

David Yeago appointed to faculty of North American Lutheran Seminary

Dr. David S. Yeago has been appointed to the faculty of the North American Lutheran Seminary and Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., as Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics.

"I am honored and delighted to join the faculty at Trinity School for Ministry in partnership with the North American Lutheran Seminary," said Dr. Yeago.

"Trinity's commitment to the historic Christian faith, focus on Biblical theology, and passion for the mission of the Gospel correspond to my own priorities as a Christian theologian. I look forward to new friendships with new colleagues as we work together to form students for service to Christ and His Gospel in the Church and in the world," he said.

The establishment of the North American Lutheran Seminary as the NALC's seminary was approved by the 2013 NALC Convocation. The NALS proposal calls for a Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry and Houses of Studies to be located throughout North America as needed.

Dr. Yeago most recently served as adjunct faculty for the NALS House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. The Rev. Dr. Mary B. Havens is director of the NALS House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell.

Dr. Havens and Dr. Yeago were highly-respected orthodox professors at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C., for more than two decades. In 2012, the ELCA school suddenly eliminated their positions.

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin was called in November 2013 as Seminary Director for the North



Dr. David Yeago speaks at the Theological Conference prior to the 2013 NALC Convocation.

American Lutheran Seminary and the Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry. She also was named Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics at Trinity.

"As we begin to grow and take shape as a seminary in the North American Lutheran landscape, the addition of Dr. Yeago as Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics will help us to be a center for students who seek to be formed within a Confessional Lutheran context," said Dr. Schifrin.

"At our Convocation last August we began this venture in theological education trusting that God is leading us into the future. I rejoice that in these early days, He is already providing for us so richly.

"We at the North American Lutheran Seminary give thanks to God for the teaching ministry of Dr. David

Donations show strong support for seminary

Donations for the North American Lutheran Seminary are more than halfway to the first-year goal of raising \$1 million for the new seminary of the North American Lutheran Church.

Gifts designated for the NALC Theological Education Fund and for the seminary have totaled more than \$616,000. This total shows very strong support for the seminary, but it remains far short of the goal of the goal of \$1 million set by the 2013 NALC Convocation.

Seminary funding comes from support from NALC congregations and from individual gifts.

“I give thanks to God for these gifts that express your great love for the church and for her future leaders,” said the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, Seminary Director. “As our seminary is established within the life of the NALC, these offerings of financial support will be used to provide seminarians with the resources needed for healthy, strong, faithful pastoral formation.

“Your gifts are received with joy by the NALS as a sign of God’s abundant blessings to His faithful people,” Dr. Schifrin said.

“In our video introducing the North American Lutheran Seminary, I called your attention to the fact that people are interested in knowing how we will secure and train pastors for the future. What followed was a challenge to turn that question back on ourselves and support the establishment of NALS accepting the goal of raising \$1 million in this first year. You have not only accepted the challenge but demonstrated your ability to exceed it,” said NALC Bishop John Bradosky.

“Thank you for your faithful support of the men and women God continues to call into Word and Sacrament ministry. Thank you for your faithful support of the faculty and administrators who will provide for their training, equipping them to lead our congregations confident in the Word and bold in their witness to Jesus Christ,” he said.

“I am thrilled with the generous response from congregations and individuals for our new

seminary. The financial support that has come from so many individuals and congregations — both large and small — shows how important it is for us to prepare orthodox, confessional pastors for our church,” said Bishop Paull Spring, chair of the NALS Board of Regents.

Donations to support the seminary may be given to the NALC Theological Education Fund online at www.thenalc.org, or sent to:

NALC Theological Education Fund
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Designated gifts to support the NALC Theological Education Fund may also be given through your local congregation.

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Yeago. He is held in the highest esteem by both Lutheran and ecumenical colleagues. His service to the church and his dedication to his calling as a teaching theologian have contributed to the formation of a generation of Lutheran pastors and church leaders. His faithful witness to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has been integral in the shaping of the hearts and minds of countless seminarians, and now through the partnership of the NALS and Trinity School for Ministry he will continue to do so as Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics,” Dr. Schifrin said.

“I am extremely thankful for Dr. Yeago’s work among the students at our House of Studies in Charlotte, and hope that, with this new appointment to our Seminary Center in Ambridge, his teaching will be made accessible to students throughout the NALS,” she said.

“David Yeago’s theological gifts are well recognized throughout the church today. It is a significant opportunity for us in the North American Lutheran Church to have him as one of our chief teachers,” said Bishop Paull Spring, chair of the NALS Board of Regents.

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Charleston to host NALC Convocation

Convocations and Theological Conference to be at The Citadel

One of the most popular tourist destinations in the United States will host the Convocations of the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE and their annual Theological Conference this summer.

All three events will be held on the campus of The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

Charleston has been named the top U.S. City by *Condé Nast Traveler* in its annual Readers' Choice Awards, which recognizes the world's leading travel brands and best cities.

"With 'sand, sun, history, good food, and friendly people,' Charleston is a consistent hit with the travelers who venture to this 'gracious and beautiful' city (in fact, it's taken first place on our list of Top 10 Cities in the United States for three years now and been rated as the friendliest). Nearby beaches and impressive architecture draw visitors, but it's the 'insanely nice' locals who enhance 'magnificent' bed and breakfasts and 'amazing shopping,'" the magazine reported.

