

God works through dogs to comfort returning Sandy Hook students

Editor's Note: *The North American Lutheran Church has chosen to work cooperatively with agencies including the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in addressing disasters. This is the story of the important work of an LCMS ministry in response to the tragic shootings in Newtown, Conn.*

By Kim Plummer Krull

Will Luther, Moses and Isaiah be at school, too?

Callers didn't necessarily ask about the K-9 Parish Comfort Dogs by their individual names, but that's who they meant when they contacted Sandy Hook Elementary School as classes prepared to resume on Thursday, Jan. 3, for the first time since the horrific shootings in Newtown, Conn.

"Calls were coming in that students were not going to come to school unless the Comfort Dogs were there, too," said Tim Hetzner, president of Lutheran Church Charities (LCC), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Recognized Service Organization that



Newtown High School counselor Deidre Croce poses with Comfort Dogs from Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) on Jan. 2 as students returned to class after Christmas break. "A lot of high school kids are hurting too," LCC President Tim Hetzner said. "Many have siblings at [Sandy Hook] and know the teachers there."

founded and coordinates the caring canine ministry.

Along with psychologists, the LCC Comfort Dogs were the only "outside group" invited to Sandy

Hook when the school re-opened at a new site, a former middle school in Monroe, Conn., about six miles from Newtown, Hetzner said.

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“Luther,” a Comfort Dog from Lutheran Church Charities, gives little “Isaiah,” a Comfort Dog-in-training, a lesson on how it’s done. Along with psychologists, the LCC Comfort Dogs were the only “outside group” invited to Sandy Hook when the school re-opened at a new site some six miles from Newtown. (Photos courtesy of Lutheran Church Charities)

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Ten dogs and their handlers arrived Jan. 1 in Newtown. It was a return trip for many of the four-legged disaster-response workers, who first visited the area the day after the Dec. 14 massacre of 20 first-graders and six adults.

“We got here before the kids and teachers started arriving,” said Hetzner, during a brief telephone interview in the school hallway.

Many students broke into smiles, he said, when they spotted the familiar furry faces. A psychologist and a Comfort Dog were working as a duo, spending time with groups of four or five students at a time.

The psychologists “helped the kids process what they’re going through,” Hetzner said, while the

huggable hounds added a gentle, calming presence.

“It’s absolutely astonishing how God works through the dogs,” Hetzner said.

Before visiting Sandy Hook, the Comfort Dogs also were invited to spend time with students at Newtown High School when classes resumed on Jan. 2.

“A lot of high-school kids are hurting, too,” Hetzner said. “Many have siblings at [Sandy Hook] and know the teachers there. Those kids are old enough to understand what happened.”

To watch a YouTube video from LCC, “Beauty Came Out of This Horror,” featuring an interview with Newtown High School counselor Deidre Croce, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfFHFfxEb8A. In the video, Croce talks

about how the dogs have helped comfort Newtown residents, especially the children.

After classes dismissed at Sandy Hook, the Comfort Dogs were scheduled for an evening stop at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Newtown. The community was invited to drop by, Hetzner said, much like the LCC group’s last visit immediately after the shootings. “Wherever we travel, we always stop at the Lutheran churches,” Hetzner said.

Also on tap were return visits to both the elementary and high schools throughout the school day on Friday, Jan. 4.

LCC started the Comfort Dog ministry in 2008 and often works closely with LCMS Disaster Response, including after the tornadoes in Joplin, Mo., and in the wake of Hurricane Sandy on the East Coast.

“What a blessing that this Lutheran ministry engages in mercy in the name of Christ, helping to ease suffering in its own unique way,” said the Rev. Glenn F. Merritt, director of LCMS Disaster Response.

Learn more about the LCC Comfort Dog ministry at www.lutheranchurchcharities.org.

Kim Plummer Krull is a freelance writer and a member of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Mo.

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Congregations consider whether to ratify proposal for NALC to join LWF

Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are now deciding whether the NALC should join the Lutheran World Federation.

The NALC's 2012 Convocation approved a resolution seeking full membership in the LWF. The resolution was approved by a two-thirds majority of the delegates to the Aug. 16-17 Convocation.

The resolution now must be ratified by a two-thirds majority of the 329 congregations that were members of the NALC at the time of the Convocation. The NALC constitution requires all major decisions by a Convocation to be ratified by congregations before going into effect. Congregations have six months to vote on whether to ratify a Convocation action.

As of Jan. 16, 127 congregations had voted to ratify the Convocation's action while 34 congregations had voted not to ratify the decision. Congregations must vote by Feb. 17. If a two-thirds majority of the congregations that vote ratify the resolution, the NALC will forward its application for membership to the LWF for consideration.

Congregations were sent information on the LWF resolution and additional documents to assist them in their deliberation on the proposal. The documents are also available on the NALC website.

The Convocation asked the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine to prepare a document to help congregations in their deliberation.

