

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

July 2013

NALC Convocation to meet Aug. 8-9 in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Members of congregations of the North American Lutheran Church from throughout the United States and Canada will gather Aug. 8-9 in Pittsburgh, Pa., for the annual NALC Convocation around the theme, "Come to the Water of Life."

The NALC Convocation is one of four events that will take place Aug. 6-9 at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh. The NALC Convocation will be preceded by Lutheran CORE's Convocation on Aug. 6 and by the Theological Conference sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the NALC on Aug. 6-7. The Women of the NALC will meet on Aug. 7.

Convocation delegates will receive information and reports and make decisions about the life and ministry of the NALC.

Among the most significant items to be considered by the Convocation is a recommendation that the NALC establish its own seminary to provide for the theological education of future NALC pastors.

The Convocation will elect one pastor and one lay person to four-year terms on the Executive Council. Four lay people and nine pastors have been nominated for the positions. The Executive Council functions as the board of directors for the NALC, providing leadership for the church body between the annual Convocations.



More than 700 delegates and visitors gathered for the 2012 NALC Convocation at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn.

There will also be an update on the NALC's application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation and a report on an exciting discipleship initiative being undertaken by the NALC in partnership with The Navigators.

The Convocation will elect members of the Court of Adjudication. Jon Evans of Pittsburgh, Pa., and Pastor Jeffray Greene of Rantoul, Ill., have been nominated for re-election.

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Women of NALC Annual Gathering

“Connecting in Mission to Share God’s Love” is the theme of the Women of the NALC annual gathering on Wednesday, Aug. 7, in Pittsburgh, Pa. All women are invited to join in a day of spiritual formation as they learn of mission ministries.

Pastor Josh Hansen of St. Luke’s Lutheran Church of Colorado Springs, Colo., will explain how to define, identify and qualify mission needs so that women’s groups may create mission partnerships and develop those mission relationships.

There will be times for fellowship, idea sharing and election of new members to The Women’s Council. Meet other sisters in Christ, both in your region and across the country as we come together for a full day to Share God’s Love.

During the 9 a.m. registration hour before the meeting, members of The Women’s Council will be available for an informal “Question and Answer, Idea Sharing and Brainstorming Session” for women to learn about the WNALC, ask questions and share individual ministries. Registration is \$60 (with lunch) and \$35 (without lunch).

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One of the highlights of the Convocation will be the recognition of Pastor Herb Hafermann for 50 years of mission work in Tanzania. Representatives of the 6-million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania are scheduled to be present to join in the celebration of Pastor Hafermann’s work.

Another highlight will be a festive Holy Communion service at First Presbyterian Church, a beautiful Gothic edifice not far from Station Square, which will feature music by the Westmont College Choir of Santa Barbara, Calif., and be preceded by a 30-minute organ and choral prelude.

There also will be numerous displays introducing NALC missions and ministries.

Lutheran CORE Convocation

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, will be the keynote speaker for the morning session of Lutheran CORE’s Convocation on Tuesday, Aug. 6.

The vision of Lutheran CORE is to connect all orthodox, traditional Lutherans. In keeping with that vision, the Rev. Steven K. Gjerde, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in Wausau, Wis., will speak in the afternoon about the relationships among traditional Lutherans regardless of church body affiliation. Pastor Gjerde will then participate in a panel discussion with Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary; Pastor Scott Grorud, Augustana District of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ; and Pastor Beth Schlegel of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church (ELCA) in York, Pa. The panel will be moderated by Pastor Paul Ulring, moderator of Lutheran CORE.

The Convocation will also include a brief business meeting to elect Steering Committee members and approve a budget. Various workshops will be offered in the afternoon, uplifting opportunities for mission.

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

You may register for the events at www.thenalc.org. Online registration is the preferred method of registration. The registration fee for the NALC Convocation is \$95. The Theological Conference registration fee is \$115, and the Lutheran CORE Convocation fee is \$70.

The registration fee for each event includes lunch during that event. The NALC Convocation fee also includes dinner on Thursday, Aug. 8, but lunch on Friday, Aug. 9, is not included.

13 are nominated for Executive Council

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

One pastor and one lay person will be elected to four-year terms on the Executive Council at the NALC's Convocation Aug. 8-9 in Pittsburgh, Pa.

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

Four people were nominated for the lay position:

- + Matthew Burkhart - Columbus, Ohio
- + Richard Jansak - Hendersonville, N.C.
- + Paul O'Malley - Auburn, Ind.
- + Frank Polkowski - East Amherst, N.Y.

Nine pastors were nominated for the clergy position:

- + Pastor Bassam Abdallah - Hammond, Ind.
- + Pastor Cathi Braasch - Elwood, Neb.
- + Pastor Phillip Gagnon - St. Albert, Alberta
- + Pastor John Hopper - Hot Springs, S.D.
- + Pastor Eddy Perez - Miami, Fla.
- + Pastor Royan Rodney - Middleburgh, N.Y.
- + Pastor Amy Schifrin - Elkader, Iowa
- + Pastor Donna Smith - Champaign, Ill.
- + Pastor Solveig Zamzow - Grafton, Iowa

The Nominating Committee asked each nominee to complete a biographical information form and to provide a photo. The biographical information provided by the nominees was printed in the May NALC News and is available on the NALC website — www.thenalc.org.



Matthew Burkhart



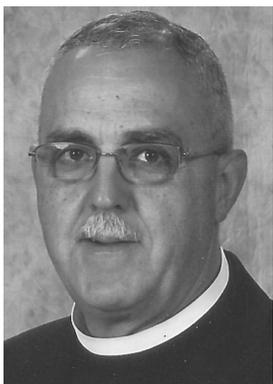
Richard Jansak



Paul O'Malley



Frank Polkowski



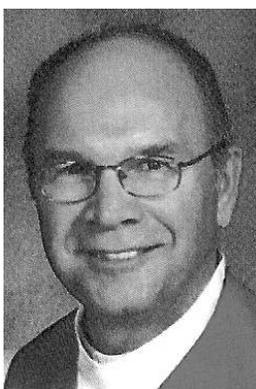
Bassam Abdallah



Cathi Braasch



Phillip Gagnon



John Hopper



Eddy Perez



Royan Rodney



Amy Schifrin



Donna Smith



Solveig Zamzow

Convocation to consider establishing NALC Seminary

The 2013 NALC Convocation will consider a proposal to establish a seminary to provide for the theological education of future pastors for the North American Lutheran Church.

The proposal for the North American Lutheran Seminary is the result of the work of the NALC's Task Force for Theological Education. The proposal recommends two components of one NALC Seminary system: a Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., and Houses of Studies located within NALC Mission Districts.

The recommendation is that there be one 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 Study dispersed throughout North America.

Both components will make up the whole of the one 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 home.

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 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

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Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., would host the NALC Seminary Center if the NALC Seminary proposal is approved by the Convocation.

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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.



A classroom at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa. Trinity has been selected as the site of the proposed NALC Seminary Center.

The Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville III, chair of the NALC's Theological Education Task Force, explained the need for a NALC seminary system. "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," he said.

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.

The goal is for the creation of Houses of Studies to take place cooperatively between the NALC Executive Council, the seminary board, and the local and regional Mission Districts as the need arises and financial resources are available.

What would become the first NALC House of Studies under the seminary proposal is already in operation at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.

In response to 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. With the approval of

the NALC Executive Council, a specialized call was issued to the Rev. Dr. Mary Havens to be the director of the department, with Dr. David Yeago and the Rev. Dr. Amy 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.

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.

If the seminary proposal is approved, the NALC Executive Council will call a Seminary Director as soon as possible. This person will serve both as administrator of the NALC Seminary and the Seminary Center. It is expected that the NALC Seminary program will begin operation in 2014.

The Convocation will consider authorizing spending \$1 million for theological education for the system's first 16 months. Funding for the NALC Seminary system 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

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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.

