, and generally watch for opportunities for fostering and furthering our ecumenical and inter-Lutheran commitments. Sometimes, these opportunities bear much fruit and bring great joy as we celebrate our oneness in Christ Jesus, saved by God’s grace through faith in Him. Other times, not so much.

In this role as ecumenical representative, it seems appropriate for me to respond to questions about our recent attendance at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, Aug. 12-17 in Pittsburgh, Pa. I am

writing this report on behalf of Bishop Bradosky, General Secretary Pastor Mark Chavez and myself.

From the birth of the NALC, we have been guided in our relationships by our initial statement on ecumenical and inter-Lutheran commitments. We seek to develop deep and abiding relationships with Lutherans around the world who share our Biblical and confessional understandings.

At the same time, we hope to be a witness to those Lutherans and others who have moved away from the truth and authority of Holy Scripture, following an agenda set by the world, rather than by God in His holy Word. This means, at times, engaging others in dialog and conversation, even though we may disagree strongly on matters of great importance.

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NALC Bishop John Bradosky was among the ecumenical and inter-religious guests present for the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly which was held Aug. 12-17 in Pittsburgh, Pa. ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson is standing at the podium. (ELCA photo)

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We are not — nor do we want to be — a Lutheran body that is isolated from others, hiding behind the walls of our church buildings. We intend to be open, transparent and respectful in our relations with others, while always being bold, honest and truthful to whom we are as the North American Lutheran Church.

For these reasons, we invite other ecumenical and inter-Lutheran guests to our Convocation. Some are invited as close friends who are asked to bring a public greeting to our delegates. Others are invited to attend as observers to foster openness and transparency.

At each of our NALC Convocations, Bishop Mark Hanson or his appointed representatives have been invited to attend as ecumenical observers. In response, one or two ELCA representatives have been our guests at each Convocation. Although they are publicly introduced, they are not asked to bring an official greeting, and no comment is made about their presence. We trust our delegates to welcome them and to treat them with the utmost kindness and respect, as is fitting for guests in our midst. We have heard that this is the case — that all guests at our Convocation are treated in this way — ELCA representatives included.

This year, our Bishop was invited to be an ecumenical guest at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Pittsburgh, the week after our Convocation. He was not invited as a guest at their 2011 assembly. Although we had some serious reservations about Bishop Bradosky attending, it was decided that he and General Secretary Pastor Mark Chavez would attend only for the “Ecumenical Day” at the assembly when ecumenical and inter-religious guests would be introduced.

Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Chavez arrived on Wednesday and departed on Friday. I was present most of the week. We expected that our Bishop would simply be introduced publicly, and that would be all. We are not in official conversation of any kind with the ELCA, but recognizing other Lutheran leaders is common courtesy and not unusual.

Because we were invited, we believed it was important to be present, indicating our place as an

important Lutheran body within North America. We expected to be welcomed with respect and goodwill, in spite of our differences.

Sadly, this was not the case. Although some extended words of welcome, the official reception indicated there is much anger toward the NALC and a complete lack of understanding or sensitivity to the great divide that exists between the NALC and the ELCA. Many of you saw the streaming video of Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson’s comments toward Bishop Bradosky. Because we are receiving questions and comments, this will serve as our response.

As Bishop Bradosky stood on the stage of the assembly, together with other invited guests — Christian and non-Christian alike — Bishop Hanson took the opportunity to show open disrespect for our Bishop and the NALC. While not wishing to quote Bishop Hanson here, suffice it to say that his comments had to do with a church body being founded on what they are against, not being Lutheran and creating discord within Christianity.

These were Bishop Hanson’s first comments and were directed at Bishop Bradosky, with no opportunity for a response then, or at any time during the assembly. Bishop Hanson went on to highlight the ELCA’s ongoing work toward reconciliation and unity, not only with Christians but with other religious groups as well. It was staged to appear that having Bishop Bradosky on the dais was the result of the ELCA’s conversations with the NALC.

Let me assure you, no conversations are happening, nor have we seen any signs of goodwill from the leadership of the ELCA. We have expected none and have seen no evidence of such.

What we did see at the ELCA assembly is evidence of much anger, which manifested itself as gross passive aggressive behavior on the part of Bishop Hanson. His words were disrespectful and manipulative, reducing us to a “prop.” Given the words and actions of Bishop Hanson, we decided not to attend the Ecumenical Reception that evening, notifying their ecumenical officer, Bishop Don McCoid. In his note to Bishop McCoid, Bishop Bradosky wrote, “Such a passive-aggressive

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display of anger couched in the language of reconciliation deserves only our absence not our presence.”

Granted, Bishop Hanson was voted out of office and is now irrelevant to any future conversations between the ELCA and the NALC. But what does the future look like with new ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton?

Although in her comments leading up to her election she referred in general to losses in the ELCA, the need for accountability with regard to the recent ELCA past, and vague urging for reconciliation, her initial press conference indicated she shares much of the attitude of Bishop Hanson. When asked how she would relate to the NALC, she recalled that Jesus tells us to love our enemies, even though our enemies are sometimes Lutheran. With regard to her service as Presiding Bishop of the ELCA — her actions will speak louder than her words.

At this time, we anticipate no change in the direction of the ELCA, in spite of the fact that assistants to the presiding bishop, Bishop Don McCoid and Pastor Marcus Kunz, have worked diligently to build a bridge between our two church bodies where mutual respect and understanding could lead to meaningful conversation.

