

Mission Teams focus on discipleship

The North American Lutheran Church hosted a Mission Summit for its five Mission Teams Feb. 18-19 in Hilliard, Ohio. Over 30 leaders attended, including leadership from Lutheran CORE and The Navigators.



The NALC has five Mission Teams:

New Starts, Multi-National Missions, Renewal, International Missions, and The Great Commission Society.

The summit was bathed in prayer, study of Scripture, fellowship, and strategic planning. Devotions and worship were led by Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, and Pastor Steve Shipman, Director of Lutheran CORE.

During the summit the Rev. Dr. Gemechis D. Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, said that the work of the NALC Mission Teams will be focused on three major areas in 2013 and 2014: Planting new congregations in the form of house churches; discipleship; and stewardship.

The leaders also heard from Bishop John Bradosky who shared a reflection on Luke 13, the parable of the fig tree. Bishop Bradosky said we are saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ — a grace that fills us, nourishes, cultivates, fertilizes, produces growth and bears fruit in our lives, Kingdom fruit. His grace does not save us and then depart; it is highly relational and “abides” with us.

Bishop Bradosky summed up the vision for the NALC in one word — discipleship. Discipleship is all there is, it is the singular focus of the Great Commission. “Discipleship is the centerpiece for everything we are doing and saying in the NALC. We want that to be our identity. We want that to be how others look at us.” he said.

In response to the visions shared by Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Buba, the Mission Teams met in small groups to create strategic plans for their ministry areas. The New Starts and Multi-National Mission Teams met together to focus on strengthening the New Starts Team, finding ways to support mission congregations, and discussing what is needed to support a house church planting movement in the NALC.

The Renewal Mission Team plans to model the discipleship and prayer movement they desire to see all congregations join, support and work with Lutheran CORE’s discipleship conference team, and help in the development of prayer and discipleship-focused support networks.

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Bishop comments on election of Pope Francis

Dear friends in Christ:

Even as we recently gave thanks for the ministry of Pope Benedict XVI, we now offer prayers for wisdom and guidance for the new pontiff elected to lead the Roman Catholic Church, Jorge Bergoglio, who has taken the name Pope Francis.

This humble spiritual leader from Argentina has pursued a life of simplicity and clarity, focusing the church on the proclamation of the Gospel, even when it is costly to do so. His humility is manifest in his care for the poor and strong commitment to mission and service.

Archbishop Bergoglio's teaching upholds the orthodox Christian faith. From all that we have been able to read about him, he is very articulate in his stand regarding Scriptural teaching for the gifts of marriage, sexuality and the family. He has clearly opposed those who seek to pull the church in the direction of secular culture.

Francis is a fitting name for a leader who chose as the motto for his Argentinian diocese, "Lowly but Chosen." Thinking of the new leader of the Roman

Catholic Church and the life of Saint Francis, I am reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:26-30)

Let us pray that this new leader will be humble in his disposition and lifestyle and bold in his faithfulness and proclamation of the Gospel to our world, so desperately in need of what only Christ can offer.

With you following Jesus,

Bishop John Bradosky

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The International Mission Team will continue to be in contact with our missionaries, praying for them and supporting them. The team hopes to contact every NALC congregation to find out about its international missions partnerships. The team will also work with other Mission Teams to communicate information and invite them to international mission support and engagement.

The Great Commission Society set the goal to collect information about mission partnerships and to create a communication hub for mission partnership opportunities.

The Mission Teams began planning for a NALC Mission Festival to be held Nov. 7-9. The Mission Festival theme is: "Discipleship! (You can't do mission until you learn how to become a disciple)."

The Mission Festival combines the annual Renewal and Mission Planters Conferences and adds an International Missions Conference.

The Mission Festival will include small groups and Bible study, workshops for discipleship, prayer, planting house churches, being a mission-branching congregation, and presentations from international guests and a blend of traditional and international worship experiences.

"It is a great year for our mission work in the NALC. We are calling all of our congregations to be strongly grounded in prayer and total dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit as they do mission," said Pastor Buba. "As we move forward, we continue to boldly proclaim the Word, rely on the ever present help of the Holy Spirit and on our unity in Christ Jesus."

Bishop Bradosky's Easter Message

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This year I prayed for our pastors, lay leaders and congregations, one Mission District at a time. As I consulted the map for your locations and contexts, I was reminded of places and people I have visited and those I look forward to seeing in the coming year. This year I have been asked to preach on Easter Sunday using the Gospel of John and decided to share with you my sermon in its current state as a word of encouragement to each of you during the Easter Triduum.

Help for the Hopeless

This past week I read these words: "We can live forty days without food, eight days without water, four minutes without air, but only a few seconds without hope." How many of you have experienced a sense of hopelessness in the last year? You are not alone. Many counselors are concerned about a crisis of hope in our culture. In the book *Hope in the Age of Anxiety* the authors describe nine ways in which hopelessness affects us:

1. *Alienated* — cut loose, no longer deemed worthy of love, care, or support, fearing further pain and rejection.
2. *Forsaken* — abandoned and alone in the time of greatest need.
3. *Uninspired* — no role models or hero figures to which one can aspire.
4. *Powerless* — unable to attain life goals.
5. *Oppressed* — feeling crushed by circumstances overwhelmed.
6. *Limited* — deficient, not having what it takes to make it in this world.
7. *Doomed* — trapped in an irreversible decline.
8. *Captive* — trapped by circumstances or relationships.
9. *Helpless* — exposed and vulnerable, unsafe and at risk in the world.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

This crisis of hope affects our health, our emotional stability, our relationships and our spiritual life. It influences life in our homes, our work, our friendships, our neighborhoods, and even in the church.

What makes our lack of hope a crisis is that many of those resources in which we have placed our hope in the past have failed us. We placed our hope in our finances and investments and are forced to face the collapse of banks and market volatility. We placed our hope in retirement accounts and social security and now realize we will have to work longer and be less secure. We placed our hope in the stability of our nation and now fear the growing national debt and the possibility of insolvency.

We placed our hope in our unity but now are experiencing division and the polarization of our entire culture. We placed our hope in our strength and security but are now forced to live with the uncertainty of school shootings, violence, terrorism, and global annihilation. We placed our hope in the strength of our culture, but now live with the reality of moral collapse, family fragmentation and abuse.

We placed our hope in our health but deal with the nearly constant news of those we love facing cancer, birth defects or infertility. We placed our hope in our own ability and strength and find ourselves overwhelmed and fearful. The hopelessness is apparent as suicide rates in a variety of population segments continue to grow each year. Is it any wonder you have experienced some sense of hopelessness?