"We support and endorse membership by our church in the LWF. We see no theological or doctrinal impediment in this matter," the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine said in a memorandum addressed to congregations.

"We recognize that the LWF is not an absolutely perfect fit for us in the NALC. Some LWF churches differ with us on doctrinal and ethical issues. On balance, however, we feel that the positives outweigh the negatives," the commission said.

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 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.

"I understand the passion and emotions linked to our past that are also a part of our discussion regarding this issue. However, I have no doubt that you will make your decisions on the basis of prayerful deliberation and not your feelings. I trust the process that we have created, providing our congregations with the final decision. Above all, I trust in the power of the Holy Spirit at work in you, guiding and leading us through this deliberation to an appropriate decision," Bishop Bradosky said in a Sept. 18 letter to congregations.

Training church leaders in Ethiopia

Texas confirmation students raising money to support seminary students

By Pastor John Conrad

Wondimu Babu is an evangelist from Ethiopia. After 15 years of serving in the field as an evangelist, he is currently a student at the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus seminary in Addis Ababa.

He is a man of God, tested like gold by fire. He has been burned, tortured, bitten, and left for dead. His church is one of about 85 that have been burned in the past few years. Miraculously, although scarred, he is alive, strong, and still serving the 2,500-member Gulale congregation. He also serves at 12 preaching posts.

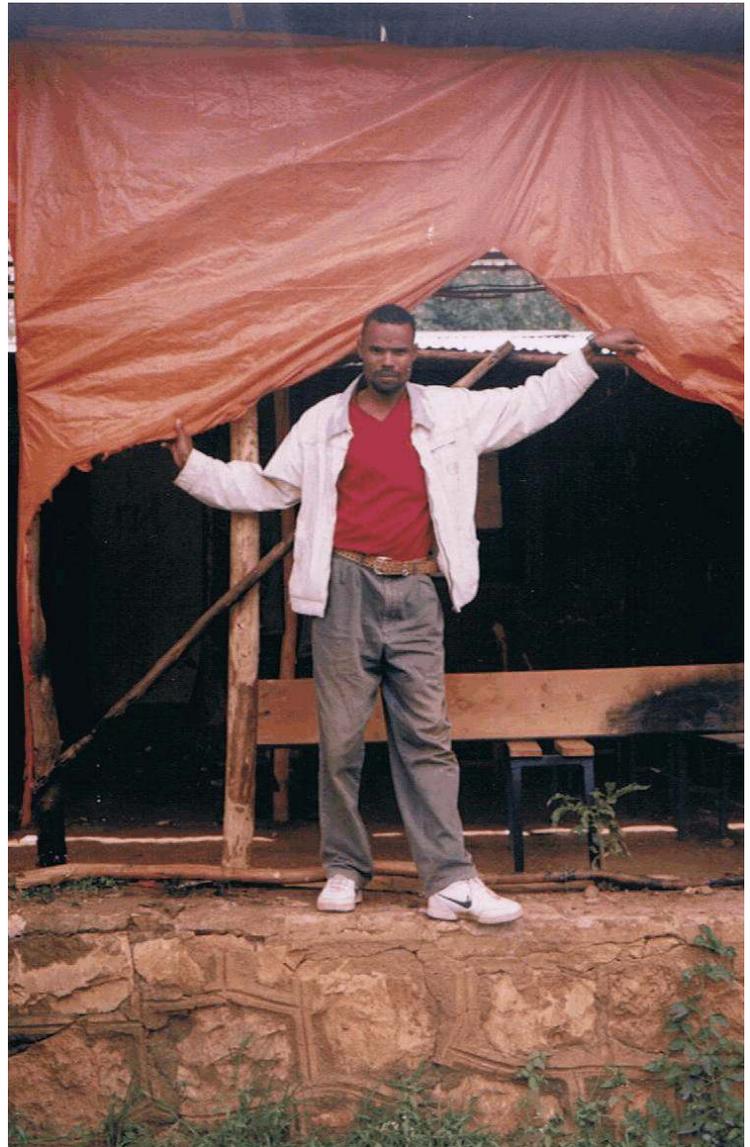
Wondimu's story is not unusual for the Ethiopian Lutheran church which goes by the name Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

As Ethiopia is at the horn of Africa, it functions as a gateway for Islam into sub-Saharan Africa. For centuries, Christians have been the primary presence. Still, Islam is very strong in many areas. Undeterred by the risk, many Christians continue to reach out to their Muslim friends, even with the reality of ongoing persecution.

About 30 percent of the students at the seminary in Addis Ababa plan to focus their energies on reaching the Muslim community, according to the Rev. Abdi Tadessi, Director of the Christian-Muslim Relations Division of the EECMY.

The people of First Evangelical Lutheran Church, a NALC congregation in Floresville, Texas, have had a history of being active in missions. In prior years, they built water wells in Ethiopia. This year, they heard of the need to support students at the seminary. It costs only about \$2,000 a year to cover all costs for a student to attend seminary in Ethiopia.