“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.”

“One of the most important questions asked by those considering affiliation with the NALC is this: ‘Where will future pastors come from and how will they be trained?’” said Bishop Bradosky.

“The NALC’s Task Force for Theological Education has been hard at work developing a plan to address the need for a seminary. I believe God has worked through them to give us a solid plan for theological education for our future.”

Task Force for Theological Education members:

- + The Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville III, pastor of New Life Lutheran Church, Menomonie, Wis., chair.
- + The Rev. Dr. James Bangsund, a pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church, San Jose, Calif.
- + Dr. Robert Benne, professor emeritus of religion and philosophy at Roanoke College, Salem, Va.
- + The Rev. Dr. Carl Braaten, professor emeritus of systematic theology at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and former executive director of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.
- + The Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville Jr., professor emeritus of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.
- + The Rev. Dr. Ben Johnson, former professor and dean at Hamma Divinity School, Wittenberg University; and former president of the Lutheran Bible Institute in California.
- + The Rev. Richard Merkouris, pastor of King of Glory Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- + The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Monona, Iowa, and Mission in Christ Lutheran Church, Strawberry Point, Iowa.
- + The Rev. Dr. Nathan Howard Yoder, pastor of St. Martin’s Lutheran Church, Maiden, N.C.
- + The Rev. Dr. David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism.



The Department of Lutheran Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C., would become the first NALC House of Studies if the NALC Seminary proposal is approved. NALC Houses of Studies may be established in other parts of the United States and Canada.

Questions and Answers

Proposal for the North American Lutheran Seminary

1. Why do we need an NALC seminary?

Although our NALC seminarians are currently studying at many different denominational (and non-denominational) seminaries, they are not receiving theological education reflective of the NALC's unique DNA — as “Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded and Congregationally-Focused.” We wish to provide them with training as pastors to serve NALC congregations, committed to the truth of God's authoritative Word which comes to us as Law and Gospel, reflected in the Lutheran Confessions. Our students are required to study Lutheran Confessions and Reformation history at other seminaries, but this is different from having students study these within the context of an NALC seminary. Having our own NALC Seminary faculty also provides our theologians with opportunities to teach as NALC professors, gives us a stronger Biblical and confessional voice within the larger Lutheran and ecumenical educational context, and encourages the education and development of NALC teaching theologians for the future.

2. How will the NALC seminary be different from existing seminaries?

The proposal of our Theological Education Task Force includes two components: a Seminary Center located at Trinity School for Ministry (TSM) in Ambridge, Pa., and Houses of Studies located within NALC Mission Districts. The two 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 they may choose to attend one of our Houses of Studies nearer to home, either as a commuter or as a residential student, if that is offered. This provides our students with much more flexibility, depending on their personal and familial circumstances. Similarly, our students could begin their NALC theological education at the Seminary Center or a House of Studies, and then complete it at the other, as desired. Our entire NALC Seminary system will offer one coordinated curriculum so that all students are receiving the same theological education regardless whether they are studying at the Seminary Center or a House of Studies.

3. Will NALC seminarians be able to study at non-NALC seminaries/Houses of Studies?

Although seminarians will be able to study at non-NALC seminaries, the availability of NALC Seminary locations will allow us to encourage our seminarians to study at either the NALC Seminary Center or one of our Houses of Studies. Permission may be granted by the NALC Candidacy Committee for seminarians to study elsewhere, but this would be granted on a case-by-case basis. Certainly, seminarians already studying at non-NALC seminaries will be allowed to complete their studies at that seminary, if they so choose. Where there is no NALC Seminary House of Studies nearby, our seminarians will still have the option of studying at existing non-NALC seminaries.

4. Will NALC seminarians be able to receive their theological education completely “online” or through “distance learning”?

Normally, this will not be the case; however, all of our students will have many options for taking classes on campus, online or through some form of distance learning. It should be noted that the NALC proposal moves us in the direction of having all our seminarians receive degrees from accredited institutions. This strengthens the ministry of the NALC while also protecting our pastors who may wish to seek advanced degrees in the future. Most schools require graduate students to have degrees from accredited institutions. That being said, our NALC Seminary in all its parts will have an online, distance-learning component that will allow students at Houses of Studies to take classes from the Seminary Center, and students at the Seminary Center to take classes from Houses of Studies. They may also take such classes from other institutions, such as Institute of Lutheran Theology and St. Paul Seminary, but these must be approved by the NALC Candidacy Committee on a case-by-case basis. It may be possible for some NALC seminarians to take all classes online or through distance learning, if necessary, but this would not be the norm and would need to be approved by the NALC Candidacy Committee.

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5. Who will determine the curriculum required of NALC seminarians?

The Theological Education Task Force has already prepared an initial curriculum. This will be presented to the NALC Candidacy Committee and Executive Staff for their input. Once a director is called to the newly-created Seminary Director position, he or she will review the proposed curriculum and make suggestions. Ultimately, the NALC Executive Council will approve of the curriculum. The Board of the Seminary, once established, will provide oversight and ongoing development of the curriculum. It will be the task of the Seminary Director to work closely with the Candidacy Committee and House of Studies directors to coordinate and integrate the NALC curriculum into existing programs of the host seminaries. The NALC Candidacy Committee will have the final word with regard to whether NALC curriculum requirements have been met by particular students, with oversight and approval happening throughout the seminarian's education.

6. How can we be certain NALC seminarians are being properly formed as NALC pastors, given the distributed nature of this theological education plan?

All NALC seminarians will be gathered once or twice a year for a residency, either at the Seminary Center or one of the Houses of Studies. These may be one or two weeks in length and will include Bible study, pastoral formation, reflection upon how the Lutheran Confessions are integrated into pastoral ministry within the NALC, etc. At these meetings, seminarians will interact with the faculty of the NALC Seminary system, the NALC bishop, staff and other resource persons as needed. The goal will be the formation of confessionally Lutheran pastors.

7. Speaking of faculty, how will the NALC proposal ensure that faculty at the NALC Seminary Center and Houses of Studies are supportive of the NALC and our understanding of Holy Scripture and Biblical moral and ethical teaching?

Those who teach at the NALC Seminary Center and Houses of Studies will comprise one faculty. NALC faculty will be required to be members of NALC congregations or members of Lutheran CORE, and

they must agree with and support the mission and ministry of the NALC, teaching in accordance with Holy Scripture, the Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as the constitution of the NALC. Non-NALC/Lutheran CORE faculty may be called to teach with approval of the Board of the NALC Seminary and the Executive Council. The NALC faculty will meet regularly for faculty meetings and to cooperate and coordinate the work of theological education within the NALC Seminary.

8. To whom will the NALC Seminary be accountable?

The NALC Seminary in all its parts will be accountable to the board of the NALC Seminary, comprised of nine to 15 ordained pastors and laity of the NALC. The seminary, staff, faculty and board will be accountable to the NALC Executive Council, which is ultimately accountable to the NALC Convocation. Members of the board will be nominated by the NALC Bishop and Executive Council and elected by the NALC Convocation.

9. Why locate the Seminary Center and Houses of Studies at existing theological schools? Wouldn't it be cheaper to locate them in NALC congregations?

The existing seminaries will be the degree-granting institutions, on behalf of the NALC. This is preferable, since we desire to have our seminarians receive degrees from accredited institutions and we will not be establishing a separate new institution. This also provides complete theological libraries and resources for our students at the existing institutions, making use of available classroom space and existing electronic infrastructure, including platforms for online and distance learning, and in some circumstances, campus housing. It will be much more cost-effective to partner with existing schools, rather than establish a new, stand-alone seminary, even one located within an existing congregation. It also allows us to use existing seminary faculties of the partner schools, allowing us to have fewer faculty on each campus. This means our NALC Seminary can be sustained at much less cost, ensuring its continuation while many seminaries in North America are facing financial crises.

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10. How will Houses of Studies be developed and managed?