That sense of hopelessness is not new. In fact, the Easter Gospel begins with people who are equally lost in that fog of hopelessness and despair. Think for a moment about what Mary experienced in the days just before that first Resurrection morning. She heard of

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Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. She watched as one of His own disciples betrayed Him to His enemies for a few coins and one of His closest disciples denied multiple times that he ever knew Him. She listened as the crowds shouted for His death. His closest friends watched at a distance as Jesus was beaten, mocked, whipped, tortured, humiliated publicly. She listened as

Jesus — who had taught them with strength, conviction and authority — cried out in pain and agony. She watched as the Messiah's bloodied body was impaled on a cross, surrounded by criminals. For three hours she watched helplessly as this One — who loved her as she had never been loved before — bled until, with no more strength, He breathed His last. She saw the soldier pierce His side with a spear, running it through His lungs and into His heart to ensure He was dead. Perhaps she was there as the few brave souls removed His body from the cross and laid it in a tomb. The only act of love she could offer was to assist in preparing spices to anoint His body for completing His burial. She was overwhelmed by one layer of grief after another. Every moment, every scene, every act of violence against Jesus added to her loss, grief, pain and despair. Her hope was gone, completely!

How is it possible that the circumstance could be any worse than it already was? Yet that is exactly what Mary experiences when she arrives at the tomb on that first Easter morning. She sees the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. Mary's conclusion: the tomb had been robbed and the body of Jesus stolen by a gardener. She is deprived of her last opportunity to offer her love by anointing His body with oils and spices. She might have asked herself, am I the only one who cares? Most of the disciples are hiding, afraid they too will end up like Jesus, crucified and buried. Only Peter and John go to check out Mary's story. In John's Gospel they get credit for believing, but notice they don't stay very long — they simply returned home.

It was only Mary who stayed, still immersed in her grief, preoccupied with her own pain, overwhelmed by the tragedy and loss, despairing and hopeless. I imagine that she was praying and crying out to God through her tears. I had a moment like that not long ago.

On March 15th I awoke at 2 a.m. in severe pain. Not wanting to disturb my wife, I left the bedroom to pace and find a place where I could moan in agony alone. I had never experienced pain like this before. It welled up, sending shock waves through my entire body. No surface, hard or soft, would bring relief. Pacing, walking, leaning provided the greatest distraction. The pain became so intense the tears welled in my eyes. Through the tears I prayed and prayed, but my words seemed to only bounce off the walls, never reaching the Lord. The pain worsened until my body's reaction was to vomit. The heaving momentarily relieved the pain as I slumped in exhaustion. The harder I prayed the more silent God seemed. That cycle was repeated two more times, and each time I prayed it was the last of the pain. Internally, I was battling with myself. Generally, I hate doctors and hospitals. I kept thinking I could do this on my own, if the Lord would only help me. "Lord, help me!" The harder I prayed the more distant God seemed. The next two rounds of pain caused the room to spin and my body to go limp. The pain became all-consuming, the only thing I could focus on. Even as it subsided, fear of the next wave was equally all-consuming. Trying to stand outside of my pain and pray was impossible. The harder I tried, the worse it got. The only thing I could do was admit my powerless state, my overwhelming need, and resolve to seek help beyond myself.

Mary was immobilized by her pain and hopelessness. She did the only thing she could do. She stayed there and looked back into the tomb. Knowing that it was

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bound to bring the next wave of painful grief, she still turns back to the tomb. Angels asking about her pain and her tears only adds anger to her grief. She says to them, basically, “What is wrong with you? Can’t you see that they have taken the body of Jesus, this Lord I love, and now I have no idea where they put it?”

We sense the all-consuming nature of Mary’s pain when we read that next verse of this Easter text. She turns around. She looks away from the tomb and right into the eyes of Jesus, and the only thing she can see is her own pain.

This is a part of our Holy Week experience — the prayer of the forsaken. On Good Friday we hear Jesus cry out from the cross, “My God, My god, why hast thou forsaken me?” Some Church Fathers refer to this as *Deus Absconditus*, the God who is hidden. We feel abandoned, our hope evaporated, our dreams meaningless. Like the psalmist we cry out, “I call all day, my God, but you never answer” (Psalm 22:2). St. John of the Cross called it “the dark night of the soul.” The witness of Scripture is not that we live avoiding it, but rather we should expect it and even embrace it, stay with it.

Being alone with our pain, the purifying silence of God can transform us. It strips away our sense of control, our priorities, our self-reliance. We become much more tentative and unsure. Richard Foster writes, “Through all of this, paradoxically, God is purifying our faith by threatening to destroy it.” The superficial things we trusted in are stripped away and, through those moments that seem “God-forsaken,” within us God is growing humility, patience, perseverance and the longing to see and know only Him.

Mary turns around and is looking right into the face of Jesus and she sees only the gardener. Her vision is still blurred by her tears. Nothing has yet changed her experience of overwhelming grief and pain. Jesus asks her why she is crying and who she is looking for? Jesus is alive. He is present. He is with her, beside her. Yet all she sees is a gardener. Does this tell you something about the all-consuming power of hopelessness, grief, pain and fear? Her anger is unabated. Thinking He is the gardener, Mary accuses Jesus of having carried away His own body. Mary demands to know where He placed it so she can go and reclaim it! Don’t laugh at her; we too can be blinded by His presence. In the “dark night of the soul” it is not that God has disappeared, rather His hiddenness is only to help us!

Jesus only has to speak one word to Mary to move her from confronting a stranger to a moment of great intimacy that places her in the presence of her Lord and the Savior of her soul. Jesus calls her by name, “Mary.” In that moment her pain is overcome by His presence and she, too, speaks words of intimate endearment, “My Teacher, *Rabbouni*,” I wonder, did she use that term because of the past three years of her journey with Jesus or because of the startling revelation of the previous three minutes or the past three days of her grief and loss? Perhaps in those last three days and final three minutes something was stripped away — removed — and something more powerful transformed her: the reality of the Resurrection. An overwhelming absence is replaced by an even more overwhelming presence. Jesus had just taught her the most important truth of faith.

The Resurrection transforms a hopeless end into an endless hope. Any doubts about His capacity to redeem and save us vanish with the reality of the Resurrection. The Resurrection shows that our faith does not depend on our own adequacy. It depends on the power of God. The disciples failed repeatedly, yet the Gospel goes forward by God’s power, not by our successes. Failure is not the end. Don’t we need to hear that? Failure is not the end. God is at work — even through our failings.

