

Congregations ratify resolution to join Lutheran World Federation

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church have ratified the decision of the 2012 NALC Convocation for the NALC to apply for membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

The Aug. 16-17 Convocation approved a resolution seeking full membership in the LWF by a two-thirds majority. As of the Feb. 17 deadline to vote, 167 congregations voted to ratify the Convocation's action, while 61 congregations voted not to ratify the decision.

The NALC constitution requires all major decisions by a Convocation to be ratified by congregations before going into effect. The LWF resolution was supported by 73 percent of the 228 congregations that voted. It needed to receive a two-thirds majority of the congregations voting for the decision to be ratified. Congregations have six months to vote on whether to ratify a Convocation action.

The application for membership will now be sent to the LWF for consideration.

"Over these past six months our congregations have engaged in prayerful discernment, investigation, consultation, and debate concerning the resolution to pursue membership in the Lutheran World Federation. I deeply appreciate and understand the concerns expressed by those on both sides," NALC Bishop John Bradosky wrote in a Feb. 22 letter to congregations.

"While the decision to apply for membership in the LWF is completed, it is not the end of the process, but the beginning," Bishop Bradosky said. "There is much work to be done in the application process, and no one can assume the outcome of that

process. I do want to assure you, however, that as we move forward in our interaction with LWF leaders, we will be diligent in our commitment to faithfully represent the NALC without equivocation or accommodation. We will stand firmly on our values, and the authority of the Word of God for all matters of faith and life, unashamed of the consequences for doing so."

The Lutheran World Federation describes itself as "a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition." It includes church bodies in 79 countries. Ninety-five percent of the world's 74 million Lutherans are members of the 143 church bodies that are members of the LWF.

In addition to noting the NALC's commitment to ecumenical relationships, the resolution notes that encouragement from church leaders in Africa is a significant reason for the NALC to join the LWF. "Our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Africa, especially in Ethiopia and Tanzania, desire the full membership of the NALC in the Lutheran World Federation to be an orthodox, confessional North American partner within LWF," the resolution states.

Some NALC members have expressed concerns that because the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are members of the LWF, the NALC would implicitly be in a formal relationship with those church bodies through the LWF. However, the resolution sets forth the understandings on church-to-church fellowship with which the NALC would seek membership in the LWF: "Full membership within the Lutheran World Federation does not require, nor imply, altar and

Bishop addresses LWF decision

Dear Disciples of Jesus Christ in the North American Lutheran Church:

After previous Convocations recommended that the NALC apply for membership in the Lutheran World Federation, our 2012 Convocation voted by the required two-thirds majority to pursue membership in the LWF. The decision to send this resolution to our congregations for ratification was not an easy decision. Many of us were concerned about maintaining the integrity of our Biblical and doctrinal values even as we remembered the painful, but necessary, steps we took in forming the North American Lutheran Church.

Over these past six months our congregations have engaged in prayerful discernment, investigation, consultation, and debate concerning the resolution to pursue membership in the Lutheran World Federation. I deeply appreciate and understand the concerns expressed by those on both sides. The voting has now concluded, and I share with you the results of your deliberation and decision. A total of 228 congregations have voted. Of those, 167 voted “Yes,” and 61 congregations voted “No.” In order to fulfill the required two-thirds approval for adoption, 152 “Yes” votes were needed. The total “Yes” votes have exceeded the two-thirds level and the resolution is adopted.

A major concern in our deliberation was the section in the LWF constitution which declares that all LWF churches are in altar and pulpit fellowship. What altar and pulpit fellowship means is not defined by the LWF constitution. In our preliminary conversations in the application process we were assured that, for the LWF, altar and pulpit fellowship is “a goal — a hope, but not a reality.” At the present time, there is no clarity with regard to this term. The application process with LWF will seek to gain such clarity, with insight gained from our Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine. Moving forward in the process will be determined by such clarity.

It is important to note that within the last month, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has decided to sever its relationship with the ELCA and the Church of Sweden. In spite of EECMY’s severed relationship with these church-bodies, EECMY remains firmly committed to membership in the LWF. President Idosa of the EECMY serves as chair of the East Africa



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Section of the LWF. He and other African church leaders maintain that the ELCA and the Church of Sweden are the ones who are guilty of creating division within the LWF. Both he and the EECMY intend to retain membership in the LWF. This situation provides further confirmation that the goal of fellowship within the LWF is a hope and goal but not a reality. Their participation and membership in the LWF now provides a template for our own. I personally believe that we in the NALC should do all we can to stand with our Ethiopian brothers and sisters. The risks they have taken for the sake of the Word of God deserve our deepest respect and admiration. Through our application for membership, we will make clear our support for the positions of the EECMY.

It is also important to note that the Lutheran World Federation is what its name indicates: a federation of churches, but not a church. Joining such a federation is not a shortcut to the church-to-church processes we already have in place for establishing such relationships. We will follow our constitution and polity with regard to membership in the LWF.

While the decision to apply for membership in the LWF is completed, it is not the end of the process, but the beginning. Now that we have spoken through a two-thirds vote of our Convocation and a two-thirds ratifying vote of our congregations, we will begin the process of applying for LWF membership. There is much work to be done in the application process, and no one can assume the outcome of that process. I do want to assure you, however, that as we move forward in our interaction with LWF leaders, we will be diligent in our commitment to faithfully represent the NALC without equivocation or accommodation. We will stand firmly on our values, and the authority

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Ethiopian Lutherans end relationship with ELCA and Church of Sweden

EECMY to continue as member of Lutheran World Federation

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus — the second largest Lutheran church body in the world — has terminated its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Church of Sweden.

The decision was finalized by a unanimous vote of the EECMY General Assembly held Jan. 27- Feb. 2 in Addis Ababa, which ratified a July 2012 action by the EECMY Church Council.