Sylvia Gadd, lay catechist at First, made a point of enlisting the participation of the confirmation class when raising funds. The class of five students went before the congregation on a Sunday morning to share the need.



Wondimu Babu at his burned church in Ethiopia.

They then had a bulletin board with a bunch of envelopes that said "Ethiopia Seminarian" and numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. People were then invited to take an envelope from the bulletin board, fill it with their contribution, and place it in the offering plate. With envelopes numbered just 1 to 63, there was enough for one seminary student. Envelopes 1 to 89 covered two students. 1 to 141 covered five!

They first hoped to support the equivalent of one student: \$2,000. That goal was quickly reached. They've now raised over \$11,000.

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Confirmation students from First Evangelical Lutheran Church who have taken leadership in raising money to support seminary students in Ethiopia.

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As encouraging as that may be, Dr. Belay Olam, president of the seminary in Addis Ababa, shared the extent of need. The Ethiopian church made a commitment to sever its financial connections with the ELCA following 2009. Now some students survive on barely a subsistence level of food from day to day. Support for over 50 more seminarians is urgently needed. Without additional support in the near future, they will have to leave the seminary before completing their studies.

The Missions Office of the NALC has recognized First Lutheran Church as a venue for sending seminary support. Those who would like to support this project may do so by sending their support directly to: First Lutheran Church, 1406 6th Street, Floresville, TX 78114. Contributions may be designated to an Ethiopia seminary or another global seminary.

Pastor John Conrad is also available to those who would like to take an active role in advocating on behalf of international seminary support. If you would like to be a part of this kind of kingdom impact, please contact him at 830-393-2747 or JTCSwede@gmail.com.

Pittsburgh hotel to host Convocations

The Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pa., has been chosen as the site for the 2013 Convocations for the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE.

The NALC Convocation is Thursday and Friday, Aug. 8-9. The Lutheran CORE Convocation is on Tuesday, Aug. 6. The annual theological conference will be held between the Convocations.

“We were not going to be able to meet in a congregation each year, so we might as well jump into the hotel setting in 2013,” said Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary. “I think it is an excellent location for our first move away from a congregation. It will be a different experience for our people, and I think a good one.”

As soon as information for registering for the events and the hotel is available, it will be posted on the NALC website.

Theological conference to feature Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen

Renowned Lutheran theologians Dr. Carl E. Braaten and Dr. Robert W. Jensen are the featured speakers for the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference April 8-11 in Canmore, Alberta. Canmore is about 50 miles west of Calgary near Banff National Park.

“Noted theologians Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen will share with us their thoughts, concerns and hopes regarding the Church of Christ around the world especially in relation to what it means to be a Lutheran nowadays,” organizers explain. The conference will also feature Pastor Greg Musselman, vice president of Voice of the Martyrs.

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

Reflections on Epiphany

Dear Disciples of Jesus,

The 12 days of our Christmas celebration lead us into our new year and the beginning of the Epiphany Season. That season begins with the closing chapter in the Christmas saga, the arrival of the Wise Men. This is one of my favorite excerpts from a sermon of Martin Luther's on Epiphany:

Let us then observe how these Wise Men took no offense at the mean estate of the Babe and His parents, that we may also not be offended in the mean estate of our neighbor, but rather see Christ in him, since the Kingdom of Christ is to be found among the lowly and the despised in persecution, misery, and the holy cross. Those who seek Christ anywhere else find Him not. The Wise Men discovered Him not at Herod's court, not with the high priests, not in the great city of Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem, in the stable, with lowly folk, with Mary and Joseph. In a word, they found Him where one would have least expected.

"They presented Him with gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Incense is a live confession, full of faith, by which we offer all that we have and are to God. ... The gift of our gold is that we should confess Christ as King, laying aside our own esteem and the dictates of our reason and good intentions, that we should present ourselves as foolish, naked, and ready to be ruled. Obedient children gladly accept their King and bring all into submission to Christ. ... Thus we see that incense is faith and gold is hope, because faith believes that all things are and ought to be of God, and hope accepts and sustains what faith believes. The myrrh is love. Faith takes us from ourselves, that we should refer everything to God with praise and gratitude. Hope fills us with the concerns of others, that we may endure all in patience without resentment. Love reduces us to that nothing which we were in the beginning, so that we desire neither goods nor anything outside of God, but simply that we should commit ourselves truly to His good pleasure. This is the way of the cross by which we come most speedily into life.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

We can present our gifts in the same way as the Lord says: "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me." Those who give of their goods to help the poor, to send children to school, to educate them in God's Word and other arts that we may have good ministers — they are giving to the baby Jesus.

Without contradicting the text, avoiding it or distorting its meaning, Luther lets the Scripture speak personally and profoundly. The Gospel texts during this Epiphany season make manifest the identity of Jesus, the nature of Jesus, and the mission of Jesus as He encounters men and women struggling with the darkness of this world. The light of His loving presence dispels the darkness and illumines the truth of His salvation, redemption, and new life that is eternal. This is the Good News we are called to proclaim without equivocation.