Today we come not just to see or hear about the Resurrection but to experience it, like Mary experienced it. The power of the Resurrection was released in Mary’s life as soon as Jesus called her name. The assurance of the Resurrection as the Apostles experienced it through Jesus transformed them into fearless, adventurous, courageous, hope-filled leaders. Their witness is also a powerful proof of the Resurrection. The reality of the Resurrection is not something we wait on for some future experience but the reality that fills and sustains us now. Jesus said, “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). “He is risen!” became the joyous chant of a new life — hope fulfilled. Through faith in Jesus the same power of God that raised Jesus now lives in you. This is why Paul tells us that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). Even when there appears to be no hope from a human point of view, I still live in hope because the power of God lives in me. Life does not limit me like it did before.

Paul says in Romans 6, “Since we have been united with Him in His death, we will also be raised as He was.” That’s not just by and by when we die. We are raised to new life right now. He says, our old sinful

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selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. Now the power of God lives in us, rather than the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share His new life. We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and He will never die again. Paul concludes, "So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:5-9, 11).

Obediently, Mary went to proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus to His disciples and gave them all the instructions Jesus passed on to her. So it began. We have the record of how these disciples responded to this news, how it transformed their lives. We see in Acts the demonstration of their faith, their bold proclamation, the fearless risking of their lives, their obedience and allegiance to Jesus. We behold the strength of their love for one another and their willingness to include others in their community of faith, their willingness to reach out with Christ's love.

The disciples lived in such a way so as to demonstrate the power and the hope of the Resurrection. Easter is the epicenter of our faith, hope and love. We worship on the first day of the week because this was when Mary had the encounter with the resurrected Lord. Easter is the center of the church year, the center of our worship and it must also be the center of our individual lives as well.

Listen to the words of hope in the New Testament because of Easter:

Romans 5:5: "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us."

Romans 8:24: "For in this hope we were saved..."

Romans 15:4: "For everything that was written in the past was to teach us that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

1 Corinthians 15:19: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people."

Colossians 1:5: "Faith and love spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you."

2 Corinthians 3:12: "Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold."

Ephesians 1:18-20: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you ... the great power for us who believe, power which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms."

That is the hope available to us through faith in Jesus. Of all people in the world, Christians should be the most hope filled. Christian churches should be the beacons of hope for every community.

Having hope is not the end but the beginning. We have not simply been called to get our dose of hope and leave. We have been called to something more. The world I described to you at the beginning of this sermon is in desperate need of hope that can only come through the eternal love of Jesus. Within the span of our worship today, people in this community will be diagnosed with or die from cancer; others will die from alcohol abuse, AIDS, or drug overdoses. Several will commit suicide and a few more will die in traffic accidents. Some will lose jobs or homes. Without hope, anger will turn to violence, and violence will turn into stolen property, abusive homes and broken relationships.

The question is, how do we move this beacon of hope that is the church out there into the places of hopelessness, where the compassionate love of Jesus is so desperately needed? Do you know anyone here that might be going in their direction?

While it is true that we gather together to proclaim the hope we have in Jesus, our resurrected Lord and Savior, we also gather together to be equipped to share that compassionate love of Jesus with family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors in the grip of hopeless circumstances. I don't mean to spoil the mood on a perfectly wonderful celebration, but what would you say to a family member who has just been diagnosed with cancer or to a parent whose son or daughter has been given only months to live? Scripture tell us, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks ... for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

Paul reminds us that we are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:20). We gather together today not only to hear the proclamation of our reason for hope

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but to be the Easter presence of Jesus out there in our world. We gather together to commit ourselves to be a community of hope — a place where people can receive the eternal love of Jesus in His forgiveness, acceptance and support, and become transformed people through faith in Jesus, filled with hope.

Whether we encounter a friend who is experiencing sickness or dealing with the death of a loved one, a family member who is making destructive choices, or someone who is simply feeling alone, each of us has the privilege to offer the powerful hope of Easter by loving them through the hope we have, in Jesus. Jesus said to His followers, “This is how the world will know you are my disciples, by the love you have for one another.” In the book of Acts, the world was watching and it saw the manifest love of Jesus and was drawn to it. The community experienced that love as those Christians moved out to share Christ’s love with others. We are all imperfect messengers, but for those who are hurting and hopeless that is better than no messengers at all!

Martin Luther once spent three days in a black depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife, Katie, came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes. “Who’s dead?” Luther asked her. “God,” replied Katie. Luther rebuked her, saying, “What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die.” “Well,” she replied, “the way you’ve been acting I was sure He had!”

In this Easter Gospel, Jesus approaches you as He did Mary. Jesus is calling your name as He did in your Baptism. He is filling you with the powerful love of His presence that provides hope even in the worst of circumstances. Like Mary, Jesus is sending us out with a message, equipping us to be His ambassadors of hope in the world, in your home, where you work, among your friends and neighbors in this community. This is a message that must be shared, the primary mission of the Church, your commission and mine.

As for my predicament, I honestly wondered if I was going to die. I wondered what it was like for my son and for my father. Death seems so overwhelming, often so much larger than life. Our greatest fear is that life is surrounded by death! Which is it? Is life being overwhelmed by death or death being overcome by life? Easter gives us a definitive word! One verse that came to mind in between the waves of pain was Revelation 1:18: “I am He who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore.” I pulled out my Bible and read those words again and again. As I stared at



them it became clear that death was surrounded by life. Death was relegated to the past tense by two powerful truths: Jesus lived and is alive forever more.

That was my sign that death was not to have the final word on that day or ever. So I resolved to stop trying to control my circumstance and let Kristi take me to the hospital ER where I could get the diagnosis and intervention I needed and that God intended. Kristi was shocked when I told her what I had resolved to do. She knew of my high pain tolerance and distaste for doctors or hospitals, and therefore concluded that I was desperate and in severe pain. A CT scan revealed a kidney stone; massive doses of pain medicine brought relief. After several days the stone was gone and so was any semblance of pain or discomfort.

The day when everlasting life broke into earthly time began not with celebration but with tears. This is still the way Easter breaks into our lives — when we least expect it, when all seems lost. That’s when the stone rolls away, the angel speaks, Jesus is present and “death is swallowed up in victory.” Easter changes our perspective forever.

This is the reason for the hope we have in us!

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed.

'On Being the Church in These Precarious Times' is theme of Theological Conference

"On Being the Church in These Precarious Times" is the theme of the annual Theological Conference sponsored by the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE.

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.

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

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 NALC are committed to the renewal of Lutheranism and Christianity in North America.

In addition to Prof. Braaten, presenters at the conference include 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.