The break was caused by the 2009 actions of both the ELCA and the Church of Sweden (CoS) to deviate from Biblical teaching on marriage and same-sex sexual relationships.

The EECMY “immediately reacted against and earnestly requested for reconsideration of their decisions,” the EECMY explained in a Feb. 11 statement. But the ELCA and CoS refused to reconsider their departure from traditional Christian teaching. “As a result of this, the EECMY was compelled to engage with an intentional theological reflection and deeper search of Scripture as well as legal and cultural perspectives of the Ethiopian context. The outcome of this study was critically reviewed and taken as the basis for the decisions of the 6th Church Council — which resulted in the writing of a Pastoral Call to the two churches to reverse their decisions, lest the EECMY would be forced to terminate her relationship,” the statement said.

The Ethiopian Lutherans called on both churches to reconsider their actions in the light of the clear teaching of Scripture. They told the ELCA and the CoS that if they did not return to Biblical teaching on marriage and sexual ethics, the EECMY would be forced to end its partnership relationship with them.

They gave the two church bodies a one-year formal notification of the proposed action to end the relationship. “Sadly, the repeated endeavors of the EECMY on this line, failed to obtain the expected

positive response from the two churches,” the statement said.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the second largest Lutheran church body in the world with 5.8 million members. It is also one of the fastest growing Lutheran churches in the world.

The EECMY entered a full communion relationship with the North American Lutheran Church in 2012. The EECMY will continue to be a member of the Lutheran World Federation, and its leaders have strongly encouraged the NALC to join the LWF.

NALC Bishop John Bradosky affirmed the actions of the EECMY in a Feb. 14 letter to the Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa, President of the EECMY. “It is my goal to make you aware of the deep respect we have for what you have accomplished. We realize you have done so at great risk. Regardless of cost you have been willing, for the sake of Christ, to bear the cross and endure whatever hardship may result. Your brothers and sisters in the North American Lutheran Church are praying for you, grateful for our relationship and willing to walk with you into the future, creating new ways to mutually strengthen one another in mission and ministry,” he wrote.

“While this process must have been very difficult, time consuming and emotionally draining, the result was a strong and profound witness to the authority of the Word of God,” Bishop Bradosky said.

“Your bold statement expressed in un-equivocating terms assured all who read it that no amount of pressure, influence, or financial gain, would change your faith anchored in the absolute truth found only in the Word of God. This witness is moving like a tsunami wave around the world. People of faith are deeply encouraged and those who pursue false gospels are discouraged by your decisions. The Holy Spirit is using your witness in ways that far exceed your expectations,” he said.

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Congregations ratify resolution to join LWF

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pulpit fellowship with all member Lutheran bodies. ... It is a present reality that certain member Lutheran bodies within the Lutheran World Federation understand themselves to be in impaired communion with certain other member Lutheran bodies” because of doctrinal differences.

“It is important to note that within the last month, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has decided to sever its relationship with the ELCA and the Church of Sweden. In spite of EECMY’s severed relationship with these church bodies, EECMY remains fully committed to membership in the LWF,” Bishop Bradosky said.

“President Idosa of the EECMY serves as chair of the East Africa Section of the LWF. He and other African church leaders maintain that the ELCA and

the Church of Sweden are the ones who are guilty of creating divisions within the LWF. Both he and the EECMY intend to retain membership in the LWF. This situation provides further confirmation that the goal of fellowship within the LWF is a hope and goal but not a reality. Their participation and membership in LWF now provides a template for our own,” Bishop Bradosky said.

“I personally believe that we in the NALC should do all we can to stand with our Ethiopian brothers and sisters. The risks they have taken for the sake of the Word of God deserve our deepest respect and admiration. Through our application for membership, we will make clear our support for the positions of the EECMY,” he added.

The EECMY is the second largest Lutheran church body in the world with 5.8 million members. The NALC is in a full communion relationship with the EECMY.

EECMY

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The Church of Sweden is officially the largest Lutheran church body in the world with 6.5 million members, but a very small percentage of its members worship regularly. The ELCA has about 4 million members.

“Being cognizant of the fruitful and long-standing relationships with the ELCA and the CoS, the EECMY expresses her very deep and sincere appreciation of their historic contributions in God’s mission. We will continue to pray that, one day, the relationships will be restored,” the EECMY statement said.

In a press release following the decision, ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson said the EECMY action was “deeply troubling.” Even though the ELCA has officially changed its teaching and practice, Bishop Hanson noted that some ELCA members share the Biblical understanding of sexuality expressed by the EECMY. “Our own statement on human sexuality acknowledges that the position held by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is also held by members of the ELCA. We are not of one mind,” he said.

Bishop Bradosky

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of the Word of God for all matters of life and faith, unashamed of the consequences for doing so.

We move forward as a church, affirming our polity that the primary focus for decision-making, mission, and ministry resides in the congregation. We will also pursue participating in structures that express our identity as a part of the universal Christian community. Regardless of the results of our application to join the LWF, our commitment to that end remains unchanged.

During this Lenten season of repentance, reflection and renewal, may God grant us the presence of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as we seek to be His one body — united in faith, discipleship and mission!

In Christ,

Bishop John F. Bradosky

NALC Bishop responds to Papal resignation

NALC Bishop John Bradosky's response to the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI:

We were saddened to receive news of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, which will be effective Feb. 28, 2013. Although our prayer is that the resignation of the Pope is not due to serious or increasing health issues, we acknowledge that he has spoken often about his intention to resign if and when he is physically incapable of fulfilling the Petrine office as spiritual leader of the world's almost 1.2 billion Roman Catholics.

We offer our sincere appreciation for his faithful preaching and teaching, especially with regard to the challenge of secularism, the Biblical institution of marriage and the sanctity of human life. The whole Church of Jesus Christ has benefitted from Benedict's commitment to a new form of ecumenism that is not based solely on theological similarities and differences, but founded on a mutual commitment to strengthen our witness to the world — a world that is pulling our people away from the Church with an enticing array of false gospels. We will miss his public witness as we continue to pray for good health and vitality for this humble servant of Christ and his Church.