The goal is for the creation of Houses of Studies to take place cooperatively between the NALC Executive Council, the seminary board, and the local and regional Mission Districts as need arises and financial resources are available. When it is determined that a House of Studies is needed in a particular location, the NALC Seminary director, board and local support committee will work together to develop a plan, provide funding from NALC and local and regional Mission Districts, congregations and individuals, and establish a partnership agreement with an existing theological school. While the NALC may provide start-up and interim funding for a specified time period, the new House of Studies will be expected to become self-supporting from tuition and donations from local and regional Mission Districts, congregations and individuals. Houses of Studies will be under the supervision of the NALC Seminary Board and Executive Council, but with their own advisory boards or support committees.

11. What about areas where there may not be enough financial support to create a House of Studies?

For the short term, students will be encouraged to attend the Seminary Center for theological education. When that is not possible, the student may take classes at an existing non-NALC seminary, with the approval and guidance of the NALC Candidacy Committee. However, the NALC Executive Council may choose to create a House of Studies for the sake of mission and availability to all NALC congregations and seminarians. Funding would then come from the NALC Theological Education Fund and the NALC budget, with the understanding that this would be for a limited time period, until local and regional Mission Districts can financially support the House of Studies fully. It should be noted that one House of Studies may be supported by a number of Mission Districts, creating a broader base of financial support. For example, a House of Studies in Los Angeles or Phoenix might be supported by all Mission Districts comprised of western states in the U.S. A Canadian House of Studies in Edmonton might be supported by all Canadian Mission Districts.

12. How will the NALC Seminary, the Seminary Center and the Houses of Studies be supported financially?

The NALC Seminary in all its parts will be one entity, wholly owned by the NALC. There will be one budget for the seminary, with separate sections for the Seminary, the Seminary Center and each House of Studies. However, the NALC Executive Council and Convocation will approve the budget of the NALC Seminary in all its parts, providing necessary continuity and oversight. Donations to the NALC Theological Education Fund will benefit the entire theological education program of the NALC, although donations may be earmarked for a particular House of Studies.

13. The second recommendation approves the expenditure of \$1 million to fund the NALC Seminary for the first 16 months. Where will this money come from?

The Executive Council and the NALC are committed to establishing our own theological education system. Much discussion among the Executive Council took place regarding funding for the NALC Seminary. Finally, it was decided by the Executive Council to be bold, stepping out in faith to lay a solid foundation for our seminary from the beginning. The Executive Council, Bishop Bradosky, Bishop Emeritus Spring, and staff are committed to developing a plan for raising this amount of money as quickly as possible, doing everything necessary to reach this goal. They share the belief that the congregations, pastors and members of the NALC are ready to step up powerfully to support this exciting, innovative program for NALC theological education. Initially, major donors will be asked to consider making a significant gift to the NALC Theological Education Fund. Together with gifts from congregations, pastors and individuals, the highest priority will be to fund the program at this level to be able to move forward in faith. It is our hope that NALC folks now are ready to give generously to support the new NALC Seminary!

14. What is the timing of the NALC Seminary? If approved, when will it begin to function as our seminary?

If the Executive Council recommendation is approved by the NALC Convocation in August 2013, the next action of the council will be to call an NALC Seminary Director. This person will serve both as administrator of the Seminary and the Seminary Center, as well as

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being a faculty member at the Seminary Center. The director will begin work as soon as possible, coordinating with Trinity School for Ministry, creating office spaces, working with the NALC Candidacy Committee and Executive Council to finalize the curriculum, and developing registration processes and procedures. While the director may accept some limited teaching responsibilities at TSM as needed in autumn 2013, it is expected that the NALC Seminary program will begin operation in 2014.

15. Isn't a House of Studies already in place at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary?

In response to immediate need for NALC students to move from the ELCA Southern Seminary, the Carolinas Mission District secured funding from a donor to establish a Department of Lutheran Studies at Gordon-Conwell's Charlotte, N.C., campus. With NALC Executive Council approval, a specialized call was issued to the Rev. Dr. Mary Havens to be the director of the department, with Dr. David Yeago and the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin as adjunct faculty. It is hoped that, with the approval of the NALC Seminary proposal, this will become the NALC's first House of Studies.

16. Are there other important aspects of this proposal that should be mentioned?

Probably the most exciting is the intention to integrate a global component to the NALC Seminary. While much remains to be developed in this regard, the intention is to share online and distance learning capabilities with our international partners so that NALC students may participate in classes offered, for example, at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Likewise, Mekane Yesus Seminary students would be able to take classes from our faculty at the Seminary Center or Houses of Studies. We would like our seminarians to have the opportunity to learn from Lutheran professors in other countries, although they may not be able to pack up family for a semester to move to Ethiopia or Tanzania. We plan to take full advantage of the technology currently available to make this possible and viable for the NALC Seminary as we move forward.

It is also important to point out that one important aspect of this Seminary proposal relates to the theological education not only of future pastors, but of lay leaders and congregational members. Rather than have one seminary location close to some few congregations —

but far distant from most — the NALC Seminary proposal will, in time, provide NALC Houses of Studies nearer to most, if not all, NALC Mission Districts and congregations. This means quality NALC theologians will be available for Mission District gatherings, congregational activities, and lay schools of theology — providing many different opportunities for in-depth, faithful theological teaching and learning regionally, if not locally. This will assist us powerfully as we seek to make disciples of all nations and peoples, teaching them to observe all that our Lord has commanded us, as He instructs us in the Great Commission.

17. What should we do now?

First, please become familiar with the Executive Council recommendation included in these pre-Convocation materials. Discuss this recommendation and plan within your congregation and especially with those who will be voting at the NALC Convocation, August 8-9, 2013, in Pittsburgh. If you have questions, please feel free to send them to Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism (dwendel@thenalc.org) or Pastor Roy Harrisville III, Theological Education Task Force chair (pastor@newlifeluth.org). They will attempt to answer your questions or point you in the right direction. Please make sure those who will be voting at the Convocation are aware of this recommendation, have seen the related materials, and come prepared to vote on this important recommendation.

Then, begin to think of ways you, your congregation and your Mission District can support theological education in the NALC! We will need financial contributions to the NALC Theological Education Fund to support the creation of the NALC Seminary, Seminary Center and Houses of Studies as they are developed. If you are a member or friend of the NALC who has been significantly blessed financially, please begin prayerfully considering making a major gift to help kick off the fundraising. Pastors and congregational leaders are asked to identify and ask possible major donors to join us in this effort. Church councils are asked to consider ways that their congregation may fully and faithfully support the establishment of our seminary. Mission Districts are asked to develop programs and initiatives that will assist in fundraising within their territory and congregations. Above all, pray for this effort and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we seek to develop a theological education system in the NALC that is flexible, integrative, faithful to our NALC commitments and understandings, yet poised to serve us well as a Church in the 21st century!

‘On Being the Church in These Precarious Times’ is theme of annual Theological Conference

“On Being the Church in These Precarious Times” is the theme of the annual Theological Conference sponsored by the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE Aug. 6-7 at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pa.



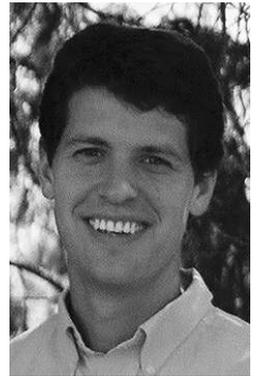
Carl Braaten



James Nestingen



Frank Senn



Stephan Turnbull

“Churches are badly divided in spite of the efforts of the ecumenical movement to achieve church unity. Lutherans, for their part, have a lot of work to do to reach agreement on the doctrine of the Church. Our hope is that this conference will make a solid contribution to that end,” explained the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten, conference organizer.

Presentations for the theological conference include:

+ **“Introduction: The Church of the Triune God”** — The Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten, professor emeritus of systematic theology at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and former executive director of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.