We offer this message in a world that is more than indifferent to the truth. We offer it in a world that loves the darkness and is becoming increasingly oppositional to the truth. It used to seem strange to hear of people offended by Christmas. Today it is common and constant.

The season begins with a word about King Herod — perhaps the first person to find Christmas offensive. He was an insanely jealous ruler who had already killed three of his own sons because he thought they were trying to take his throne. To such a man, even a baby is viewed as a threat. Herod epitomizes the darkness of our world and the

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depravity of power — willing to sacrifice the lives of innocent children to keep his hold on the throne secure. Our world is not much different from the one the Wise Men encountered, nor the one Jesus experienced, nor the one His disciples faced.

It should not surprise us that people are offended by what Christmas is truly about. It's not the day off that bothers them. It's not the gathering for a big feast. It's not the presents that are exchanged, but rather, it's this: It is the statement first made by the angel to a worried Joseph who just learned that his fiance, Mary, was pregnant. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

It's the talk of a Savior that people find offensive. It's the talk of sin and the need for forgiveness. It's the proclamation of the Savior and the insistence of Christ Himself that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the only way by which people may come to the Father.

There are people offended by Christmas, and there are those who are simply indifferent.

The Wise Men learn about Herod and they stop in Jerusalem to meet another set of characters in this story: the chief priests and the teachers of the law. Doesn't it strike you as odd that the chief priests and teachers of the law don't even express any curiosity as to why they are being questioned about the Messiah and His birthplace?

They have been waiting for over 1,000 years. They know He's going to come. They know where, and yet when questioned by someone they knew was not an expectant believer, they appear to have little interest. They knew the prophecy but were doomed to miss the event.

Having access to the truth is one thing, believing it and obediently following where it leads is something completely different. People can become indifferent and complacent. That is the difference between knowledge and discipleship. Indifference is another manifestation of the darkness.

Robert Lewis Stevenson, best known for his adventure story *Treasure Island*, was in poor health

during much of his childhood and youth. One night his nurse found him with his nose pressed against the frosty pane of his bedroom window. "Child, come away from there. You'll catch your death of cold," she fussed. But young Robert wouldn't budge. He sat, mesmerized, as he watched an old lamplighter slowly working his way through the black night, lighting each street lamp along his route. Pointing to the street below, Robert said, "See, look there; there's a man poking holes in the darkness."

The clear and faithful proclamation of the Gospel accomplishes a similar objective, it pokes holes in the darkness and leads those who hear and receive it by faith to the One who banishes the darkness eternally, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I would be remiss to end this letter regarding the season of Epiphany and Luther's exposition regarding the faithfulness of the Wise Men without reminding you of the most important component that contributed to the successful completion of their journey.

The true nature of faith is that they held fast to the Word. ... Faith pays no regard to what it sees and feels, but clings only to the Word. The Wise Men were cast down and offended. ... They passed through a difficult struggle and because they believed the Word, God sent the star even closer to be their guide. ... After a spiritual struggle, God is so heartfelt, so near and clear, that not only does a person forget the anguish and the struggle but they are even more endeared to Him."

As we begin 2013, another year together as the North American Lutheran Church, may we be strong in our faith, hold fast to the Word, follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and offer to Jesus our gifts of faith, hope and love, acknowledging Him as King, Lord and Savior. Let us poke holes in the darkness through the faithful proclamation of the Gospel in word and deed, in mission and ministry boldly caring for those in need in our own community and around the world. These are the ones for whom Jesus was born, lived, loved, died and arose.

May the One who banishes the darkness fill you with His light!

Texas congregation partners with synod of Ethiopian church

Holy Ghost Lutheran Church, a 1,500-member, 168-year-old congregation of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) in Fredericksburg, Texas, enjoys a strong reputation as a welcoming place.

Over 500 people attend one of three worship services offered each weekend. Holy Ghost is known for its youth and family ministry, its education ministry, and its Montessori preschool. According to Pastor David Priem, "What draws most people in is the welcoming feel and attitude."

Holy Ghost has been a part of the NALC since October 2010, very soon after the formation of this new church body. Pastor Priem also serves as dean of the NALC's South Texas Mission District.

Holy Ghost's direct mission connection with the North Central Ethiopian Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus ("Place of Jesus") began when Pastor David Priem joined a group who went to Ethiopia last spring.

After first attending a theological conference and revival event with national church leaders in Addis Ababa, they then traveled to the town of Dese, about 400 kilometers north of Addis Ababa.

Pastor Priem enjoyed getting out into the countryside, meeting the people, and visiting half a dozen churches along the way. For him the highlight of the theological conference was getting to know the national church leaders and pastors. The highlight of the trip to the countryside was witnessing the faith of the people. Much of the area is heavily Muslim, so the church is facing opposition. Yet it is still growing.