"'Precarious' is an appropriate word choice to describe these times and our culture," said NALC Bishop John Bradosky. "When the church as institution merely follows the 'times' and absorbs the culture, it also finds itself in a precarious position. ... 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."

"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."

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

Women of NALC gathering to focus on missions

Are you passionate about missions or do you feel clueless? Either way, the annual gathering of the Women of the NALC has something for you.

Come join us Aug. 7 in Pittsburgh, Pa., to explore missions. We will have a time of devotions, speakers and small groups. We will also be electing new members to The Women's Council of the WNALC.

Come be a part of a day of fellowship and faith. Information about the NALC Convocation and hotel will be available soon. If you have any questions please contact Jeanne Wallace at jeannewallace.wnalc@gmail.com.

Nominations open for Executive Council, Court of Adjudication

Nominations are now being received for positions to be elected at the 2013 NALC Convocation Aug. 8-9 in Pittsburgh, Pa.

The Convocation will elect two members of the NALC Executive Council (one lay person and one pastor) and two members of the Court of Adjudication.

Congregations are welcome to nominate individuals for any of the open positions as well as for the 2014 Nominating Committee. Nominations may also be made by individuals.

Please submit nominations by May 1. This will enable the committee to meet the constitutional deadline to make biographical information available to NALC members.

To submit a nomination, please complete the Nomination Form and return it to the Nominating

Committee as soon as possible. Nominees will be asked to complete the Nominee Biographical Form, which then will be made available to NALC congregations and to Convocation delegates.

Pastor David Baer of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Whitewood, S.D., is chair of the Nominating Committee. Please contact him at 605-269-2104 or nominations@thenalc.org with any questions or to request copies of the forms.

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.

Ancient Evangelical Future Conference to consider Biblical interpretation

How do we read the Bible? How does the way we read the Bible inform our theology and ministry?

Modern and postmodern methods of Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) have tended to read the Bible as an isolated text with little unified meaning or coherence — but this has not always been the case. Throughout most of church history, Christians have read the Bible under the guidance of the Rule of Faith and the great Creeds of the Church. How does such a creedal hermeneutic square with contemporary Christian and secular approaches to the Bible, and what are the implications of this approach for Christian theology, spirituality, and mission?

These questions will be addressed in the Ancient

Evangelical Future Conference June 5-7 at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa.

Hosted by the newly established Robert E. Webber Center, this Conference will draw deeply from the well of the Great Tradition. Conference speakers from across a spectrum of theological traditions will join us to lead this important and timely conversation.

Keynote speakers include Dr. Richard Hays, Duke Divinity School; Dr. Christopher Hall, Eastern University; Dr. Peter Leithart, New St. Andrews College; Dr. Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Yale University; Dr. David Yeago, a Lutheran theologian; and David Neff, Christianity Today.

More information is available at www.tsm.edu.

Yes, there will be pastors for the NALC!

Two of the most common concerns expressed by NALC pastors and members are, “How will we educate our pastors without a seminary?” and “Will we have pastors for the future?”

Within the last month, two experiences have touched on both of these concerns, and I would like to share them with you so that you can be part of the excitement and hopefulness that I have for the future of the North American Lutheran Church.

First, I was part of a subcommittee of the Theological Education Task Force that visited three possible “seminary center” sites.

Because we were visiting three sites in four days, and because there would be four or five of us making the trip, we decided to travel together by car. The Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville III, the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, the Rev. Dr. Ben Johnson, and I — all in one vehicle — drove from site to site through five states.

We had planned to travel in a smaller vehicle, but as the weather-person would have it, there was to be snow at the beginning, middle and end of our trip, so we secured a four-wheel-drive Chevy Tahoe.

The only regret is that we didn’t get a picture of Ben and Amy in the back seat, fussing with each other like young brother and sister! Heard from Roy in the front seat were familiar comments such as, “Don’t make us stop this car!” and “We’re going to have to separate you two!” Needless to say, the trip was made with goodwill and we all departed as friends, encouraged by the trip and the clarity that was gained from visiting these three existing seminaries.

Many may not even be aware that there is a Theological Education Task Force, but this group of committed, knowledgeable persons has been meeting for some time — assessing needs, reviewing alternatives, and developing a recommended curriculum, all aimed at generating a proposal that will be recommended to the NALC Executive Council in the not-too-distant future.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

The intention of the Task Force has been to look honestly and clearly at what is working today in theological education and pastoral formation and what isn’t. There is no desire to re-create a failed or failing model of seminary education that was effective 50 or 100 years ago but which does not serve the church well today.

The Task Force, ably chaired by Dr. Harrisville, is finalizing its proposal, so I’m not at liberty to share details about the plan and recommendation at this time. I will share that it is a creative, integrative, mission-driven, discipleship-focused plan that will combine the best of all possibilities.

Very soon your Theological Education Task Force will present its proposal and recommendations that, if approved, will provide theological education and training for pastors, lay professionals and laity in accordance with NALC core values and focus, with a Confessional Lutheran grounding. I look forward to the report and recommendations being presented, and I hope you also will trust that the outlook for theological education in the NALC is bright!

The second experience was the chance to be involved in the meeting of the NALC Candidacy Committee held March 7-9 in Columbus, Ohio. Because I am involved with the candidates newly approved for ordination by the Candidacy Committee, Bishop John thought my participation would be useful. And it was, if for no other reason than I was able to see first-hand the competence and pastoral skills of the committee in working with our candidates for ordination.

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At the same time, I was blessed to meet and participate in interviews with those NALC candidates scheduled for this meeting of the committee. Some candidates being interviewed were NALC members interested in beginning seminary in the fall, some have just begun seminary education and had their initial interview, and others are further along in their theological education.

Now, when NALC folks ask whether we will have competent Lutheran pastors to serve our church in the future, I can answer confidently, “Yes!” We have qualified, committed persons who are involved in theological education and pastoral formation, hoping to serve as ordained ministers in the NALC.

As we had hoped, now that the NALC is growing and developing as a church, our congregations are raising up individuals who seem to have faith, gifts and abilities suited to ordained ministry. The Holy Spirit is indeed at work in the hearts and lives of such individuals across North America, leading them to start on a path to Word and Sacrament ministry within the NALC.

I wish all of our pastors and members could have been involved in the Candidacy Committee meeting to truly appreciate the committee’s work, as well as to meet some of our candidates. The days I spent with the committee and candidates created in me an increasing enthusiasm and excitement for the future of the NALC. We will have no shortage of competent, faithful NALC pastors to serve our congregations in years to come!

I encourage our pastors and congregations to respond in several ways.