+ **“The Holy Spirit: Creator of the Church”** — The Rev. Dr. Stephan Turnbull, senior pastor of First Lutheran Church in White Bear Lake, Minn.

+ **“The Church is Part of the Gospel”** — Dr. David Yeago, professor of systematic theology in the Department of Lutheran Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.

+ **Breaking the Promise of Lutheran Unity: Apostasy, Heresy, and Schism** — The Rev. Dr.



*Sarah Hinlicky
Wilson*



David Yeago



*Nathan Howard
Yoder*

Nathan Howard Yoder, pastor of St. Martin’s Lutheran Church, Maiden, N.C.

+ **“Whether Church Order is a Matter of Indifference in Lutheran History and Theology”** — The Rev. Dr. James A. Nestingen, professor emeritus of church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., and the Rev. Dr. Frank Senn, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Evanston, Ill., and Senior of the Society of the Holy Trinity.

+ **“Doing Theology in the Service of the Church”** — The Rev. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, assistant research professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, and editor of the theological journal, *Lutheran Forum*.

Response to the Recent Decisions of the United States Supreme Court Regarding Marriage

While the decision of the court is not a complete surprise, we were hoping for more than a ruling aligned with the popular opinion of our culture. Many of the basic tenets of our legal system are rooted in Biblical principles. The laws of our nation were once established on transcendent truth and not simply what citizens were willing to tolerate. Contemporary decisions seem to be based on only the most recent cases, philosophies and political will. The historical foundation and connection to Biblical principles is seldom raised or followed. The prevailing attitude is that the wisdom of man in contemporary culture is far superior to the wisdom of God.

There are few in our culture bold enough to speak out against the slow erosion of the Biblical understanding of marriage and the family that each of these decisions bring. The recent decisions of the Supreme Court should cause us to raise some important questions. We believe in equality and justice for all people, but can justice be separated from righteousness? Can one speak out for the Biblical understanding of justice without also speaking out for the Biblical understanding of righteousness? Can acceptance and tolerance of behaviors in opposition to the Word and Will of God be considered equal to those behaviors that are in agreement with Scriptural teaching?

We must never simply acquiesce to such rulings but engage in constructive dialog, consistent prayer, Biblical study, loving obedience to Christ, and faithful caring for our neighbor. Our response is grounded in the Great Commission, making disciples obedient to Christ, teaching the faith, and trusting in the constant presence of Jesus. We must remain all the more committed to influence our culture and the world by faithfully proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, boldly living what we confess.

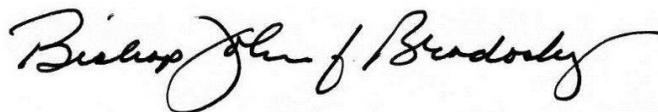


From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

While our pastors and congregations will not participate in the blessing of same-sex unions and continue to uphold in our preaching and teaching the Biblical standards for marriage and sexuality, we have an even more positive word to offer.

I commend to you the ecumenical statement on marriage and the family (<http://thenalc.org/educational-resources/>). This is a perfect time for our pastors to preach and teach about the Biblical understanding of marriage and the family making full use of both the Old and New Testament references. I am confident that our pastors and congregations in the NALC will continue to boldly proclaim God's truth in love, offering the forgiveness, mercy and healing that only Christ can provide. We will continue to pray for all men, women and children affected by these decisions as well as those responsible for making them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop John F. Bradosky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop John F. Bradosky
North American Lutheran Church

June 28, 2013

Note: The ecumenical Affirmation of Marriage was printed in the June NALC News.

Standing Together for Religious Freedom

An Open Letter to All Americans

NALC Bishop John Bradosky has joined more than 100 prominent national religious leaders and scholars in signing an open letter to all Americans entitled, “Standing Together for Religious Freedom.”

The letter, which was released on July 2, calls on the Administration and Congress to respect conscience rights and religious freedom. Signers represent a wide range of religious traditions. Christian signers ranged from Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Lutherans to Baptists Evangelicals, and Pentecostals.

Here is the text of the letter:

We write as an informal and diverse group of religious leaders, theologians, lay practitioners and community servants. We believe the doctrines of our respective faiths require something of us beyond the walls of our churches, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship. Those faith convictions manifest themselves through our daily interactions among family, neighbors, strangers and institutions.

Further, we recognize the United States, at its best, is unique among the nations of the world when it defends the self-evident freedom of all people to exercise their faith according to the dictates of their consciences. This freedom contributes to the vibrancy of our nation. Unfortunately, this delicate liberty of conscience is under threat.

Through its contraceptive coverage mandate, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) continues to breach universal principles affirmed and protected by the U.S. Constitution and other federal laws. While the mandate is a specific offense, it represents a greater fundamental breach of conscience by the federal government. Very simply, HHS is forcing Citizen A, against his or her moral convictions, to purchase a product for Citizen B. The HHS policy is coercive and puts the administration in the position of defining — or casting aside — religious doctrine. This should trouble every American.

Many of the signatories on this letter do not hold doctrinal objections to the use of contraception. Yet we stand united in protest to this mandate, recognizing the encroachment on the conscience of our fellow citizens. Whether or not we agree with the particular conscientious objection is beside the point. HHS continues to deny many Americans the freedom to manifest their beliefs through practice and observance in their daily lives.

The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Free exercise includes the freedom to order one’s life, liberties and pursuits in accordance with his or her convictions. HHS breaches the free exercise clause and federal statutes (passed with broad bipartisan support) by selectively denying some Americans this constitutionally protected right.

Americans afford each other broad liberties with respect to lifestyle choices. However, the federal government has neither a compelling interest nor the appropriate authority to coerce one citizen to fund or facilitate specific lifestyle choices of another. If the federal government can force morally opposed individuals to purchase contraception or abortion-causing drugs and devices for a third party, what prevents this or future administrations from forcing other Americans to betray their deeply held convictions?

Therefore, we call upon HHS to, at a minimum, expand conscience protections under the mandate to cover any organization or individual that has religious or moral objections to covering, providing or enabling access to the mandated drugs and services. Further, because HHS claims to be acting on authority granted it by Congress, we ask Congress to consider how it might prevent such offenses from occurring in the future. Any policy that falls short of affirming full religious freedom protection for all Americans is unacceptable.

You may download a copy of the letter including the list of signers and the text in Spanish at: www.thenalc.org/education-resources.

Great Commission Society launches website

Select your own mission support opportunities

The Great Commission Society (GCS) of the North American Lutheran Church will launch a page on the NALC website this fall to provide congregations and individuals with a menu of projects they can support directly.

The Great Commission Society is made up of people who are passionate about making and mobilizing disciples for Christ's mission in the world. For individuals, the membership contribution is \$240 per year (\$20/month). For congregations, it is \$100 per month or \$1,200 per year. Membership contributions are used to fund mission starts in the United States and Canada and also to provide emergency support for surprise needs of ongoing missionaries, projects or mission starts.

Last year GCS funds assisted the Ethiopian people building congregations in Houston, Denver, Chicago, and Charlotte, as well as other mission work in Georgia, Minnesota and South Carolina. As membership increases, GCS may also use funds to train mission leaders and advocates.

You may also make one-time special gifts to GCS. Celebrating a congregational anniversary, paying off a mortgage, observing an ordination anniversary, even spending a budget surplus — any of these could be an occasion for a special gift.

The new GCS web page will include thumbnail sketches of



mission projects seeking direct support from GCS members.

Do Sunday School children want to support building a school? Bible study members a Bible translation project? Someone who loves learning might choose support for students studying to be pastors at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia or support for faculty of St. Luke's Theological College in South Sudan.

Each project will be screened to ensure the organization's legitimacy, need and use of funds. Once approved, they will be placed on the web page. In most cases you will be able to link directly to the website of each listed project to get further details.