A big part of the trip's purpose was to identify ways to partner with the church in Ethiopia and to build global mission connections. Pastor Priem said, "Every congregation we visited could use help. ... I wanted to help them all." But he knew that he needed to find something that would capture the interest of the people back home. What caught his

attention was the great need to train evangelists who could then go out into heavily Muslim areas and start new churches.

He learned that for only \$15,000, the North Central Ethiopian Synod could start a Bible school to train 50 evangelists for a two-year period and then send them out. Pastor Priem said, "That is not much money to us, but it is much there." As he prayed about it, he found the Holy Spirit guiding him to respond to that need.

It is a regular practice at Holy Ghost Lutheran Church to receive special offerings for different causes throughout the year. Pastor Priem shared with Pastor Bobby Vitek, his co-pastor, and the congregational leadership his vision for what they could do and the impact they could have. He shared the challenge as the sermon during a worship service and also as a presentation after the service.

He told about the histories of Ethiopia and Christianity in that country. He built a case for the Mekane Yesus Church to develop resources to continue growing. He also made a presentation at another church and anticipates being able to do the same in other congregations. Then he continued to lift up the challenge in bulletin and newsletter announcements.

When the special offering was received, people responded with gifts totaling \$12,100. A gift of \$2,000 was given by an out-of-town couple who were visiting the church on the day of the special offering's announcement. Pastor Priem is confident that between Holy Ghost Lutheran and other congregations the full \$15,000 will be received.

Pastor Priem summed up the experience by saying, "Visiting the Christians in Ethiopia and seeing how passionate they are for the Gospel enlivened and enriched my faith. All of us on that trip told them, 'Please send missionaries to America. We do not have your kind of passionate faith.'"

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An Important Announcement: Stewardship for Mission Grants!

A speaker once related how a preacher would sometimes enter the pulpit and say, “Now, before I preach the sermon, I would like to say something important.” And then, the preacher would make some announcement. The message was: “The announcement is important — what follows in the sermon isn’t!”

Well, this announcement *is* important! That’s not to say that everything else in this newsletter isn’t — it’s just that we have something exciting and new to announce. We hope and pray that it will be of interest and benefit to all of us in the North American Lutheran Church and especially to our mission locations — house churches, mission posts, mission fellowships, and mission congregations.

We are announcing receipt of a grant for \$12,500 from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans! This grant will provide funding for our missions in North America to plan and carry out educational or inspirational activities related to stewardship in 2013.

This generous gift from Thrivent will be used in the NALC to provide **Stewardship for Mission Grants**.

The North American Lutheran Church is a “Mission-Driven” church body with almost 50 mission locations (mission posts, house churches, mission fellowships and mission congregations) throughout North America. We are committed to the “Great Commission” — we are called to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. We are also committed to missions that are built from the “ground up” rather than the “top down.”

This means, practically, that the NALC does not provide funding for mission starts, other than a few limited grants that average \$4,000 to \$6,000 annually.

Because this is a somewhat new method of mission planting, many of our pastors and lay members involved in such missions are not prepared, nor do



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

they understand the need, for faithful and growing stewardship. Similarly, because such grass-roots local mission and ministry efforts in Lutheranism are new to many, most involved in our missions are not equipped to inspire members to greater generosity.

At the same time, many pastors and lay members involved in our missions, having been in established congregations before, may be unwise in their use of valuable limited financial resources — focusing more on building and infrastructure, rather than using funds to reach out, spread the Gospel, and assist the growth of the mission.

We realize that our mission locations in the North American Lutheran Church need assistance, education and support in understanding new ways of inspiring their members in faithful stewardship as well as in setting goals and developing spending plans that will allow them to wisely use their limited resources for the most effective mission and ministry as they seek to invite, welcome, educate and baptize new disciples who will unite with them in successful local congregational life for Word and Sacrament.

When funding was made available by Thrivent, it seemed the best use of these funds would be to provide grants to those mission locations applying for funds to support local stewardship education and training. These funds could be used to cover the costs of bringing a stewardship-congregational

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Stewardship for Mission Grants

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finance consultant on-site, sponsoring a weekend stewardship-congregational finance workshop, funding persons from the mission location to attend training at off-site seminars, and/or purchase of a stewardship curriculum to be used by the mission participants. These programs, events, and/or activities will provide our mission locations with leaders and lay members that are educated and prepared to inspire all members to greater generosity, while also providing the necessary “mission-mindset” to enable wise budgeting and spending of offerings for the greatest impact and faithfulness.

Following this announcement, information and grant application forms will be provided to our NALC missions. Completed applications must be received in the NALC office no later than Feb. 28. Executive Staff of the NALC will approve applications and arrange for disbursement of funds, with recipients receiving notification no later than March 31.