Our meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in September 2011 was a significant occurrence in the life of the new North American Lutheran Church. We had been invited to meet with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, but were also given the opportunity to be received by the Pope at his weekly Wednesday audience. He had just returned from his pilgrimage to Germany, the land of Luther and spoke freely about his visit during his address. Being a German and a theologian with a deep appreciation for Luther and his theological understanding, during his pilgrimage to Germany Pope Benedict said:

"For Luther theology was not mere academic pursuit, but the struggle for oneself, which in turn was a struggle for and with God. How do I receive the grace of God? The fact that this question was the driving force of his whole life never ceases to make a deep impression on me. For who is actually concerned about this today — even among Christians."



Pope Benedict XVI greets the NALC delegation during their September 2011 visit to the Vatican. The NALC delegation included, from left, Pastor David Wendel, Bishop John Bradosky and Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring.

Benedict went on to point out that belief in a magnanimous God who cares nothing about sin and evil in our contemporary culture is working destruction in our world and watering down the faith of those in the Church. "Luther's burning question must once more become our question too," said Pope Benedict.

We should also mention that we are deeply grateful for his support for the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This Declaration, approved by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation, signed October 31, 1999, made a significant contribution toward resolving one of the most important issues between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities of faith. It is commonly understood that it was then Cardinal Ratzinger who was instrumental in completing the approval process for this joint document.

Though there are theological issues that continue to separate us, we must always be encouraged by the many ways in which we share in the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We will miss this pope who, more than any other, has been a friend of Luther and Lutherans. We pray that the next Roman Pontiff will be equally committed to ecumenism in general and Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations in particular, especially as we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

'On Being the Church in These Precarious Times' is theological conference focus

The North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE have announced the topic of their joint 2013 Theological Conference, "On Being the Church in These Precarious Times." The conference will take place Aug. 6-7 at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pa. The theological conference will be part of a week of activities with the Lutheran CORE Convocation preceding on Aug. 6 and the NALC Convocation following on Aug. 8-9.

Organizing the theological conference is the Rev. Dr. Carl Braaten, professor emeritus of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and former executive director of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.

Prof. Braaten says of the theme, "(German) Lutheran Bishop Otto Dibelius called the 20th century the 'Century of the Church.' Yet 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."

Together with many Christian denominations, Lutherans have experienced significant division and disunity in recent years. Issues that have caused such turmoil are the authority and understanding of Scripture, the name of the Triune God, human sexuality and marriage, as well as abortion and the value of human life. In light of this turmoil, Lutheran CORE and the North American Lutheran Church are committed to the renewal of Lutheranism and Christianity in North America.

NALC Bishop John Bradosky said, "'Precarious' is an appropriate word choice to describe these times and our culture. Precarious means 'dangerously unstable or insecure, likely to fall or collapse, dependent on circumstances beyond one's control.' When the church, as institution merely follows the 'times' and absorbs the culture, it also finds itself in a precarious position. However, the Church as the Body of Christ is neither unstable nor insecure. It is neither likely to fall nor collapse, when it depends completely on Christ and remains under His authority and rule. The presenters at this year's theological conference will

certainly deal with the real and present dangers we face, but will provide us with powerful insight, direction and encouragement, renewing the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus."

In addition to Prof. Braaten, presenters at the conference will be the Rev. Dr. James A. Nestingen, professor emeritus of church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.; the Rev. Dr. Frank Senn, liturgical scholar and pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Evanston, Ill., as well as Senior of the Society of the Holy Trinity; the Rev. Dr. Stephan Turnbull, Senior Pastor of First Lutheran Church in White Bear Lake, Minn.; the Rev. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, editor of *Lutheran Forum* and assistant research professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France; Dr. David Yeago, professor emeritus of systematic theology at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C., and the Rev. Dr. Nathan Howard Yoder, pastor of St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Maiden, N.C.

"We are excited to offer solid theological reflection for both pastors and laity on such a timely topic," said the Rev. Steve Shipman, director of Lutheran CORE.

"There is probably no event like this for Lutherans in North America, maybe even the world, which packs so much content into a day and a half."

This will be the fourth theological conference sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE. The two bodies are committed to serious theological reflection and see this conference as essential to their shared ministry to Lutherans, as well as other Christians concerned for the health and vitality of the Church in these precarious times.

Inviting all concerned Christians to participate in this important conference, Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring of the NALC said, "I am looking forward to this year's theological conference. The nature and mission of the Church remain core issues for all Christians, including all Lutherans. I anticipate provocative presentations and thoughtful conversation during this year's conference."

Watch the NALC and Lutheran CORE websites for more information on the conference.

Superstorm Sandy Recovery

Prayer, Partnership and Patience

St. Andrew By The Sea, a NALC congregation in Atlantic City, N.J., not only sits geographically centered in the ongoing recovery from the Oct. 29 storm but has taken a central role in the organization and unfolding of the long term rebuilding process. A founding church of the Atlantic City Long Term Recovery Group (ACLTRG), a non-profit partnership of faith-based communities and national community-based volunteer groups, their lead pastor serves as vice-chair of the organization.

Veteran relief workers from other major U.S. natural disasters as well as FEMA and national relief agencies all report the long-term rebuilding of homes and communities post-disaster happens essentially thanks to churches, synagogues and mosques taking the lead and caring for people. But almost nothing prior can prepare a church for the challenges and stress of long term recovery!

Pastor David McGettigan of St. Andrew reports the two greatest challenges three months post storm are case management (identifying and assessing the needs of residents) and volunteer housing (sufficient clean, safe temporary housing for the volunteer groups who are pledging to come from around the country). "We have a satisfactory early structure in place to engage in construction, we have promises of hundreds of volunteers beginning in March with college spring breaks, and we have early generous donations from churches, but encouraging residents to ask for help and reveal their needs, and finding places to house volunteers is agonizing," he said.