First, support and encourage persons in our congregations who evidence gifts and abilities that might be suited for ordained ministry. We are truly on the threshold of having what might be considered, as one Executive Council member likes to say, the “premier” theological education network in North America, for the “premier” Lutheran denomination in existence today — the NALC. Our pastoral candidates will not have to find their own way or make do at some other denominational school.

Second, support our candidates for ministry. Every one of our seminarians makes great sacrifices to enter into theological education and appreciates prayer support, congregational support, and, yes, financial support. If your congregation would like to assist one of our seminarians, feel free to contact our NALC office and we can get you connected. If your congregation can’t assist a seminarian financially, perhaps the members of your church would like to send greeting cards or goodie boxes to our seminarians. There are many ways to let our seminarians know that they are loved, supported and prayed-for by our congregations.

Finally, it is time for us to begin thinking again about supporting theological education in Lutheranism. Many pastors, congregations, and members have a legacy of financially supporting Lutheran seminaries. As our beloved former seminaries have lost their way, such financial support has been withheld as we’ve been hoping and praying for an orthodox, confessional Lutheran seminary.

Let me say again, we are on the threshold of developing a premier Lutheran theological education network that will train Biblical, Confessional Lutheran pastors for the NALC. We have quality, faithful seminarians and candidates engaged in theological education and pastoral formation in the NALC. We have many scholars and theologians ready to teach the unwavering, unchanging, Biblical and Confessional truth which has been for so long at the heart of Lutheranism. We will soon see revealed an exciting new plan for theological education for pastor and laity within the NALC.

We need not continue waiting and watching. We have a theological education fund in the NALC, and gifts and donations to support theological education in the NALC can be sent — now — to get our program off to a running start! Finally, we can again be excited about Lutheran theological education!

Gifts to support the NALC Theological Education Fund may be sent to:

NALC Theological Education Fund
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

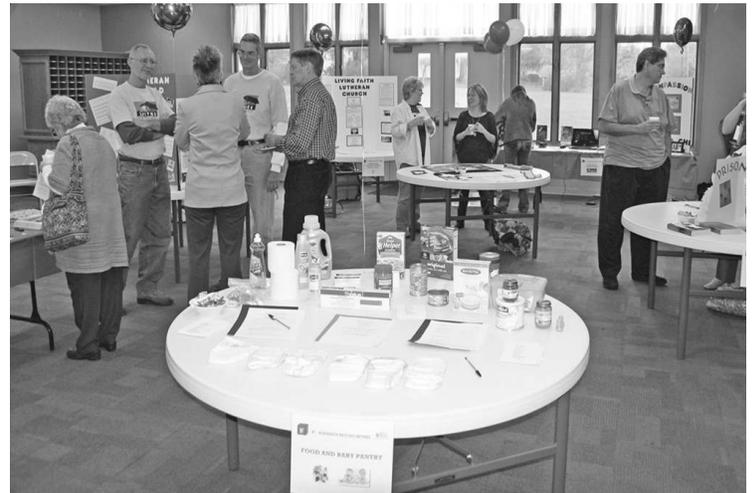
Mission Connect: A congregation in Indiana and a church in Ethiopia

Bethel Lutheran Church of Noblesville, Ind., is a congregation of the North American Lutheran Church on the northeast side of Indianapolis. Fourteen years ago they began developing a new 33-acre campus, which will enable them to grow as the city continues to develop around them.

Total attendance among four weekly services ranges from 360-390 people. A Saturday night service is casual country. The Sunday morning services are traditional at 8 a.m., blended at 9:30 a.m. and a praise service with a praise band at 11 a.m.

Mission is a major emphasis at Bethel Lutheran, according to Senior Pastor Doug Gast. The logo of the Missions Committee is B³ — Blessings Beyond Bethel. A mission emphasis on the fourth Sunday of every month keeps a mission focus out in front of the congregation.

On the fourth Sunday of October 2012, which was Reformation Sunday, the congregation held a Missions Faire. Seventeen booths were set up in the fellowship hall, with displays about the various missions that the congregation supports — local and domestic as well as international. People visiting the fair were given a passport, which they could have stamped at each of the displays. Children who had every one of the boxes stamped received a gift.

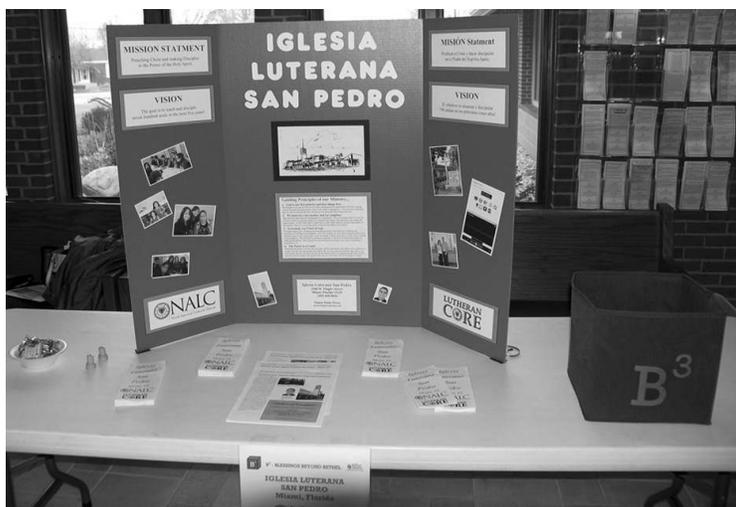


Congregation members and visitors check out the many informational displays at the 2012 Missions Faire highlighting missions supported by Bethel Lutheran Church in Noblesville, Ind.

Locally the congregation supports a food bank, provides holiday meals for the needy, and collects Christmas gifts for senior adults and children, who otherwise would not receive a gift. They also operate a food and baby pantry, which serves the hungry as well as mothers with infants. Last year this pantry served over four thousand people.

The congregation enjoys a mission partner relationship with two other congregations here in the United States. They recently sent a financial gift to Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Florida. This congregation is served by Pastor Eddy Perez, who is a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee and Dean of the Caribbean and Hispanic Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church.

Bethel has also established a partnership with Living Faith Lutheran Church in Wabash, Ind., a new mission start of the NALC. The youth groups of the two congregations will be going on a canoe trip together to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota next summer, and Bethel passes on its Vacation Bible School material to its mission partner.



The Iglesia Luterana San Pedro mission partner booth at Bethel's 2012 Missions Faire.

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Financial support of the NALC Theological Education Fund comprises the third portion of Bethel's domestic mission efforts. Bethel wants to help ensure that there will be biblically faithful Lutheran pastors in the future.