Grants will be approved based on need, appropriateness of plan, number of persons impacted, and potential for greatest impact. Grants to projects and events involving more than one congregation will be encouraged and considered. Should not all the funds be requested by our NALC missions, other NALC congregations will be invited to apply with the same requirements.

Our hope is that not only will these Thrivent grants assist our missions and other NALC congregations in renewing stewardship, but that renewal of stewardship will support and encourage our central focus on the Great Commission — on making disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

If you have questions, please contact me at dwendel@thenalc.org. If your mission location doesn't receive application materials, please contact our financial administrator, Anne Gleason at agleason@thenalc.org.

Two events this summer for youth

Two significant youth events will take place this summer.

Youth Encounter will hold its Impact National Youth Event June 27-30 in St. Louis, Mo. Youth Encounter is a partnership ministry of the NALC. More information is available online at www.youthencounter.org.

The Lutheran Church—Canada is holding its National Youth Gathering July 5-9 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The theme is “Stand Firm.” They are inviting all NALC youth to be a part of this event. More information is available online at www.lutheranyouth.ca.

Youth Encounter also hosts regional youth events throughout the year. More information is available online.

Texas congregation

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Then he added, “They are not ashamed to talk about Jesus. They wear their faith on their sleeves. We over here are reluctant to share our faith. For them it is part of their daily lives.”

When asked whether he would encourage other people to visit the Christian church in Ethiopia, Pastor Priem responded, “Yes, if you want to have the experience of a lifetime. It will change your outlook on ministry and the faith.”

For information regarding how you could visit the church in Ethiopia, contact the NALC Administrative Assistant to the Missions Director, Rachel Sosebee, at 614-777-5709 or rsosebee@thenalc.org.

Reprinted from CORE Connection, the newsletter of Lutheran CORE.

Webinar to introduce proposed NALC Employee Handbook for Congregations

The North American Lutheran Church will conduct a webinar on Wednesday, Feb. 6, to introduce an employee handbook prepared to assist NALC congregations as they work with their employees.

Congregations that are interested in using the handbook will be introduced to the concepts it includes. Participants will be assisted in answering questions regarding its contents and format.

The presenters are Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, and Joan Rennekamp, a Human Resources Consultant with Rothgerber Johnson & Lyons, LLP. Both will explain the basic

provisions of an employee handbook that has been developed to be consistent with the teachings of the NALC, and which will be available for use by all NALC congregations.

The webinar presentation will be 60 minutes. Questions may extend longer and participants may stay if they wish for an additional 30 minutes.

To register, please contact the NALC Financial Administration office at nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org or 888-551-7254. Once we receive your registration, we will send you a draft of the document for use during the webinar as a reference.

Santa Barbara, Calif. worship community

A new Lutheran worshipping community will gather during the Epiphany season at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Calif., as a part of what they are calling “the Epiphany Project.”

These service will take place at 10 a.m. on Sundays in the college chapel and will be led by Pastor Marv Combs, Dean of the NALC’s Southwest Pacific Mission District.

The purpose of the Epiphany Project is to provide an opportunity for students and others to experience and learn about Lutheran liturgical worship and to ascertain if there is interest in an ongoing NALC worshipping community in the area.

Dr. Michael Shasberger, Adams Chair of Music and Worship, and Dr. Maurice Lee, Assistant Professor of the Religious Studies, are coordinating the services. You may contact Dr. Shasberger for more information at shasberger@westmont.edu or 805-565-6280.

All are welcome to attend on any or all Sundays.

Tell others in the NALC about your congregation

The North American Lutheran Church continues to grow. There are now more than 340 congregations in our church body.

We’d like to introduce your congregation to other congregations in the NALC. We are looking for a short article for the *NALC News* that could serve as an introduction of your congregation to others in the NALC.

Tell us about your congregation’s ministry and mission. Tell us about your community. Tell us about your history. We’d like to know whatever you think others might find interesting.

Send the article and a few photos that show your congregation and its mission and ministry to news@thenalc.org.

The Athanasian Creed

Though it is named in honor of him, the Athanasian Creed was not composed by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria and a great defender of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine. It probably originated in southern Gaul (France) in the fifth or sixth centuries.

In a sermon, Caesarius (470-542 A.D.), Bishop of Arles, a town in southern France, shows acquaintance with this western Creed. The Athanasian Creed is also known as the *Quicumque Vult*, the first words of the Latin text, which mean “Whoever wants . . .” It was originally written in Latin, unlike the Nicene Creed, which was first written in Greek.

At its beginning and end, the Athanasian Creed makes quite clear that if one does not believe the catholic faith as expressed therein, one cannot be saved. Not in three articles as in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds but in individual statements, the Athanasian Creed rehearses the catholic faith, specifically, the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and of the person of Christ.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is treated first. The Creed asserts, “We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.” (Translation from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 54-55). Notice the corporate “we” and the reference to our worship of the Triune God.