Reluctance to self-disclose is explained by veteran workers in many ways — embarrassment at their inability to care for themselves, feelings of being overwhelmed and paralyzed by anxiety, absence from their homes while still in temp housing, fear of immigration issues if the government is involved, and, ironically the ongoing presence of FEMA. In discussion with experts in the field, "we are told to be patient. As soon as FEMA leaves — currently scheduled for March — people will realize the federal government will not be directly involved in

their rebuilding and the phones will start ringing," Pastor McGettigan said.

For volunteer housing in the busy spring break month of March, barring other options, St. Andrew By The Sea will open its sanctuary and, if needed, its entire facility to house all the volunteers necessary. For late spring and summer when they expect 200+ volunteers a week and have promised to assist with volunteer housing with other damaged communities in the area, the ACLTRG is working with the city and school board of Atlantic City to take over a closed school building. Pastor McGettigan asked for prayers that this would be possible.

Progress, however, is apparent. Last Saturday about 100 volunteers organized by the ACLTRG canvassed large portions of the city door-to-door and have begun to bring residents in need to the Long Term Recovery Center. Besides two homes St. Andrew Church is working on personally, the NALC effort has taken responsibility this week for three additional homes screened and assigned by the ACLTRG. As work begins more details will follow but basically these are elderly folks who have a small apartment in the first level of their own home which provides meager additional income and houses other needy members of the community. Because this is considered a "business" they qualify for much less government assistance.

As March unfolds, St. Andrew and NALC Disaster Response will take responsibility for additional homes that otherwise might go unserved without insurance or personal means to rebuild.

"Thank you for your partnership, keep us in your prayers, and most of all be patient as we seek to allocate NALC and other congregational financial gifts and volunteer efforts in the wisest and most efficient manner to those who have the most need. And a final word of thanks for the ongoing financial support NALC Disaster Response has received from our generous congregations," Pastor McGettigan said.

Sudanese refugee's dream becomes reality

'Lost Boy' to build theological college in South Sudan

It started as a vision, planted in the heart of one of the Lost Boys of Sudan.

Coming to the United States from a refugee camp in Kenya, Matthew Riak earned master's degrees in Christian education and theology and served as pastor to Sudanese congregations in North Carolina and Michigan. But his heart still beat with love for the people back in Sudan.

In September 2012, Pastor Riak, newly commissioned as a missionary by the North American Lutheran Church, went to South Sudan with a vision for developing Christian leaders who would serve in their congregations and their communities and so help build up the Kingdom of God.

He envisioned an institute which would offer advanced Christian education for people not able to leave their jobs, their families, and their communities to attend a university for four years. There is a large number of people who are already serving as leaders in their communities or who have been identified as potential leaders who are eager to learn more about leadership.

The vision for St. Luke's Theological College is a college which will offer intensive classes three times a year in the areas of theology, leadership



Sign at future site of St. Luke's Theological College.



Pastor Matthew and Achol Riak with their son, Emmanuel.

or management. Some of these classes will be taught by Sudanese professors. Some of them will be taught by lecturers from other countries who spend two weeks teaching as volunteer, guest professors.

When Matthew shared his vision with a group of leaders in South Sudan, Bishop Nathaniel Garang Anyieth stood up and said, "Matthew, do not think that this is *your* vision. This is *God's* vision. We also have it. And now your experience will help us to shape it."

When South Sudan gained independence in July of 2011, the new nation brought rich opportunities for the church to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially in the area of education. The South Sudanese people are longing for the education that had been denied them for so many years.

As windows and doors open, the opportunities and the needs loom large. But when the Holy Spirit shares a vision, God also calls people to step out in faith to make that vision a reality.

St. Luke's Theological College will be an indigenous institution, owned and governed by Christian leaders in South Sudan. In October, 20 leaders from South

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Sudan, including Bishop Nathaniel and Stephen Par Kuol, Minister of Education for Jonglei State, formed a Board of Governors.

The South Sudanese government has given a prime piece of property in Bor which will become the base of operations for the college. This land has been cleared and secured with a fence, a gate and a sign. St. Luke's now has a visible presence in South Sudan. The Ministry of Education has approved St. Luke's Theological College to award certificates, diplomas, and degrees in the three areas of leadership, management and theology.

St. Luke's will be a self-sustaining institution, whose financial needs will be met primarily through tuition and contributions from people in South Sudan. A cadre of young, American-educated Sudanese teachers committed their time and expertise to administration and to teaching classes. Already 75 students have enrolled in introductory classes which will be taught by these Sudanese teachers. It is their first step toward doing advanced study and preparing themselves for leadership roles in church and community.

It will take some time before St. Luke's becomes fully self-sustaining. During this initial phase, congregations of the NALC can be a part of this exciting new mission by helping to cover some of



A meeting of the St. Luke's Theological College Board of Governors in Bor, South Sudan.

the start-up costs. Support for the college is also coming from Leadstar University, a Christian college based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which is providing curriculum and teaching modules and other material support.

You can learn more about this emerging mission by visiting St. Luke's Theological College on Facebook. E-mail StLukesTheologicalCollege@gmail.com to become a prayer partner for Matthew and St. Luke's.

You can support to the work of the college financially by sending contributions to: St. Luke's Theological College; 3215 Four Mile Road NE; Grand Rapids, MI 49525.

Nominations requested for NALC leaders

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are encouraged to nominate individuals to serve on the NALC's Executive Council, Court of Adjudication, and 2014 Nominating Committee.

The 2013 NALC Convocation Aug. 8-9 in Pittsburgh, Pa., will elect one lay person and one pastor to four-year terms on the NALC Executive Council and two members of the Court of Adjudication to four-year terms.