The NALC encourages individual congregations to do and support mission directly. GCS members will be able to encourage favorite mission projects to post on this GCS web page soliciting contributions from other NALC congregations and individuals. Once posted, a project is

introduced to a much wider audience which can support it in prayer and finances. GCS members can study posted projects and learn about the exciting work being done locally and throughout the world.

NALC Bishop John Bradosky has encouraged congregations to financially support at least one local — possibly multicultural — and one international mission project each year. The NALC is a Mission-Driven church and the GCS web page will give information about a wide range of projects available for such support and for strengthening relationships between local congregations and those around the world. Each congregation's annual parochial report will provide an opportunity for it to declare the missions it has supported in the past year, and the amount of support it has furnished. This will allow the NALC to track mission work even though the monies will not flow directly through its coffers.

The NALC website will announce when the new GCS web page is launched. Check it out! Join the Great Commission Society and become part of the stream of believers holding out their hands with gifts of prayer and financial support for other believers in greater need. Find the projects that closely align with your passions for spreading Christ's Gospel word at home and abroad and watch how your prayer and support can not only help them, but see what Christ works in you through this ministry!



Bible school at St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Riverside, Mo., gets a show-biz treatment. Glenda Mann (right) leads a song as her husband, Mike Mann (up on stage) keeps the kids' attention. (Photos by Brian Davidson)

Mike and Glenda Mann rock vacation Bible school

By Lisa Gutierrez
The Kansas City Star

Sometimes, kids from the apartments in back of the church cut through the woods to get here. Some don't even belong to the flock, but they are more than welcome at vacation Bible school. So they come.

The classes have become a neighborhood draw at St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Riverside, Mo., a little white church on a hill just up the road from the Corner Cafe.

Sing-alongs, balloon props, puppets, magic tricks and sight gags like burning Bibles ("It's a really hot book") make it a show. Forty-three kids packed the pews of the church's community hall this night. Parents hung around to watch, too.

The kids hoot and hollered up a storm with Mike and Glenda Mann, the husband-and-wife entertainers who come every summer, camping behind the church for the week in their 33-foot travel trailer.

She's the granddaughter of a Baptist minister, with reddish hair like Reba McEntire and a husky, honeyed drawl like hers, too. He's a Catholic-turned-Baptist with dark hair and earnest eyes who can rile a kiddie crowd like a Vegas headliner.

The Manns, who hail from Hutchinson, Kan., spend summer on the road teaching vacation Bible schools from Kansas to Michigan, sometimes putting on two or three shows a day. "We do big shows. We don't go in with a briefcase," Glenda said.

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They come home in September to perform at the Kansas State Fair, where the secular crowds know them as Glenda and Mike's Mysteries and Wonders Magic Show.

"As long as it's clean, family entertainment, we'll do any type of venue," Glenda said. "We do corporate events, we do business parties, school assemblies, fairs, festivals."

For vacation Bible school gigs, they add Jesus to the magic.

The rope trick, for instance — in which two kids try to fish a money-wrapped piece of cord from a magician's bag — ends with this lesson: If you choose Jesus, you have a better life on Earth and in Heaven.

"We emphasize the importance of learning God's Word to hide in your heart because obviously you're not going to carry around a 20-pound Bible with you," Glenda said.

Their Bible school work puts them in front of hundreds of children every summer. With no



Vacation Bible School leader Glenda Mann arranged kids for a lesson at St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Riverside, Mo. When Glenda and her husband teach, Bible school is a hands-on experience.

offspring of their own, Glenda likes to say: "We have thousands by other parents."

Some of their children, she said, "have fur and feathers," a reference to a rabbit and the doves that travel with them.

They won't tell how long they've been married — "a long time," Glenda said. They fell in love so hard they got married less than a year after meeting.

"Christ has been the center of our married life and everything we've done from the beginning," said Mike, who worked on B-52s at Boeing in Wichita before the two became full-time performers.

Glenda's grandmother, a minister's wife, taught Sunday school classes using magic tricks. The formula still works with the Wii generation, especially for 10-year-old church member Michael Berry, who sat in the front row singing loudly and waving his hand each time volunteers were called for.

He likes vacation Bible school, he said, "because you learn about God."

The Rev. Bud Elliott has known the Manns since the 1970s and asked them to bring their show to Riverside after he arrived 10 years ago. He considers them salt of the earth, good showmen to boot.

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Vacation Bible School student Dirk Istaro (left) received his instructions for a skit about David and Goliath from Mike Mann.



Reedchard Noda of Riverside, Mo., sings along to one of the Manns' many interactive tunes.

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"They have the ability to shift gears, improvise," he said. "Every audience is different. They're very flexible in what they do and that's how they maintain that contact with these kids, and that keeps them coming back.

"Every year that they've been here, kids will be so enthusiastic the first night that they'll bring others with them the second night."

Glenda, who plays the piano, writes many of the songs they teach. They used to travel with her keyboard until they got tired of hauling it around. Now they use mostly recorded music.

Times have changed in other ways, too — namely, the kids. "Attention spans have shortened," Mike said. "We've shortened everything down. The songs are shorter."

They teach the kids hand gestures to make the words stick. Glenda shook a tambourine as the kids clapped along to her catchy little ditty, "Soul-Healin' Man."

*"He's a soul-healin' man. He's a soul-healin' man.
He looks inside where no man can.
He's a soul-healin' man."*

"They are so animated and energetic. The kids relate to them right off," said the church's music director Joyce Hisel, the recently retired choir director at Platte County High School.

"Between the music that they use, the hand gestures that they use, how they involve the kids in everything that they do, from the puppetry to the magic, it's all so upbeat and just very joyful. And there's always a lesson in whatever they do."

Every class begins and ends with bowed heads. At the end of their two hours together, Mike told the kids: "Let's bow our heads for a word of prayer. God's looking at your heart right now. Do you know where your heart is with him?"

"Right here," one little boy called out.

"Let's pray," Mike continued, launching into a prayer in sing-song fashion, the kids repeating each line after him.

"Jesus I believe in you. I believe your Bible. It says that you died, on the cross, in my place, and paid the price for all my sins.

"Jesus, I believe in you and I ask you to come into my life as my Savior and my Lord."

Prayers said, the crowd dispersed, kids going home wearing balloon headpieces and holding the balloon animals that took Glenda hours to make.

And out behind the church, one little boy disappeared back down the path through the woods.

Reprinted with permission from The Kansas City Star.



Mike Mann and Calipo, the monkey puppet, have a message for the kids at St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church. (Photos by Brian Davidson)

Put Out Into the Deep

“Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy cataracts...” — Psalm 42:7a

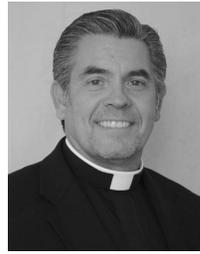
“And when Jesus has ceased speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’” — St. Luke 5:5

If it hasn't been obvious, my subject matter for these newsletter pieces are often suggested by comments I hear while visiting our NALC parishes. When there is a theme I hear again and again, it makes me want to share that with you.

Recently that happened as I was visiting several different congregations in several different places. The comments were about the same in each case. A parishioner would stop me after worship and share with me that though they had been raised in some other denomination, the reason they ended up in the Lutheran church had been because of deep preaching and teaching — something they hadn't experienced before!

I would have to say that in my experience as a parish pastor, that was all too common as well. Folks would come to Lutheranism because they hadn't heard deep preaching and teaching before. They may have been raised in the Church, in a different denomination, but had never experienced deep Biblical preaching, teaching that deals with difficult, profound life issues, ministry that isn't superficial or shallow, but ready to “put out into the deep.”