The Athanasian Creed states that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each a Person of the Holy Trinity. The third century theologian, Tertullian, of the city of Carthage in North Africa was the first to use the Latin word, *persona* (person), as a Christian theological term. *Substantia*, meaning substance or being, which Tertullian also adopted for theological use, expresses the divine unity.

The three persons are not to be confused, nor is the divine being to be divided. Each person is God, uncreated, infinite, and eternal; yet, there is one eternal being, not three eternal beings. Each is God and Lord; yet, there are not three gods and lords, but one God and Lord.



Words on Worship

Pastor Michael G. Tavella

The Athanasian Creed describes distinctions within the Trinity. The Father is not made, created, or begotten. The Son is not made or created, but is begotten. The Spirit is not made or created, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. This western creed includes the *filioque*, meaning “and the Son,” which was added to the Nicene Creed in the West and to which the Eastern Church objected. The East asserts the original text of the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The West asserts that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.”

The three persons are coeternal and coequal. At the end of the section of the Athanasian Creed on the Trinity, we are again reminded that in order to be saved, we must believe what this Creed says about the Holy Trinity. Faith involves both trust in Christ and right belief or praise (orthodoxy) regarding the triune God and, in fact, all the essential teachings of the Church.

We worship “one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity.” The affirmation of God as trinity and unity begins and ends the section on the Holy Trinity. Our doxology (words of praise) must be orthodox. In fact, there is no doxology without orthodoxy.

The *Quicumque Vult* continues with a confession regarding the Son. It is necessary for our salvation that we believe that Christ was incarnate (became flesh) and that He is both God and man. He was begotten “before all worlds,” that is, He was not created. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, having both a body and a soul. His two natures are

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not to be confused, yet He is one Christ, one in the unity of His person.

The *Quicumque Vult* continues with words that echo the other two ecumenical creeds, regarding Christ's death for our salvation, His descent into hell, His rising from the grave, His ascension into heaven, and His accession to God's right hand. Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Everyone will rise bodily from the dead to give an accounting of his deeds. Those who have done good will receive eternal life; those who have done evil will go to eternal fire. I have had people ask me if this does not promote works righteousness. No, it is quite Biblical. We will be judged according to our deeds. These deeds derive from faith, which is God's gift. Faith leads to faithfulness, though not perfect faithfulness, which is reserved for heaven. Works are fruits of our justification in Christ. Thus, by grace alone through faith alone, we are justified and saved.

The Athanasian Creed embodies the doctrine of the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries that deliberated on the Holy Trinity and the person of Christ, the two primary themes of the Athanasian Creed. This latest of the creeds, subscribed to by the western Latin Church, reflects Biblical teaching and catholic consensus.

The word *catholic* is used once in each of the other two creeds, but is used four times in the *Quicumque Vult*. In the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds, catholic modifies Church; while, in the Athanasian Creed, it modifies faith or religion. The section of the creed concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is headed with "Now this is the catholic faith." Later in this section, we are warned that "catholic religion (*catholica religione*) forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords." At the end of the creed we read, "This is the catholic faith," and are reminded that we cannot be saved without "believing this firmly and faithfully."

The word *catholic* comes from a root meaning, "pertaining to or according to the whole." The catholic Church is the universal Church, that is, the entire Christian community which professes the orthodox faith. In his *Disputation against Scholastic*

Theology, Martin Luther writes, "In all we wanted to say, we believe that we have said nothing that is not in agreement with the Catholic church and the teachers of the church." (*Luther's Works*, Volume 31, page 16) We Lutherans claim to be part of the catholic Church. Evidence of this lies in the fact that we subscribe to the three ecumenical creeds.

From its beginning, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has intended to maintain its catholic identity. Though the designation *Lutheran* was originally used as a pejorative term to distinguish the catholic Church from an heretical sect, we wear the name with pride, knowing that Lutherans are faithful catholics who confess the faith of the Church as expressed in the creedal summaries.

The Athanasian Creed is cited with the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds in the *Book of Concord*. The teachings of the creeds are faithfully represented in the Lutheran Confessions. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is fully committed to Biblical authority and the catholic heritage, which upholds and defends this authority.

The Athanasian Creed is not often used in contemporary Lutheran practice. The rubrics of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* suggest its use on the Sunday of the Holy Trinity. We have used it in my congregation. It is long, but it gives the congregation an opportunity to hear a more extensive rehearsal of the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the person of Christ. Sermons on this Creed can be helpful in explaining its meaning and background. The LBW rubrics suggest that the congregation recite the creed antiphonally. I have always had the congregation recite it in unison.

We have now reviewed the three creeds, all of which may be recited in worship. They are acts of worship in the liturgical tradition of the catholic Church. Why do we use creeds since we have the Scriptures themselves? The reason is that the creeds articulate the Biblical faith and are the church's official summaries of this faith. Arians, who believe that Christ is subordinate to the Father in His divinity, read the same Bible as we do. Therefore, it is necessary for the Church to clarify and define the teaching of Scriptures. The Lutheran Confessions serve the same function as the creeds.