The Convocation will also elect the members of the 2014 Nominating Committee. Names of those

recommended for the Nominating Committee will be forwarded to the NALC Executive Council which nominates individuals to be elected to the Nominating Committee by the Convocation.

All nominees must be members of a NALC congregation. All ordained nominees must be NALC pastors.

Pastor David Baer of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Whitewood, S.D., is chair of the Nominating Committee. He can be reached at 605-269-2104 or djbaer@rushmore.com.

ELW: Don't Buy It!

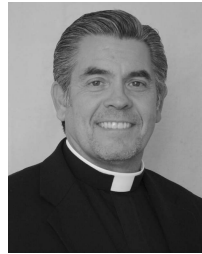
This edition of Ministry Matters is in response to comments I've heard at different times and in different places. First, I've been surprised to hear NALC folks saying, "Our congregation is hoping to raise money to purchase the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*."

I heard several such comments around the time that I was listening to Prof. Jim Nestingen speaking at our Congregational Renewal Event in Columbus. He was speaking about having our Lutheran Confessions shape our worship and our worship reflect our Confessions. An example of what happens when this is not the case, Prof. Nestingen said, is the new ELCA worship book, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW). "I hate that cranberry book!" he said. And he continued by pointing out the Confessional deficiencies in ELW.

Now I will admit, at this point I thought our pastors and congregations were all well aware of the problems in ELW and that none of our congregations would consider introducing it, if they hadn't already. I thought additional comments about ELW would be overkill. However, hearing that some pastors and congregations are still considering purchase of the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* book, I decided at that moment that something needs to be said in the NALC about the so-called "cranberry book" before any more pastors and congregations think of buying it!

We are well aware that some of our congregations have purchased and are using ELW. This is not to unfairly criticize or scold these congregations. Quite often, pastors share that they bought it because it was the new worship book of the church. As in the past, they trusted what was in it, even though it was approved by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly before it was seen. In the past, Lutheran worship books were critically prepared and theologically evaluated. The materials were reviewed by church-wide meetings once and often twice, being regularly sent back for changes that would guarantee theological and Confessional integrity.

While there were review panels which received proposed ELW materials and made suggestions, I have yet to find one panelist who made recommendations which led to revisions. Church



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

musicians, theologians, and liturgical scholars served on these panels, expressed serious concerns, and believe their suggestions were ignored.

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, an NALC pastor and theologian states, "I was on the review panel for hymnody. There were 12 people appointed to make the decisions and 12 of us in an outer circle who were asked to write reviews. I wrote reviews of approximately 800 hymns. As I mentioned, they didn't listen to me, but then they could deceptively say that they had listened to all the voices."

Many pastors and congregations have been shocked to see the changes in ELW which are so radical — completely without theological and Confessional foundation — leaving the book, to say the least, less than orthodox as a Lutheran worship resource. All should be alerted to and aware of these problems to prevent introduction of a worship book that is not a trustworthy Lutheran book, Confessionally, liturgically and theologically.

What are some of the difficulties with ELW?

The Rev. Dr. Frank C. Senn, our foremost Lutheran liturgical scholar today, says, "The problem with ELW is its consistent suppression of the Trinitarian Name of God. This makes it a sub-orthodox resource."

NALC Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring agrees, stating that one of the serious deficiencies is with regard to use of the Trinitarian formula, or lack thereof. Bishop Spring says, "At numerous points throughout the liturgies, the classic Trinitarian formula is juxtaposed with another version as an option. See, for example, 'Thanksgiving for Baptism' (page 97), the absolution

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(page 96), the apostolic greeting (page 96), the benediction (page 114). One is free to use either version. Pastor Scott Grorud said to me once, ‘Since when is the Holy Trinity an option for Lutherans?’”

Pastor Schifrin provides another serious example. She says, “In the new Eucharistic Prayers, there is a move away from the classic way that Christians have prayed to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Father language is avoided in some but not all of the prayers, but a clear example is in the adaptation of the Eucharistic Prayer that was first used in the Occasional Services book and then in *With One Voice* Leader’s Edition (pages 23 and 37, second column). In ELW the Epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit) and Great Doxology are replaced with an adaptation of a post-communion prayer from LBW in which the Epiclesis and Doxology are merged so that the word *Father* is not included.”

While such avoidance of the Trinitarian name — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — is rampant throughout ELW, it is seen prominently in the decision to rewrite and paraphrase the psalms. When asked whether Bishop Bradosky wished to comment on the difficulties in ELW, he simply responded, “where would I begin?” He went on to say he would begin with the psalms! In ELW, the psalms are changed to avoid referring to God as “He” by changing the text of the psalms to “you.”

This is described by ELW as “emending” the psalms, which means “to make corrections by editing.” The historic and accurate wording of the psalms have been “corrected by editing” so that those using ELW never have to use the supposedly “incorrect” pronouns “He” or “Him” when referring to God. Bishop Bradosky writes, “The attempts to vacate the psalms of gender reference is driven by politically-correct gender neutrality and not proper translation. It is testimony to an arrogant approach to the Word of God in which both the translation and interpretation of the texts is a matter of manipulation in support of a larger authority — the agenda.”

This is the same rationale for providing an alternative invocation to worship. Rather than beginning worship only in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, you may choose to say, “Blessed be the Holy Trinity ...” Robert Jenson, in his lecture on the holy name of

God at the 2010 Lutheran CORE Theological Conference, said, “No substitution for ‘Father’ or ‘Son’ or ‘Spirit’ can be faithful. One simple reason is that we have a name for God at all only because the Lord mandated this one. It is directly revealed, if anything at all is, and is not subject to our better opinion. ... By making the divine name optional, the ELCA’s new book of worship (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) departs from the faith” (*Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism*, page 118).