I would also say that this was my experience and understanding of Lutheranism as a youngster growing up in the Church, going to catechism classes every Saturday morning for two hours, sitting in Sunday worship every week hearing serious, deep sermons which proclaimed Law and Gospel clearly, not hesitating to quote our Lutheran Confessions. Sometimes you had to work at listening to and hearing those sermons, just as it took some work to participate in Lutheran liturgy — but it was deep, and deeply meaningful, and helped us all to grow more deeply in our faith as Lutheran Christians and as followers of Jesus Christ.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Early in my ministry, in Hobbs, N.M., my congregation participated in a video lecture series on evangelism. Sadly, I don't remember the title nor the speaker. I do remember the image the speaker continued to use in each presentation. He described the life of faith and discipleship as being on the beach, standing on the sandy shore of a great body of water.

We become disciples because someone already in the water invited us in. It wasn't so difficult getting our toes wet, and we enjoy rolling up our pant-legs to get in up to our ankles. We might even change into shorts or a swimsuit so that we can get in up to our knees. Till then, it can be all fun. But there's always someone out further, calling us to go deeper, inviting us out further. And then, it can get a bit scary — we can become afraid of the deeper water. What if we can't touch bottom? What if we're not sure what we'll find when we get out there? What if we have to tread water? What if the current is strong and it moves us?

That's what the life of faith and discipleship is like, in a way. Though the invitation is first to simply get into the water, the invitation is always to go deeper — deeper into Holy Scripture, deeper in our faith and trust, deeper in worship, deeper in our prayer and devotional life — certainly, deeper in our Lutheran Confessions, which teach us deeply about our Christian faith. It can get scary — but it also gets fun and exciting and unpredictable, the deeper we go!

In the NALC, we are tempted, as all churches are today, to stay in the shallow water. We believe those who claim people will be scared off if we

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invite them into deeper water. We buy into the notion that what people want is “Christianity-light” — light preaching of 3-5 minutes with a decidedly “self-help” relevance to modern life; superficial songs with weak theology, bad theology, or no theology; adult classes that focus on contemporary issues, rather than Scripture, Creeds and Confessions.

If the anecdotal evidence is correct, then what brings folks to Lutheran churches is not superficial, shallow fluff, but deep preaching, teaching and worship, full and rich in the Word, immersed in our Lutheran confessional and liturgical tradition!

Sure there may be some who will come and just get their toes wet — so we just keep inviting them in to the deeper water. Because for those who “put out into the deep” as Jesus instructs Simon, the results will be great! Deeper faith, deeper discipleship, deeper liturgy and worship that brings people to the shore, but lures them into the water — because it is so exciting, and fulfilling, and faithful!

I pray that we will not be the Lutherans who stay shallow and superficial, but the Lutherans who go deep! My hope and prayer is that the NALC will be known for deep preaching, teaching and worship, deep Biblical, theological and confessional foundations, and therefore, pastors and laity who are deep in their faith and discipleship!

2013 NALC Mission Festival is Nov. 7-9

“Discipleship — It Takes One to Make One” is the theme of the NALC’s 2013 Mission Festival to be held Nov. 7-9 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio.

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 worship, workshops, and seminars. Small groups

***I pray that we will not be
the Lutherans who stay
shallow and superficial,
but the Lutherans who go deep!***

P.S. I would like to announce and invite pastors, church musicians, deacons, assistants, worship committee members and other interested persons to a conference/retreat in Colorado Springs, Colo., Nov. 11-13, titled, “I Never Learned That: A Liturgical Conference.” The goal of the conference will be to teach the theology of liturgy and worship, which will then lead to practical instruction and guidance in worship planning and leadership, presiding, chanting, preaching, and essentials of Lutheran worship that you may never have learned before! Teaching theologians will be the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin and the Rev. Dr. Frank Senn. Please e-mail me for more information at dwendel@thenalc.org.

P.P.S. We have congregations in the NALC who are interested in calling pastors with “Youth and Family Ministry” focus, and some interested in hiring lay persons to serve in such associate positions. If you would consider such a position, please contact me ASAP at dwendel@thenalc.org.

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. Workshop presenters include Steve Shipman from Lutheran CORE, Bill Mowery from Navigators, an international missions panel, and others.

Registration for the Mission Festival is \$100 per individual and includes a box lunch on Friday. For more details contact the NALC missions office at 614-777-5709.

First Lutheran Church Pontiac, Illinois

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

Being excited about ministry and outreach comes very naturally and easily for Pastor Heidi Punt, associate pastor of First Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Pontiac, Illinois.

This is the first time that she and her husband, Pastor Dieter Punt, have served in the same congregation. They are both from South Africa and met while attending seminary there. Pastor Dieter Punt has been serving at First Lutheran for 12 years, while his wife, Heidi, has been there for only one year. She had previously served in other congregations.

When First Lutheran in Pontiac began looking for a second pastor, both she and the congregation proceeded cautiously. They both wanted God's way, not just what was convenient. "My husband and I were not surprised we could work together; we had raised a family together. We looked at our strengths and divided up the responsibilities," Pastor Heidi said.

After coming to First Lutheran a year ago, she began holding Bible studies with all the existing ministries. As part of the studies, the question, "Why are we doing what we are doing?" kept being asked. The Church Council also set aside three weekends for considering the question, "What is God calling us to do as Christian leaders?" From this process the congregation began refocusing on the Great Commission and what it means to them. Their concern is to do God's work, not just good volunteer work.

Each of the existing ministry teams was invited to send one representative to be a part of the Mission and Social Outreach Committee. This committee meets quarterly, engages in Bible study, looks at the congregation's gifts and talents, and studies the community's needs as well as the needs of people nationally and internationally.

First Lutheran very intentionally thinks of their ministry as local, national, and international. Even the benevolence budget is structured in that way.



Confirmation students took an active role in the 2012 Palm Sunday worship at First Lutheran Church.

Benevolence monies are committed first, then other dollars are budgeted to pay the bills. According to Pastor Heidi Punt, "Benevolence comes first. We know that God will provide the rest."

On the local level, the congregation serves an Easter dinner to people in the community who have nowhere else to go or do not have the financial resources for such a meal. The dinner is served on a Saturday afternoon the weekend after Easter, before the Saturday evening worship service. Some who attend the meal also stay for the service. Two years ago the congregation served 50 people; last year they fed 125. This year an even larger number was anticipated. Funding for the meal comes from members of the congregation as well as from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Transportation is provided for those in need.

On the national level, the congregation is developing a partnership with Life Stream Oromo Evangelical Church, a NALC mission congregation in Chicago made up of Ethiopian immigrants. Members from First Lutheran met individuals from Life Stream Oromo at a NALC Great Rivers Mission District meeting.

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Pastor Heidi said, "People from that church [Life Stream Oromo] were sharing what they are doing and what their needs are. Our members heard their presentation and decided they wanted to build a mission relationship with them." It has been working for them to have a partnership with a congregation that is geographically close. Pastor Heidi shared, "We can get in a van and go there. Their Sunday School children can come here and experience rural living. We are just beginning to establish the relationship."

Also on the national level, several of the men from a men's Bible study group will be going to Atlantic City, N.J., in April, to help St. Andrew By the Sea Lutheran Church rebuild a house there. After Superstorm Sandy, the men contacted St. Andrew and sent financial resources immediately. In coordination with Pastor David McGettigan of St. Andrew, they have scheduled their volunteer trip for April. St. Andrew is helping people in Atlantic City rebuild their lives after the storm.

The congregation's Lenten mission campaign this past year was entitled "Stomp Out Hunger" and is an example of the congregation's ongoing commitment to mission.

On the local level, they gathered together for a 12-hour famine and prayer vigil to pray for those who are hungry and to collect canned food for their local food pantry.

On the national level, they volunteered at the Feed My Starving Children food bank, where they packed enough food to feed more than one hundred children for a whole week.