Bethel's international efforts involve support of Lutheran World Relief and Water to Thrive, an organization that builds water projects in Ethiopia and Sierra Leone in Africa. Their main international partnership is with a congregation of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus ("Place of Jesus").

Pastor Gast was part of the group who attended a theological conference and revival event last spring in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and then traveled to the northern town of Dese, stopping to visit several Christian churches along the way. These churches are all located in heavily Muslim areas.

One of the congregations they visited is in the town of Senbate and is served by a young pastor by the name of Gobena Degefa. Pastor Gast remembers standing in their small, square church building on the edge of town. The fields around the church were filled with a cash crop, which the congregation is growing to help defray costs. Pastor Gast shared that as Pastor Degefa was speaking, "This feeling washed all over me, like the Holy Spirit washing over me. I got tears in my eyes. It was overwhelming." He asked the guide if he could share with the group that he felt that God was calling him to develop a partnership with this particular congregation.

So far Bethel Lutheran has sent a gift of financial support, which will enable the Ethiopian congregation to hire an evangelist, conduct their Sunday School, and provide for the orphaned children within their care. Bethel Lutheran is looking forward to the time when they will be able to increase their support after they have met all obligations to the ELCA. (Bethel Lutheran left the ELCA in early 2012 to join the NALC.)

The Missions Faire on Reformation Sunday was preceded by an Ethiopian night two weeks prior. The evening started out with supper. A woman who used to have a catering business went on the



Bethel Lutheran Church has sent a financial gift to assist the congregation of this Mekane Yesus church in Senbate, Ethiopia, so it can hire an evangelist, conduct Sunday School, and provide for orphaned children in their care.

internet and found recipes for all kinds of Ethiopian food. Then Pastor Gast shared pictures and told the story of his trip and the history of Christianity in Ethiopia. He said, "The theological conference was wonderful, the trip to Dese was terrific, and the visit to Lalibela, a place where eleven churches were carved out of stone, was beyond belief." When the Muslims were taking over Jerusalem in the twelfth century, the Ethiopians carved these churches to replicate churches in Jerusalem.

Pastor Gast said, "We are striving to make mission as strong, as exciting, and as inviting as we can." He describes the trip to Ethiopia as "the trip of a lifetime." He found the people to be welcoming and warm and the "the most joy-filled people I have ever met."

He further commented, "No wonder the Church is growing like crazy when you have that kind of spirit. The Holy Spirit is moving strong. I asked the president of the Mekane Yesus Church to bless my Bible, which he did. That Bible is a sacred treasure."

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

Reprinted from CORE Connection, the newsletter of Lutheran CORE.

Who Are the “Nones?”

There have been, over the last year, newspaper articles citing the increasing number of Americans who, when asked in surveys about their religious affiliation, are answering “none.” I’ve read stories about these “nones” in both *USA Today* and the *New York Times*. And National Public Radio has recently broadcast a series on this growing segment of the American population.

I’ve already written about how the “nones” have grown to become approximately 20 percent of the American population. This is up from about 7 percent 40 years ago.

So who are the “nones?” Can we profile them, thereby gaining some sense of why they choose not to identify with any faith community? We can certainly try. So here goes. And ask yourself, as you consider the following characteristics, if a significant number of “nones” reside in *your* local community.

To begin with, “nones” are more likely to be males than females. Part of this is probably due to more American women than men having the primary responsibility in raising children. This means they might be more likely to respond to invitations to connect with a church “for the sake of the children.” But I think there’s more to this than parenting responsibilities. I have found women, in general, to express more interest in matters of personal spirituality than many men. And some men have misguided notions that religion is not something an independent, self-sufficient male would need.

“Nones” are more likely to be younger adults than older adults. No surprise here. Young adulthood is a life stage when people are less settled in terms of where they live, their marital status, and their career. They are also more likely to question traditional religious values and teachings.

“Nones” are more likely to be unmarried. This is at least partly due to how nuclear-family-oriented most congregations tend to be. Single adults can feel very out of place in most congregations. Even couples who are not parents can feel like they don’t belong.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

“Nones” are more likely to live in the western United States. (Exceptions to this include the New England states and much of Canada.) The specific states which repeatedly “compete” for the status of most unchurched are Nevada, Oregon and Alaska.

“Nones” are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. Truth is, most evangelical Protestants (the great majority of Protestants in the United States) vote Republican. Those unchurched Americans with more liberal/progressive views might assume that they couldn’t be open about their political views in a typical Protestant congregation. There is a widespread stereotype, among Americans, that most church-going Protestants are politically partisan conservatives. So “liberals” tend to stay away.

“Nones” are more likely to be Anglos. A higher percentage of Hispanics and African Americans attend church than Anglos.

Finally, “nones” are not necessarily unbelievers. The estimate is that only one-third of them self-identify as agnostics or atheists.

Some of these characteristics have direct implications for your congregation’s ministry. For example, it’s important that we try to keep men involved in our congregational life — both as participants and leaders. The more your church is perceived as primarily a community for women, the more difficult it will be to attract and involve men.

Another practical issue related to “nones” is the generational barrier we have (unintentionally)

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created as we have become aging congregations. In most communities once you no longer attract nesting-stage families your congregation is destined for a slow death. To avoid this destiny your church needs to invest a disproportionate percentage of your resources — including time and money — in youth and children’s ministries. Not just for the sake of the children and youth still in the membership, but for the sake of those you might be able to reach in your surrounding community.

And when it comes to politics I encourage pastors and lay leaders to be sensitive to the current level of acrimonious, partisan politics in American life. Granted, some political issues are important to our life of faith. However, we still need to be careful not to align too closely with one-sided political agendas.

An important observation regarding the growing number of Americans self-identifying as “nones:” We might be witnessing, in our lifetimes, the beginning of the end for nominal Protestantism. In fact, I was intrigued by a *Christianity Today* article, this last December, entitled “Spotlight: The End of Nominal Protestantism.” In this article Ed Stetzer, a Christian author, was quoted as saying, “The nominals are becoming the ‘nones.’ As the cultural value of identifying as Christians decreases, Christianity is no longer the first choice of many seeking spiritual meaning.”

I try to be a “glass-half-full” kind of guy. So on some level, I believe there is cause for celebration when *nominal* Christianity is on the wane. Stetzer concluded the above quote with this statement: “But it (the decline of nominal Protestantism) also means more vibrant congregations.”