Bishop Spring notes this avoidance of addressing God as Father as particularly problematic in the Prayers of the Day. He writes, “There is an intentional effort at neutralizing the person of God, especially omitting all masculine references. At one point, I read over all the prayers, all 250 of them, and only eight were addressed to God the Father (and these were for rather minor observances, Epiphany 7, and some minor ‘occasions’). Also notice that the concluding doxology in all the prayers has been changed. It used to be ‘through Jesus Christ, your *Son* our Lord.’ In ELW the formula is ‘through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord’ — an obvious and successful attempt at removing the *Sonship* of Jesus, as if He wasn’t God become *man*, the only begotten *Son* of God.”

Sadly, ELW reflects the ideologies prevalent in the denomination which created it. Pastor Senn adds, “These ideologies are reflected as much in hymn texts as in liturgical texts. For example, you won’t find ‘All Creatures of our God and King’ in the index of first lines because it has been changed to ‘All Creatures, Worship God Most High’ in order to avoid the word ‘*king*’ and other terms that suggest ‘domination.’”

We could fill this newsletter with specific references to the unfaithful, unorthodox material in ELW. Other issues are: the Prayer of Thanksgiving in Holy Baptism removes “through the flood, (God) condemned the wicked” and replaces it with “through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family...”, removing the Biblical truth that the flood was condemnation upon sin (see Genesis 6:11-13); the creeds were rewritten without ecumenical consensus, the second article of the Apostle’s Creed itself making the book unacceptable, as the wording is changed to “Jesus Christ, *God’s* only Son” to avoid saying “His”, and “descended to the dead” replacing “hell”, both suggesting that this book prefers to do away with *sin* altogether, which also does away with *hell*.

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It's also worth adding a word or two about "the Word" being read in our congregations. A common question asked is, "does the NALC have an approved translation of Scripture?" The answer is, no. It may be said, however, that many are using the newer "English Standard Version" (ESV), which claims to have 85 percent of the beloved Revised Standard Version (RSV) texts, although they have removed much of the beautiful, poetic language so familiar to most of us. Is there any more beautiful passage in the Bible than, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet" (Psalm 119:105)?

So, it should be said that some congregations are returning to the beloved RSV — the Revised Standard Version. You can find it available online for no more than \$20 — download it and almost any church secretary or computer-savvy pastor or lay-person can follow the LBW or Revised Common lectionaries and create your own lesson sheets in 30 minutes or less! Sola Publishing provides ESV lessons sheets for free, following the LCMS lectionary. Go to www.solapublishing.org and look for free worship resources.

It should be said that many of our congregations have moved away from the New Revised Standard Version being used for Augsburg Fortress lectionary materials. Why? The NRSV is arguably "agenda-driven" in many of the same ways listed above. Similarly, many have stopped using the Augsburg Fortress "Sundays and Seasons" online resources for the same reasons — you have to take too much time reviewing and revising these materials to remove the agenda-driven materials that are there.

The bottom line: ELW does not support and encourage the theology of the NALC which is Christ-Centered and Traditionally-Grounded in the truth of Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions and what is called "the Great Tradition" of the western Church. Since at least the fifth century, Christians have considered the maxim, "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" as the guard and protection for worship and belief. In other words, the words of worship and praise must reflect the words of belief, and similarly, the words of belief must shape the words we use in worship and praise. What we say in worship over time will change our beliefs, and our beliefs will naturally be reflected in what we say in worship — and how we worship. This is why our worship forms are not *adiaphora*, not

to be dismissed easily as unimportant to what we believe and confess. Rather, our beliefs must be reflected in worship, and our worship must reflect properly our belief. No wonder that when names for God in Lutheran worship began to change, Lutherans were also losing their grounding and foundation Biblically and theologically. ELW reflects and is part of that loss of Biblical, theological and confessional integrity in Lutheran worship. So ...

For those congregations which might be thinking about purchasing ELW — "Don't buy it!" Continue to use the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, one of the best Lutheran resources ever developed among Lutherans. We have negotiated with Augsburg Fortress for them to continue printing additional LBW resources. In addition to the pew edition, they will also publish the accompaniment edition, the Minister's Desk Edition and the *Occasional Services* book. These will be available through their online store. We have also begun a conversation about the possibility of an LBW second edition, but we are far away from such a reality.

In addition to LBW, we would also encourage congregations to take a look at the new *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB) published by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. One objection some will have is the continuation of using "one holy *Christian* and apostolic Church" in place of the historic and ecumenical "one holy *catholic* and apostolic Church" in the creed. If you purchase their on-line "Service Builder" program, you can make that change easily before printing. LSB is a solid Lutheran worship resource, theologically and Confessionally sound.

Finally, what to do if your congregation already has purchased ELW? You might consider giving them away to a financially strapped ELCA congregation — trading them for their used LBW's! Otherwise, use only the options in ELW which affirm the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paste older versions of the creeds inside the covers. Use the baptismal rite from LBW, together with all other occasional services (installations, recognitions of ministries, burial of the dead, etc). Certainly, there are some hymns, songs and resources that may be useful in ELW, but review them with a critical eye, being sure that what is being sung proclaims Biblical truth and is in accordance with our Lutheran Confessions. If you've already purchased ELW, the old adage holds — "buyer beware!" If you haven't purchased it, don't buy it!

Not forgetting the essentials of our faith

Even though as an NALC pastor I am no longer on the ELCA clergy roster, I still read and (usually) enjoy *The Lutheran* magazine. The cover story for the January 2013 issue was “The Shrinking Church.” This article addressed the recent losses experienced by mainline Protestants in general and the ELCA in particular.

In the introduction to this issue the editor, Daniel J. Lehmann, wrote that this particular cover story was a “straightforward overview” of the ELCA, and that it represented “an absolutely necessary recognition of (the ELCA’s) declining membership and worship attendance.” Lehmann then wrote, “Sure the statistics are sobering, but you can’t launch revitalization efforts without acknowledging the current situation.”