On the international level, they became involved in the Heifer Project. With the Heifer Project, the Sunday School children and the preschoolers have challenged the adults to see who can raise the larger amount of money. In the first two weeks \$2,500 was given toward a goal of \$5,000. As money is received, animals are placed in a Noah's ark display in the fellowship hall. When the goal of \$5,000 has been reached, Noah's ark will be full. One weekend a woman from an animal shelter brought in two goats to show the children. Pastor Heidi commented, "It is really fun to have the children challenge the adults. Right now the adults are winning, but not for long. The adults' pockets are empty all the time."



Sunday School children pet goats brought in as part of a Heifer Project fund-raising effort.

Also on the international level, the congregation is building a partnership with Pastor Scott Ryll, a NALC missionary in Hungary. First Lutheran had contacted the NALC headquarters, asking for potential international partners. Pastor Heidi said, "We looked at the various options which the NALC provided to see which one would best fit us."

They were drawn to Pastor Ryll because of his emphasis on feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and reaching out to people who are alone and lonely. They are beginning to make plans for an adult mission trip to Hungary in 2015. When asked what they will be doing, Pastor Heidi answered, "It depends upon the needs at the time. The core will be personal relationship building."

Pastor Heidi's enthusiasm for mission, ministry, and outreach is exuberant and contagious. She said, "Our mission focus is fluid and continues to shift and grow as God calls and equips." She concluded our conversation by saying, "I am really thrilled that the congregation is getting excited. It is easy to be excited when the Holy Spirit is the driving force."

To learn more about the ministries of First Lutheran, visit their website: www.firstlutheranpontiac.org.

Reprinted from CORE Connection, the newsletter of Lutheran CORE.

What the Local Church Is Uniquely Equipped to Offer

It was a *Mennonite World Review* article that went viral last March. The article was apparently written by a disillusioned young adult who no longer attends church.

She wrote, “I will be the first to admit that part of the problem with twenty-somethings and church is that we’re bored. We wake up early and put on a skirt only to be met with baby dedications and a sermon that is 27 minutes too long. We sigh over sharing time and roll our eyes at long-winded announcements.”

She continued, “There’s also the whole business of cynicism. We’ve become hardened by youth pastors who turned out to be pedophiles, preachers who turned out to be adulterers, spiritual leaders who give advice on subjects they know nothing about, Christian fundamentalism at its worst.”

This article generated many comments supporting the sentiments of this young woman. But thankfully there were also comments from young adults who are still active in their congregations. My favorite of these: “Who can’t find fault with most any group ... Do I get bored at church? Sure, often. So (am I) more insightful, on the ball, committed if I sleep in from church, avoid the hard work of self-examination and building community? ... What better illustration of a self-centered, validated generation than the ennui that avoids church.”

Among the unchurched, we are finding an incredible amount of skepticism regarding the institutional church. This includes, of course, those who are not convinced of the truth of the Gospel. However, this group also includes those who self-identify as Christians but have rejected the very concept of “organized religion.”

So what does the local church — your church — have to offer? What can we say in response to this skepticism and cynicism? What can the local



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

church offer that cannot be found through the individualized pursuit of personal spirituality?

This is a question we need to be prepared to answer. And I’d suggest there are at least two responses to these questions. In fact, given some of the current trends in contemporary American society, I would suggest that organized faith communities are more needed and necessary than ever.

The first, and most obvious benefit for belonging to a local church is the difference it can make in lives that — increasingly — are characterized by loneliness and isolation.

I came across a fascinating article by Samuel Freedman, entitled, “In a Crisis, Humanists Seem Absent.” He pointed out that after the tragic shooting in Newtown, Mass., this last December the 26 families who lost loved ones were supported in very conspicuous ways by local faith communities. Freedman wrote, “This illustration of religious belief in action ... an example at once so heart-rending and so affirming, has left behind one prickly question: Where were the humanists?”

Freedman then quoted Greg Epstein, the humanist chaplain of Harvard University. (That’s right, Harvard has “humanist chaplain.”) Epstein, author of the book, *Good Without God*, said, “It is a failure

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In Pursuit of the Great Commission

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of community. What religion has to offer to people at moments like this — more than theology, more than divine presence — is community.”

As the saying goes, I couldn't have said it better myself. Given the realities and trends in contemporary North American society, the kind of community provided by local faith communities is needed more than ever.

I am astounded at how rapidly the social fabric of our culture seems to be unraveling. Some examples:

+ Christian author Charles Arn states, “Nearly every membership-based organization is losing members. Most people still come to faith through a relationship ... regardless of generation.”

+ U.S. Census data indicates we have now reached the point where over 40 percent of all babies born in the United States have single mothers.

+ The suicide rate among Americans is increasing. Among those 35 to 54 years of age the rate has increased nearly 30 percent between 1999 and 2010.

+ One in three Americans over 45 identify themselves as “chronically lonely,” up from just one in five a decade ago.

New York Times columnist (and Christian) Ross Douthat writes, “For many people, the strongest forms of community are still the traditional ones — the kind forged by shared genes, shared memory, shared geography. And neither Facebook nor a life coach nor a well-meaning bureaucracy is likely to compensate for these forms' attenuation and decline.”

A second and perhaps not as obvious benefit for belonging to a local faith community is the prospect for finding purpose in one's life.

As Christian author and pastor Rick Warren has said, “It's not about you. It's really all about God, and your purpose is far greater than your personal fulfillment.” That might sound counter-intuitive given this column's emphasis on meeting personal needs through our ministries. However, I feel this particular benefit is central to what the Body of Christ has been called to do. We are here as the Church — in part — to help individuals identify and respond to God's call on their lives. As I've shared more than once with the people of my congregation, this is about determining where our God-given gifts, our passion and the world's need intersect. Our congregations should continually be striving to assist members in pursuing God's purposes through the use of their personal, God-given gifts.

Both these needs — for community and for a sense of purpose — can be met by the local church. These are examples where our Biblical mandate and the very real and apparent needs of the unchurched coincide.

So evaluate your own congregation's ministries. Is there anything more you could be doing to foster a healthy, loving sense of community, especially for visitors and your members who are in crisis? What about care-giving ministries? Your hospitality ministries? And do you provide multiple small groups, which are especially needed in mid-sized and larger congregations? I recently visited with a terminally ill member and heard his amazing testimony of how his small group has helped him face his death.

Regarding the matter of people pursuing God's purpose for their lives, are you providing multiple opportunities for appropriate volunteer ministries? What about occasional “workshops” where participants can identify their ministry gifts?

Ultimately, part of our outreach to those outside the Body of Christ is finding ways we can meet their realized — and often urgent — needs. Only then will many of them give us the opportunity to lead them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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

Water Missions International

Water. We drink it. We cook with it. We use it to wash our hands. We use it to shower. Everything we do is dependent on water.

Imagine this: turning on the tap and dark, murky, bacteria-infested water comes gushing out of the faucet. Would you be willing to drink it? Would anyone be willing to drink it?

For close to a billion people across our planet, this is reality. For them, water is not a source of abundant life, health and well-being. Water is a birthing ground for sickness and disease. Water strips them of opportunities for education and work, contributing to an endless cycle of poverty and despair.

This is the global water crisis.

In 1998, Molly and George Greene, founders of Water Missions International, were operating an environmental engineering company in Charleston, S.C., when they heard about the devastation in Honduras caused by Hurricane Mitch.

After receiving a request for multiple water treatment systems in Honduras, and being unable to find existing systems that would work, George and his team of engineers took action to build such a system — and thus the idea for Water Missions International was born.



When the Greens arrived in Honduras, they were shocked by what they found. The river that flowed through a nearby village was the color of chocolate milk — deep brown with toxins, bacteria and hopelessness. The residents of the village referred to it as the “River of Death” — no one survived once they drank from that river.

As one of the newly-built water systems became operational, the local villagers were still terrified to drink any water from the river — whether it was clear or not. So Molly and George placed their own lips to the hose and drank the newly purified water. With that action, Molly and George bridged the final gap and the villagers swarmed forward to drink the water.