More vibrant congregations? How? By more churches becoming local mission outposts that intentionally reach out to the local community and personally invite the unchurched to become a part of the Body of Christ. Church involvement — needless to say — is no longer “the thing to do.” As a result, the Gospel needs to be proclaimed and the love of Christ shared in very intentional ways. Nothing less will suffice. And once people visit it is absolutely essential we provide more than nominal membership in a nominal church. To meaningfully engage new people in the life of our congregations

we will need to help them move beyond membership to discipleship. They will need to be introduced to what it means to be fully committed followers of Jesus Christ.

What does “nominal” Protestantism look like in a local congregation? And how would you know whether *your* congregation qualifies as an example of nominal Protestantism? In other words, has your church — perhaps inadvertently — become the kind of congregation that presents Christianity in a way that fails to advocate for the Biblical vision of faithful discipleship?

Before I get into some of the possible “clues” that characterize nominal Protestantism, a disclaimer: Just about every congregation, to some degree, has “watered down” the Gospel. Parish pastors and lay leaders often end up compromising the Gospel for a variety of reasons. For example, the statement “there are bills to pay” is a commonly heard refrain when new ministry initiatives involve too much risk. As a result, we often tread lightly when there is danger of antagonizing our more faithful and generous members. Or, in pursuit of the unchurched, we’ve perhaps convinced ourselves that we need to be so “seeker sensitive” that our presentation of the Gospel becomes a pale reflection of the real thing. So nominal Protestantism is an on-going challenge for all of us.

Now for some of the more common characteristics of nominal Protestantism on a congregational level. Consider whether any of these apply to your congregation’s ministry.

Nominal Protestant churches tend to emphasize formal membership more than discipleship. This can manifest itself in your established process for receiving new members. Has your new-member orientation become so streamlined and simplified that you are modeling nominal membership, not committed discipleship? This can be reflected in the length of the process you require to join, the content of your instruction, and the expectations you have for your new people.

Another indication of nominal Protestantism is when congregational life is dominated and controlled by the pastor(s). The more top-down and hierarchical

your ministry leadership, the less likely you encourage lay leaders. Your people are not fooled. They understand that pastors who function as “gatekeepers” are typically exhibiting their own personal insecurities. Gatekeepers are easily threatened by the gifts and abilities of their constituents. The result is that the work of the Holy Spirit in these congregations is compromised.

Nominal Protestant congregations are less likely to acknowledge and celebrate the gifts and abilities of individuals in their midst. Clues to this might include the absence of lay people in worship leadership, very few (if any) lay-led small groups, and the absence of occasions when lay leaders are publicly called and commissioned to lead specific ministries.

Nominal Protestant churches are more likely to stress their parochial, denominational heritage than their mandate, as a part of the Body of Christ, to reach out to all non-believers. We live in a time when denominational distinctions strike increasing numbers of believers and nonbelievers alike as, at best, dated and at worst, irrelevant. While our Lutheran teaching and heritage are an important part of disciple-making, our more public outreach to the unchurched needs to focus on our Christian identity more than our denominational heritage.

I realize there are some communities in North America where denominational distinctions still matter. However, these communities are becoming rare. Both the rise of secularism and the growth in the number of independent, non-denominational congregations have contributed to this trend. We might not be happy about this development, but we dare not ignore it.

Nominal congregations often de-emphasize the importance of Bible-based financial stewardship. One of the greatest heresies of our culture is consumer-oriented materialism. When we present Christian stewardship as something involving our “spare change” or our “discretionary spending,” we are neglecting an important aspect of Christ’s public teaching. Nominal congregations sometimes sound almost apologetic when they raise the issue of Biblical stewardship.

Finally, nominal Protestant congregations fail to give proper emphasis to the Great Commission. This is so much more than delegating evangelism to one of your standing committees or mentioning it in your congregation’s mission statement. This is about outreach being your on-going passion as a faith community. It means talking about it in sermons and groups, offering events that involve your surrounding community, regularly encouraging members to invite friends and acquaintances, giving attention to your Sunday hospitality ministry, and doing all you can, when it comes to worship content, to make your services participatory for first-time visitors. Something else: When outreach is a congregation’s passion it should typically be your top priority when it comes to congregational planning.

The dichotomy between congregational “maintenance” and a congregation’s “mission” has become something of a cliché over the last 20 years. But it’s still a relevant test when it comes to your congregation’s ministry priorities. Making mission your over-riding priority is not without *short-term* risk. Some of your more nominal members might object. However, consider the far greater price we pay *long-term* when we abandon the more demanding aspects of Christian mission and discipleship.

Living in the Pacific Northwest has perhaps skewed my perception. But in this part of North America the distinction between the sacred and the secular has become incredibly stark. Churchgoers in my community are becoming increasingly aware of their minority status as people who still have ties to (dare I say it?) “organized religion.” I look back on my early years in ministry, when millions of nesting-stage Baby Boomers were coming back to church “for the sake of their children,” and now realize I was experiencing a once-in-a-lifetime anomaly. It was nothing more than a brief delay in our society’s steady movement toward an increasingly secular worldview. However, the good news is that we have the opportunity to now pursue, as congregations, more authentic, Biblical and radical mission strategies. We can celebrate the beginning of the end for nominal Protestantism and, without apology, become witnesses to the transforming power of Christ’s love.

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

The Daily Prayer of the Church

From the earliest times of the Church, Christians have engaged in daily prayer, a practice rooted in the Old Testament. The Psalmist declares, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules” (Psalm 119:164). In Psalm 55:17, David proclaims, “Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.” Three times a day, Daniel prayed and gave thanks to the Lord (Daniel 6: 10b).

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John went up to the Temple at 3 p.m., a designated time of prayer (Acts 3: 1). On his journey to Caesarea to meet Cornelius, Peter went up onto a housetop at noon to pray (Acts 10: 9). In the temple of the time of Jesus and the early Church, prayers were offered at certain hours three times a day.

The author of the *Didache* instructs the reader to pray the Lord’s Prayer three times a day. In *The Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus encourages daily prayer at the third hour, when Jesus was nailed to the cross; at the sixth hour when darkness came on the land; and at the ninth hour when Christ was pierced with the spear. The Christian is also to pray before leaving for work, before going to bed, and at midnight. In his work, *The Lord’s Prayer*, Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in the Third Century, gives Biblical explanations for prayer in the morning, at the setting of the sun, and at night along with three other times during the day.