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Revisiting the 'Facts on Growth' study

Odds are that many of you have not taken the time to check out the Hartford Institute's 2010 study of over 11,000 congregations. I've decided to summarize the most helpful insights from that study. The complete study can be found by going to www.FaithCommunitiesToday.org, then clicking on *Facts on Growth: 2010*.

First the ministry *challenges* cited in this study; then the recommended ministry *strategies* for addressing these challenges:

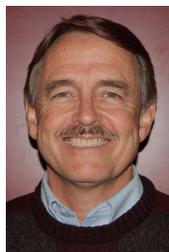
Current Ministry Challenges

1. North Americans are less likely than ever to belong to any off-line social organizations. The digital age has only increased the odds that the typical American is not a part of any voluntary group or community that actually meets physically (as opposed to online). I just read in the *New York Times* that there are now one billion people on Facebook. Facebook has only been available for seven years!

2. Children and teens, especially in middle and upper middle income households, are over-programmed. Between sports teams and extracurricular school activities there is very little discretionary time left for church activities and groups.

3. Our current weak economy has impacted congregations in multiple ways; including less discretionary income (reduced charitable giving), many adults having to work multiple part-time jobs (less available time for volunteering), and fewer new people moving into the community. The overall financial impact of the last four years on congregations has been significant. The 2010 study states, "Congregational economics are much more precarious today than in 2005."

4. The changing landscape for the American family has added to the challenge congregations face when trying to reach out to residents in their surrounding communities. The new demographic realities include a) 44% of American newborns are now born to single Mothers, b) fewer adults are



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

choosing to marry, and c) of those who marry, fewer are choosing to have children.

5. The aging of the American population in general and mainline Protestants in particular has made it even more difficult to reach younger adults, youth and children. Generational barriers are real. A congregation with a median age of 60 or 65 will have a difficult time reaching single adults or couples in their 30's and 40's.

Suggested Ministry Strategies

1. Many growing congregations are offering, as a way of connecting with the unchurched, parenting classes and/or events, marriage enrichment opportunities, and sports ministries.

2. Growing congregations try to provide scheduling options as a way to connect with increasingly busy households. Obviously, this is a strategy much more difficult for smaller congregations to manage. But the days are long gone when you can expect most of your members or "prospects" to be available on the same evening.

3. Growing congregations offer small groups (offered at different times, of course) to integrate and disciple busy people. And the larger your congregation the more essential small groups are.

4. Growing congregations are more likely to offer contemporary music in worship. Please note this is not *only* contemporary music. However, it is far less likely that a congregation will grow if it *only* offers *traditional worship music*.

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Athanasian Creed

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Private, error-ridden and heretical interpretations of the Scriptures and the faith must give way to a true confession. The creeds are confessions of Scriptural truth. When we recite them, we are reminded of what we believe. They are a vital act of worship.

We began our Christian life when the Church, and perhaps ourselves if we were old enough, recited the Apostles' Creed at our Baptism. During worship throughout our lives, we recite both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Athanasian Creed is a reminder of the orthodox Trinitarian and Christological faith. It is good to recite this Creed also, at least once a year.

No creed devised by an individual pastor or congregation should have a place in the worship of the catholic Church. By definition, ecumenical creeds are acknowledged by the whole church or a large portion thereof. The Athanasian Creed bears the approval and imprimatur of the western Church. All the creeds have received a wide consensus. A congregational creed does not carry such authority and may embody the idiosyncrasies of one or a few people.

It is best for the Lutheran Church to continue to affirm the ancient creeds and the Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century. In them, the Church speaks faithfully. The Lutheran Confessions are in accord with the doctrine of the three creeds and, more fundamentally, with the Holy Scriptures. It is true that the entire Church does not subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions. Nonetheless, they serve as witnesses to the ecumenical Church and to the world of the evangelical Lutheran commitment to the Scriptures and the catholic faith. Most of all, they serve as witnesses to Christ and our salvation through Him. In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther writes that the doctrine of justification is "the first and chief article."

As we travel on our pilgrim way into the future to the Kingdom of God, we Lutherans join the Church catholic in witnessing to the Truth so that others

may come to acknowledge the triune God and His work of creation, redemption, and sanctification.

Next time the topic will be the process of writing a sermon.

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Revisiting 'Facts on Growth' study

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Finally, some direct quotes from Kirk Hadaway, the author of this study:

+ "Most important to growth is the ability of congregations to attract younger adults and families with children."

+ "At least part of the explanation for mainline decline (as opposed to relative evangelical growth) is the lack of a clear motivating purpose...It helps to stand for something."

+ "In terms of the character of worship itself, the descriptors most strongly associated with growth are 'joyful,' 'innovative,' and 'inspirational.'"

+ "Congregations that involved children in worship were more likely to experience substantial growth."

+ "The primary way people first connect with a congregation is through someone who is already involved."

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