In the aftermath of their Honduras trip, Molly and George discovered the sad truth about the global water crisis — that more than a billion people are forced to drink dirty, unsafe water every day. In 2001, the Greens took action to combat this reality and founded Water Missions International.

Today, Water Missions International (WMI) has provided access to safe water and the Living Water Message of Jesus Christ for over 2.4 million people throughout the world. Additionally, WMI operates nine country programs in Latin America, Africa and Asia and has served 49 countries on five continents.

You can learn more about Water Missions International online at www.watermissions.org.

Global Water Crisis

Statistics Say It All

+ One out of every nine people in the world, roughly 780 million, lack access to improved drinking water, and 1.8 billion people drink microbiologically unsafe water.

+ Lack of safe water and adequate sanitation is the world's single biggest cause of illness — and often the major cause of death following a natural disaster.

+ Waterborne diseases cause the death of more than 1.5 million children each year — which is more than 4,000 children every day.

+ It is estimated that more than 2.5 billion people globally live without adequate sanitation, accounting for 37 percent of the world's population.

+ One dollar invested in water supply and sanitation can provide an economic return of up to 34 times, depending on the region.

+ Water and sanitation infrastructure helps people take the first essential step out of the cycle of poverty and disease.

+ Every 21 seconds a child dies from water-related disease.

+ Unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation cause more deaths each year than all forms of violence, including war.



+ The impact of diarrheal disease on children is greater than the combined impact of human HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

+ The provision of improved sanitation and drinking water could reduce the number of diarrheal diseases by nearly 90 percent.

+ Each year 443 million school days are lost due to water-related diseases.

+ The average distance that women in developing countries walk to collect water per day is four miles, and the average weight that women carry on their heads is approximately 44 pounds.

+ The average American uses about 80-100 gallons of water each day, but in developing countries, five gallons can meet the daily water needs of one person.



Call Inc. is a Christian non-profit teaching mission and ministry (not a business) dedicated to mobilizing ordinary people called by Jesus to “incorporate” His call into all of life ... family, work, community, world and the gathering of believers.

Yes, Jesus is calling you — not just pastors, church professionals and foreign missionaries! Miraculously throughout history, Jesus has called ordinary people to transform and heal a broken world. It’s the Lord’s ingenious plan! Martin Luther taught and encouraged the same.

Discover how you can live “worthy” of Jesus and “in conformity” with His call! Recognize His personal and practical voice! Yes, Jesus is still speaking to His children, and desires to speak to you. Uncover how Jesus has already custom designed, empowered and equipped you for His call, giving you His Holy Spirit, power, spiritual gifts and other unique attributes. Identify the places that Jesus has prepared for you to live in conformity with His call. Pinpoint what distracts and detours you from living worthy of Jesus and His call! Because He rose from the dead, Jesus is still alive, calling, befriending, training and partnering with ordinary people like you to recreate, reform and renew people, places and problems with His rule, reign, redemption, and resurrection power!

Discover how you can be the “church” in action. “Church” in Biblical Greek literally means, “called out ones.” Ordinary people “called out” by Jesus and pressing on in His call are crucial to truly grasping the potential and power of “church.”

Mobilize ordinary people “called out” by Jesus to have a transformative impact and influence in the world!

A multitude of ordinary people hearing Jesus’ call ... that’s our hope and prayer! Towards these ends and as a result of years of experience, Call Inc. has developed teaching seminars and resources such as our *Ordinary People “Call” Seminars* and our brand new *Custom Designed Reflection Guide*, an interactive prayer journal combining guided listening prayer exercises and scriptural teaching for individual discernment, Bible study and group conversation. We hope ordinary people will hear the Jesus calling them to a life of discipleship.

Visit our display table at the upcoming CORE and NALC gatherings! Attend our workshop during the CORE convocation. Here is a summary of our objectives, values and what we do.

Our Objectives & Values:

- + We teach ordinary people called by Jesus how to seek, discover and “incorporate” His call into all of life. Our hope is that all Christians of any age will live worthy of Jesus and His call.
- + We train leaders to mobilize ordinary people called by Jesus.
- + We encourage leaders to discern the call within their call to increase their effectiveness as kingdom leaders and mobilizers of ordinary people.
- + We renew “Christian churches”... ordinary people “anointed” and empowered with the Holy Spirit in order to be “called out” by Jesus to transform the world.
- + We encourage “living worthy of Jesus and His call” as an essential dimension of a multifaceted approach for developing fruitful disciples of Jesus.
- + We teach events, provide resources (including free downloads), discernment conversations, discipleship development, leadership development, and encourage individuals, groups and churches towards these objectives.

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What We Do:

+ Ordinary People Call Seminars combine scriptural teaching, prayerful reflection exercises, listening prayer and conversation, assisting people to seek, discover and “incorporate” God’s call into their unique mission field of life: family, work, community, world, and the church gathering. Most basic is the call to know, follow and uniquely serve Jesus ... 24/7.

+ Teaching Events (seminars, retreats, workshops) on related topics: spiritual gifts, life stewardship, discipleship, listening prayer, spiritual disciplines (as a means of grace), call mobilization training, fear, and “church” (the called out ones). These scriptural events are taught by highly experienced and knowledgeable teachers.

+ Resources (publications and downloadable resources for all ages): God’s call, spiritual gifts,

life stewardship, discipleship, and “church” (the called out ones) with plans for video teaching!

+ Free Downloadable Resources for individual use including spiritual gifts identification inventory and an easy-to-use talent and skills profile (an effective replacement for time and talent sheets).

+ Discipleship Development Strategy & Discernment Conversations for individuals, leaders, churches and other organizations.

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NALC annual reports from congregations

Congregations recently received an e-mail requesting that they complete their annual report for the North American Lutheran Church.

“As the NALC grows, it is important to have a record of essential information about each of our congregations and the church as a whole. The information helps us identify our strengths and weaknesses and keeps us accountable to being a mission-driven church,” said Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary.

Each congregation received a unique link to its online report. If you did not receive the link to your report or if you have any questions, please contact Anne Gleason at agleason@thenalc.org or 888-551-7254.

Bishop Bradosky to host tour of Holy Land

NALC Bishop John Bradosky will host a tour of the Holy Land Nov. 12-21.

The tour of Israel and Jordan includes Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and many sites in Galilee. It is scheduled to leave from Columbus, Ohio, but arrangements can be made for other departure cities.

For more information contact Pam Charas at 937-434-0993 or mcharas@earthlink.net or Jerusalem Tours at 888-373-8687 or visit their website: www.jerusalem tours.com.

Thank you, Rachel Sosebee

Rachel Sosebee will be leaving the NALC Ministry Office in Hilliard, Ohio, in August. She and her family are moving to the Raleigh, N.C., area where her husband, Neil, has accepted a new position.

Rachel began serving as administrative assistant in the NALC Ministry Office in May 2011. She later became the Administrative Assistant for Missions where she provided valuable administrative support to Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, and the Missions Office. She had a variety of duties in that position, including contacting and updating the status of over 50 NALC mission congregations, planning fall and spring conferences, working with the grant applications, and coordinating speaking and travel arrangements for Pastor Buba, both domestic and international.

“Rachel was a gift from God at just the right time. As we established a new office with a General Secretary and Mission Director on the road and the Bishop functioning from his home in Pennsylvania, Rachel quickly became the voice and heart of the NALC at our offices in Ohio. She embraced and articulated our values in her words and actions. In the midst of a multitude of questions and shifting expectations, she responded with encouragement and compassion,



Rachel and Neil Sosebee and their children, Henry and Lucy.

demonstrating her heart for ministry and her faith in Christ. Her ability to adapt was apparent with monthly revisions to her job description. She not only understood and accepted her context but took every opportunity to offer encouragement and support to our staff. We are indeed grateful for her faithful service. As she leaves this position we pray she will find additional opportunities to use her gifts and abilities to bless the NALC as she and her family move to their new home in North Carolina,” said NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

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