In response to Bishop Eaton’s election at the ELCA assembly, Bishop Bradosky states, “It is fascinating to me that delegates were so excited about a change in leadership as though it would result in a change in direction for the church (ELCA). I am even more convinced that a change in leadership does not necessitate a change in values or behaviors. If nothing changes at that level there will be nothing new in the ELCA no matter how many times you use the slogan (“Always Being Made New”).”

Bishop Bradosky has also given me permission to quote his comments from a personal letter sent to ELCA leadership after leaving the ELCA assembly. He wrote, “I pray that your people will see the truth beyond the illusion, the anger behind your words of tolerance, your divisiveness behind your words of reconciliation, and take appropriate action.”



Bishop Elizabeth Eaton responds to questions at a news conference following her election as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on Aug. 14. She was elected on the fifth ballot, defeating Bishop Mark Hanson 600-287. (ELCA photo)

As the NALC is no longer focused on the past — focusing instead on the exciting, positive future God has in store for the NALC — we pray that the leadership of the ELCA will be able to do the same. We call upon the new Presiding Bishop to lead the ELCA in repentance, return to the truth and authority of God’s Word, and subsequent renewal of the ELCA as a Biblical and Confessional Lutheran body.

For the NALC, we will continue to boldly and without hesitation proclaim our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our commitment to the truth and authority of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions as faithful interpretations of those Scriptures. We will preach the Word in season and out of season. We will stand firmly on God’s truth, our consciences captive to the Word of God. And as we do so, we will remember the words of our Lord in John 15:20:

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”

Let us pray that all who claim to be followers and disciples of Jesus Christ will keep His word!”

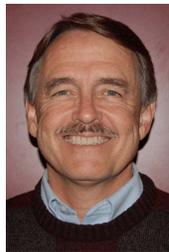
Does God have a ‘Plan’ for your congregation?

Carolyn Arends, columnist for *Christianity Today*, is also a professional musician. She once toured with the late Rich Mullins, who was also a Christian musician and songwriter. Carolyn mentioned, in a recent column, that Rich would sometimes be asked how a Christian could discern God’s will for his or her life. This was his response:

“I don’t think finding God’s plan for you has to be complicated. God’s will is that you love Him with all your heart and soul and mind, and also that you love your neighbor as yourself. Get busy with that, and then, if God wants you to do something unusual, He’ll take care of it. Say, for example, He wants you to go to Egypt. If that’s the case, He’ll provide 11 jealous brothers, and they’ll sell you into slavery.”

Good answer. But that raises the question as to whether God has a “plan” not just for individuals, but congregations. If so, it raises the question of what God’s plan might be for those Lutheran, Episcopal/Anglican and Presbyterian congregations that have been impacted by the controversy over sexuality and Biblical authority. This would include congregations that have gone through disaffiliation and joined a new church body (like the NALC and LCMC), those that have had votes to disaffiliate which have “failed” (i.e., come up short), and those churches that, from the beginning, chose not to disaffiliate and instead continue to advocate for the centrality of Scripture in their original church body, and those faith communities that have separated from their local congregations over this controversy and have organized as new mission starts.

All of us, to one degree or another, have experienced painful and exhausting conflict. Which brings me to one more possible insight — from Joseph — regarding God’s possible “plan” for our congregations. It can be found in Genesis 50:20. This was when Joseph spoke to his brothers and said, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

for good to accomplish what is now being done.” Is there any “good” that has come from all this?

In the congregation I serve — Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore. — I still find myself reflecting on what we went through beginning in late 2009. It was a process that ultimately ended with two overwhelming votes to disaffiliate from the ELCA in 2011. Despite the overwhelming votes, this still ranks as the most significant congregational conflict I’ve experienced in 37 years of parish ministry. (The problem with any formal vote is you always end up with winners and losers.) Eventually about 15 percent of our active members ended up leaving.

For a pastor who has grieved, over the years, when even one member became angry and left the congregation, this has been extremely difficult. And needless to say, many of our members have experienced a similar type of “grief” — especially when close friends have been among those who chose to leave our congregation.

However, acknowledging what we’ve endured, is there anything we have gained as a congregation?

One benefit has been an overwhelming consensus, among our members, regarding the centrality of Scripture in our faith and life. We now share a conviction that the authority of God’s Word trumps the prevailing, ever-changing views of our secular culture.

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A second blessing resulting from the 2009 to 2011 period is that I, and our members, are no longer “looking over our shoulder,” anxiously awaiting the next change in denominational policy. With both the NALC and LCMC there is recognition of not only the centrality of God’s Word in denominational life, there is also an understanding that the heart and soul of any denomination is the local church. Consequently, both the NALC and LCMC require the approval of any major policy changes by at least two-thirds of their congregations. And while there might be future instances in which our national church leaders grow frustrated with this particular constitutional provision, the great majority of my members are grateful for this requirement.

More often than not, the Great Commission is most effectively lived out and fulfilled by the local church. Missional congregations are not only essential to the health of national church bodies, but also they ultimately accomplish far more in evangelism than denominational agencies.

However, congregational conflict can cripple these local mission efforts. Congregational unity is, more often than not, essential to effective outreach. The good news is that many of our congregations are now more unified than they have been in years.

There are post-conflict opportunities for us now, as united faith communities, to fulfill God’s “plan” for our congregations. Ultimately, we don’t seek unity simply to avoid conflict. We seek unity for the sake of our mission: That all might come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Try not to dwell on all you and your members have endured these last few years. Move beyond a survivor mentality to a new, more vibrant mission focus. Remember: A healthy, well-led and motivated local church is uniquely equipped to help build God’s kingdom on earth. There is no time like the present!

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