Cyprian provides a Biblical rationale from both the Old Testament and the New Testament for praying throughout the day. The first rubric on Daily Prayer in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* states that prayer services among Christians developed in the home, then in congregations, then in monasteries and among the clergy.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* provides Morning Prayer (or Matins, from Latin for morning, *matutinum*), Evening Prayer (or Vespers, from Latin for evening, *vespera*), and Prayer at the Close of the Day (or Compline, from Latin *completorium*, *completa hora*, complete hour). Responsive Prayer 1 can serve for the prayer office of Terce from the Latin for the third hour, 9 a.m. Responsive Prayer 2



Words on Worship

Pastor Michael G. Tavella

can serve for *Sext* from Latin for the sixth hour, noon, and for *None* from Latin for the ninth hour, 3 p.m. Daily Prayer is also called the Divine Office. Office is from Latin, *officium*, for service. Daily Prayer follows the course of the day, the cycle of sunrise through sunset to a time before retiring for the night. A middle of the night service was held in monastic communities.

Daily Prayer includes versicles, psalms, prayers, the Lord’s Prayer, hymns, and readings from the Scriptures. The Invitatory is included in Morning Prayer. A responsory is included in Prayer at the Close of the Day. Canticles are sung at Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of the Day.

A pastor is not required to lead these services. In *LBW*, the presider’s part is indicated by L, that is, Leader. The rubrics indicate that more than one person may serve as a leader in the service. The prayer offices of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of the Day are choral. Both the leader and the congregation sing significant parts of the liturgy.

The *Invitatory*, which precedes Psalm 95 in Morning Prayer, is an invitation to worship in the form of a choral exchange between leader and congregation. In Daily Prayer, *versicles*, a series of lines from the Scriptures or grounded in them, are exchanged between the leader and the congregation.

In Evening Prayer, *versicles* introduce the Service of Light. The *Phos Hilaron*, which is Greek for “joyous light,” is a beautiful chant in this introductory

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liturgy. The Service of Light is associated with the lighting of the candles for Vespers, reminiscent of the lighting of lamps in Christian households accompanied by prayer. The Service of Light is followed by Psalm 141, "Let my prayer rise before you as incense." In Morning and Evening Prayer, other psalms follow the introductory psalm.

The singing of psalms is fundamental to the prayer offices. LBW provides a schedule of psalms to be used during the month at Morning and Evening Prayer. Psalms are provided for the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. The psalms for Compline are listed in the text of this liturgy. A psalm prayer for each psalm is included in the *Ministers Desk Edition*. A period of silence for reflection follows the singing of the psalm. The Psalm Prayer is said after the silence. Silence is an invaluable part of the liturgy, allowing time for meditation.

Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of the Day each include a canticle, a Biblical song from the Bible. The canticles in these services come from the beginning of Luke and pertain to the birth of Jesus. The *Benedictus*, Zechariah's song, is sung at Morning Prayer; the *Magnificat*, Mary's Song, is sung at Evening Prayer; and the *Nunc Dimittis*, Simeon's song, is sung at Prayer at the Close of Day. Alternative musical settings of the canticles are provided in LBW. Hymn versions may also be used.

In the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, a two-year lectionary of Scripture readings is given for use at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. Short lessons are provided in the text of Compline. LBW provides a responsory to follow the readings at Compline. The LBW rubrics suggest that a classic responsory may follow the reading of the Scriptures in Morning and Evening Prayer. These classic responsories can be found in the *Service Book and Hymnal*. The responsory texts are derived from the Scriptures and include the *Gloria Patri*. The seasonal canticles (#7-12 in LBW) may also be used as responsories.

An office hymn appropriate to the time of day and season is sung. Examples of office hymns are St. Gregory's "Father, We Praise You" and St. Ambrose's "O Trinity, O Blessed Light." The

Ministers Desk Edition gives a list of office hymns. In Compline, Hymn 278, "All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night," or another hymn is sung. A second hymn is sung later in the service. If a sermon is preached at Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer, a hymn in addition to the office hymn is sung.

Prayers are said or sung at all the offices. A litany, derived from the Eastern Orthodox Church, is included in Evening Prayer. A shorter form of this litany is used in our services of Holy Communion. In place of the recitation of a series of Collects including the Prayer of the Day, the Litany (Western form, *LBW*, p. 168) or Responsive Prayer I may be used at Morning Prayer. When Collects are recited, the people may add their petitions. At Evening Prayer, the Litany (Western form) or Responsive Prayer 2 may be used instead of the litany provided in the text of this liturgy.

Two forms of confession and forgiveness are included in Compline. We confess the sins that we have committed during the day. In one of the two forms cited, the leader confesses his sins, followed by an absolution spoken by the congregation. The congregation then makes confession, followed by the leader's absolution.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* provides Propers for the Divine Office for the seasons of the Church Year, Advent, Christmas/Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. Among the Propers are invitatories, versicles, antiphons, and two alternative thanksgivings for light for use in Evening Prayer. The great "O Antiphons" for the period of December 17 through December 23 are included in these propers. Each of the O Antiphons addresses Christ with a different title. The hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," is based on these antiphons.

Responsive Prayer 1 and 2 serve as the texts for prayer at midmorning, noon, and mid-afternoon. These services begin with the *Trisagion*, "Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal," and are followed by the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, versicles, and prayers. The rubrics suggest that before the *Trisagion*, a psalm or hymn and a brief lesson may be added.

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The Divine Office may also be used by the family or individual. Shorter forms of these services are indicated by red circles next to the parts that are to be included; however, there is no reason why a fuller service could not be used at home or by an individual.

The Divine Office is a prime example of the Biblical basis of the liturgy. In it we find Biblical canticles, psalms, Scripture readings, and versicles taken from the Bible. The prayers, canticles, and hymns reflect Biblical teachings and language.

In the Daily Prayer of the Church, the Triune God is worshipped, praised, and lauded. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is lifted up. The Divine Office reflects the principle first mentioned by Prosper of Aquitaine, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, “the law of prayer is the law of belief.” What we pray is what we believe. It is of the highest importance that our liturgy expresses the orthodox Christian faith.

Our belief must conform to the Scripture and its faithful witnesses, the creeds and confessions. The Divine Office is faithful to the teaching of the Church. What we pray in the Divine Office is the Biblical and orthodox faith.

The Divine Office is a part of the ancient liturgy of the Church. Lutheran Christians should be encouraged to pray these beautiful services. When we recite and sing the Divine Office, we are connected to the Church of every age, all the way back to the simple services in the household. The Daily Prayer of the Church is a treasure that we have inherited. Let us be faithful stewards of these riches.

Next time I will make some final comments to conclude this series on worship.

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

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.



NALC office celebrates new arrival

Rachel and Neil Sosebee celebrated the birth of their daughter, Lucy, on March 25. Rachel is Assistant to the Missions Director at the NALC office in Hilliard, Ohio. Lucy is pictured with her parents and brother, Henry.



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