Very true. Needless to say, after reading Lehmann’s comments, I then read the cover story with great interest. The article, written by Nicole Radziszewski, included the following “sobering” statistics:

+ Nearly 30 percent of ELCA churches had an average worship attendance of fewer than 50 people back in 2010. (It is fewer now.)

+ From 2003 to 2011 worship attendance in the ELCA declined by 26 percent.

+ From 2009 to 2010 ELCA membership declined by 5.9 percent, *the sharpest rate of decline among mainline denominations*. This issue of *The Lutheran* also reported — in a sidebar entitled “ELCA Statistics” — that in just 2011 alone the ELCA had a 5 percent drop in membership.

I have been carefully following ELCA annual statistics since the mid-1980s. And while the ELCA has almost always been in numerical decline, what’s different now is its new status as having “the sharpest rate of decline among mainline denominations.”

For most of the last 25 years denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ (UCC) have had a significantly greater rate of decline than the ELCA. So as I read this story I was hoping for an explanation regarding the ELCA new status as *first in decline* among mainline church bodies. But the



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

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only explanation offered was the usual demographic changes and challenges faced by all mainline denominations.

So what was missing? The acknowledgment — anywhere in this article or in the editor’s introduction — that the ELCA has had over 700 congregations leave as a direct result of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly policy changes. And *no* mention that this particular exodus has had a dramatic impact on the ELCA’s recent statistics. Why no acknowledgment of what has been — at least for the ELCA — an *unprecedented* exodus of congregations? My guess is that to admit the impact this controversy has had would mean — by implication — admitting that some of these losses would have been avoided if the new policies had not been instituted.

However, my irritation with this story has to do with much more than my conviction that the article did not meet up to editor Lehmann’s standard of a “straightforward overview.” As a parish pastor who accompanied his congregation through what was a very difficult and challenging process dealing with the consequences of the 2009 policy changes, this story struck me as disingenuous. And when I think of the collective pain experienced by not just the over 700 congregations who left, but also the additional 275 congregations that dealt with “failed” votes to leave, how can all that turmoil be ignored in an article on the “shrinking” ELCA?

Okay, I got *that* off my chest. What relevance does any of this have for Great Commission congregational evangelism? Just this: I believe one of many factors in the decline of mainline Protestant denominations is the perception that they no longer seem to represent a distinct, non-secular worldview.

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Scripture Readings and Sermon

The Liturgy of the Word follows the Entrance Rite and is followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharistic Meal. Three lessons from the Holy Scriptures are read, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and one from the four Gospels. In Cycle A, Matthew is read; in Cycle B, Mark; and in Cycle C, Luke. The Gospel of John is dispersed among the three-year cycle. In the Easter season, the First Lesson is taken from the Book of Acts rather than the Old Testament.

The three-year cycle of lessons ultimately derives from the Roman Catholic Church. The *Ordo Missionem Missae* was published in 1969 as a result of the Second Vatican Council. Protestant denominations revised and adopted this lectionary. In 1974, the Consultation on Church Union published a three-year cycle of lessons. In 1983, the Consultation on Common Texts published a harmonization of the many variants of the three-year lectionary. Then, in 1992, the Consultation produced the Revised Common Lectionary. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* of 1978 includes a version of the three-year lectionary. The *Lutheran Service Book* of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod provides a revision of the three-year lectionary found in *Lutheran Worship*.

The ancient Church did not possess a lectionary, which developed in the early Middle Ages. Before the appearance of the three-year cycle, the Lutheran church used the medieval one-year lectionary. The latter can be found in the *Common Service Book* and the *Service Book and Hymnal*. The one-year lectionary did not provide Old Testament lessons, but the rubrics of the *Common Service Book* permitted other lessons to be read before the Epistle. The *Service Book and Hymnal* added Old Testament lessons.

Following the reading of the lessons with the intervenient chants of a psalm and an alleluia verse, the pastor, ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, preaches the sermon. The term, *sermon*, comes from the Latin word, *sermo*, which means “talk or speech.” The sermon is also called the *homily*, a word derived from Greek. The preacher comments on one or more of the lessons.



Words on Worship

Pastor Michael G. Tavella

What is entailed in the writing of a sermon? First, the pastor must prayerfully study the Biblical texts better to understand their meaning. It is important that the preacher be aware of the context of the passage or *pericope*, a word literally meaning, “a cutting.” Context lends to an understanding of the meaning of a passage. The preacher should read the passages immediately before and after the sermon text. Other passages may also help in the interpretation.

Word studies can lend to an understanding of the text. It may be helpful to cite a Greek or Hebrew word in one’s sermon. The rule is: always explain the term to the congregation and make sure you know how to pronounce it properly.

It is important that the preacher explains the text well and applies the text to the everyday life of the congregation and the individual members of it. A basic question preachers should ask is, what significance does this text have for my congregation and its members? The sermon should help the congregation understand better the Christian faith and also help them apply the faith to their vocation in the world. The sermon may include a call to certain actions in society, but it is not to be a political or partisan speech. Leave this to the kingdom of the left hand.

How long should a sermon be? It should be long enough to get the message across to the people. If it turns out that the sermon would take 40 minutes, there is probably fat that can be trimmed. It has been my practice to deliver a one-point sermon which takes about 20 minutes.

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I usually write my sermons on Saturdays, which I do not advise. Though I am last minute, I often think about the texts days before the services.

The personal experience of the preacher and stories taken from literature can be helpful to illustrate the message. Too much dwelling on one's life may appear to others as self-centered, and it may be. Stories and poetry that apply to the text may aid in illustrating the point. But the best examples are from the Scriptures themselves.

Citations from the Church fathers, the theologians of the first seven centuries or so; later theologians; and Martin Luther can add substance and historical depth to the sermon. It is important that these extra-Biblical texts are thoroughly explained. I recently quoted from Advent sermons of Saint Bernard, Cistercian monk and Abbot of Clairvaux during the 12th Century in two of my own Advent sermons.

A visual aid may help make a point. Icons can be effective in this regard. Lutherans are not iconoclasts, image breakers. We appreciate religious art for sacred use. Our stained glass windows are beautiful testimonies of this point. On the Baptism of our Lord, the icon of Christ's Baptism may be a helpful illustration. The icons of the Holy Trinity, of the Nativity, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ may serve the preacher well in delivering the Word of God. It may be well to show the icon after worship in the narthex so that congregants can get a closer look. Other items may also serve as illustrations.

Citing hymns and the liturgy provides education regarding the worship of the Church. If the text is John 1, where John the Baptist exclaims "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," why not refer to the *Agnus Dei* in the liturgy and give the reason for its inclusion. If the text is Isaiah's vision of the heavenly beings in the Temple in Jerusalem, why not refer to the *Sanctus* in the Eucharistic liturgy and give an explanation of why it is used in this place.

Occasional humor in a sermon is good, if it illustrates the point being made. At all costs, off-color humor should be avoided. Humor may re-engage wandering minds with half closed eyes, or not. It should be remembered that people are geared to

give their attention to the computer, movies, and television and cell phone screens. Modern individuals are less inclined to give attention to a live oration. Humor, though, in a sermon is not for entertainment. It is tempting to try to amuse worshipers during a sermon in a distracted society, saturated with entertainment and celebrities. Humor should be used with great discretion. Pastors are not stand-up comics. The best attention getter is a substantive message.

The sermon is the Word of God insofar as it reflects the essential teachings of the Church. Leading congregants astray is a very serious matter. Pastors take ordination vows to uphold the Holy Scriptures and their primary witnesses, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions. The sermon should be orthodox.

Lutherans consider the Word of God to be Christ Himself, the preached Word, and the Holy Scriptures. In the sermon, Christ is made present to the congregation. The Word is rightly divided between the Law and the Gospel. A sermon must reflect this distinction. A helpful book on this matter is C.F. W. Walther's *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* along with, of course, the works of Martin Luther. My comments here are highly dependent on my reading of these works. The sermon should not end on the theme of Law or contain only the Law. The Law and Gospel are to be rightly divided and the proper sequence of Law, then Gospel, is to be maintained. The fruit of faith is a worthy topic in a sermon; but the preacher is to make clear that works without faith are sin as Paul writes and Luther stresses.

The preacher must always be aware that the sermon is an opportunity to teach Christian doctrine. Any deviation from essential teaching is a betrayal of the congregation. Pastors are not called to question the central teachings of the Church. To question a teaching is acceptable as a rhetorical device to make a point. Before the sermon ends, doubt should turn to affirmation. This is not to say that either the pastor or the Church has all the answers about the world and life. We certainly do not, nor should we pretend to have such competence. What we do have, though, is the revelation of God in the Scriptures that tells us all that is necessary for salvation. What are the essential doctrines? To remind ourselves, all we

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Words on Worship

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need to do is steep ourselves in the Holy Scriptures, refer to the creeds, and keep up on the contents of the *Book of Concord*.

Preaching the Word of God is an event that reveals the divine presence. God comes to us in His wrath and mercy so that we may repent of our sins and receive through faith the forgiveness of sins. All three Persons of the Trinity are involved in this event as are all three Persons in every act of God. The Son reveals the Father through the power of the Spirit within and among us. In the preached Word, the Lord gives to believers what He promises — the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation from the Father through His Son in the Holy Spirit.

Preaching is a fundamental way that the Lord reveals Himself to the world. The Holy Sacraments, God's Word with signs, are partners with the preached Word in the revelation of God to humanity. Through the Word, God's presence is made known. A land bereft of the Word is a spiritual desert. It is the land of death. But the coming of the Lord turns the desert into a garden.

*The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom:
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendor of our God.*

— *Isaiah 35:1-2 (NIV)*

This beautiful passage has an eschatological theme. In the sermon, our faith is renewed; our hope is refreshed as it awaits faith's fulfillment; and love flows from faith to our brothers and sisters in Christ and all our neighbors until, in the end, all that remains is the love of God (see 1 Corinthians 13) for us and in us.

Next time we will review the Daily Office.

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In pursuit of the Great Commission

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Ross Douthat, Christian author and *New York Times* columnist, wrote an article in the May 2012 issue of *Christianity Today*. The article was entitled "Rooting Out Bad Religion." After pointing out the heresies, among many Christian churches, of the "Prosperity Gospel" and conservative political partisanship, he addressed a particular problem among mainline denominations: abandoning Christian orthodoxy and confessionalism. He wrote, "There's evidence to suggest that churches that self consciously surrender big chunks of Christian teaching don't seem to thrive in the long run." (You might want to re-read that quote.)

I do not mention this quote as a critique of the ELCA in particular. I share it as a cautionary observation for all of us as Lutheran pastors and lay leaders. Don't be deceived. When it comes to fruitful evangelism, accommodating secular values that contradict clear Biblical principles is not only inappropriate, it's ineffective. It is incredibly naive to think that by simply jettisoning the more challenging or controversial tenets of our faith we will have the unchurched residents of our communities beating down our sanctuary doors, demanding church membership.

Part of the faithful proclamation of the Gospel involves presenting a clear vision of how the Christian worldview contrasts with and challenges a more secular (and typically self-serving) worldview. So let's be clear regarding this "In Pursuit of the Great Commission" column: No matter what practical, programmatic outreach strategies I might recommend, it is all predicated on an overriding assumption: That you will always strive to be faithful to the clear teachings of God's Word. Because without that overriding principle just about everything we do becomes, from an eternal perspective, relatively meaningless.

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