"Standing With ... To Withstand" is the theme of the 2014 NALC Convocation. The Convocation will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 24, and conclude at 5 p.m. Friday. The theme is based on Ephesians 6:10-20 which describes the whole armor of God.

The Convocation is the annual meeting of the NALC. In addition to business, the gathering features inspiring speakers and worship services.

The Lutheran CORE Convocation will meet July 21-22 under the theme "Sharing the Hope that is in Us."



Summerall Chapel at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., will host the NALC and Lutheran CORE Convocations and Theological Conference. (Photo by Russ Pace of The Citadel)

The Convocation is set to begin at 7 p.m. on Monday, July 21. Featured speakers include the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions; the Rev. Dr. Walter Sundberg, Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary; and Pastor Stéphane Kalonji of Reformation Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in New Bern, N.C.

The annual Theological Conference sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE is held between the Convocations. "Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed" is the theme of the conference which begins at 7 p.m. on July 22. (See *article on Page 4.*)

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering is on Wednesday, July 23. Watch for more details online and in the *NALC News*.

Registration information for all four events will be sent to NALC congregations and available at www.thenalc.org by May 1.

2014 Theological Conference

Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed

“Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed” is the theme of the 2014 Theological Conference July 22-23 at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

The annual theological conference is sponsored by the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE and is held between their Convocations.

Dr. Robert Benne, one of the conference organizers, will open the Theological Conference with a reflection on the theme. Dr. Benne is the Jordan Trexler Professor Emeritus and Research Associate at Roanoke College in Salem, Va.

Dr. Benne’s introduction will be followed by six major presentations. Speakers for the Theological Conference and their topics include:



Robert Benne



Mark Granquist



Stephen Hultgren



R. David Nelson



Amy Schifrin



Christopher Seitz



David Yeago

**The Scripture Controversy
in American Lutheranism
Infallibility, Inerrancy, Inspiration**

The Rev. Dr. Mark A. Granquist
Associate Professor of Church History
Luther Seminary - St. Paul, Minn.

**On Being “Lovers of Truth”
The Canon of Scripture and
the Church’s Commitment to Truth**

The Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Hultgren
Lecturer in New Testament
Australian Lutheran College - Adelaide, Australia

**What Is Theological Exegesis?
Practical Resources
for Preaching the Gospel Today**

Dr. R. David Nelson
Lutheran Theologian and Acquisitions Editor
Baker Academic and Brazos Press

**Knowing the Bible through Worship
and the Liturgy**

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin
Seminary Director
North American Lutheran Seminary
Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics
Trinity School for Ministry - Ambridge, Pa.

**The Ethics of Sex, Marriage, and the Family
According to the Bible**

The Rev. Dr. Christopher Seitz
Senior Research Professor
Wycliffe College - Toronto School of Theology

**Luther’s Way of Reading and Interpreting
the Bible**

Dr. David S. Yeago
Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics
North American Lutheran Seminary
Trinity School for Ministry - Ambridge, Pa.

Indiana congregation partners with churches in Ethiopia and Florida

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

The March-April 2013 *NALC News* told the story of how Pastor Doug Gast and Bethel Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Noblesville, Ind., entered into a mission and ministry partnership with Pastor Gobena Degefa and his congregation in Senbete, Ethiopia. Pastor Doug also shared the story at the 2013 Lutheran CORE Convocation.

Since then, Bethel's Missions Committee has been busy developing enthusiasm for the mission connection by sharing the Senbete mission's message with Bethel's members.

Last year Bethel sent \$5,200 to the Senbete church — about half of which was raised during the Advent and Lenten services above and beyond Bethel's regular offerings.

These gifts enabled this Ethiopian congregation to support 20 orphans, hire an evangelist, and pay for the cost of Pastor Gobena's further schooling. Seeing how much can be done with the dollars that are sent, Bethel Lutheran plans to give this year's Advent and Lenten offerings to support their Ethiopian mission partner.

Pastor Gobena and Pastor Doug keep in regular contact via email. In a recent exchange, Pastor Gobena related that he had been traveling by bus to another town. Just outside the town, police stopped the bus and ordered everybody off. As the police interrogated passengers, the bus suddenly exploded. Pastor Gobena was injured and lost everything he had on the bus — his clothing, his laptop, and all the money he had with him. From a hospital in Addis Ababa, he sent Pastor Doug an email, asking for prayers for himself and the congregation he was now unable to serve.

That same weekend Pastor Doug received a gift for almost the exact amount of Pastor Gobena's loss. This gift came from a member who wanted to



Pastor Doug Gast and Pastor Gobena Degefa met in early 2012 when Pastor Gast traveled to Ethiopia. While visiting the congregation in Senbete and listening to Pastor Gobena describe their ministry, Pastor Doug felt that God was calling him to develop a partnership with this congregation.

support missions. Pastor Doug is now in the process of sending the money to Pastor Gobena, who has resumed his ministry and recently baptized six former Muslims.

"In the notes I receive from him, he is always very upbeat as he expresses his gratitude for our prayers. It is always so uplifting to hear from him." Pastor Doug said.

Bethel Lutheran continues to form other mission connections, most recently with Pastor Eddy Perez and Iglesia Luterana San Pedro, an NALC mission congregation in Miami, Florida.

Bethel Lutheran has sent Spanish language Sunday School and Vacation Bible School materials, and a family from Bethel Lutheran visited San Pedro, taking along four cases of Bibles to the Spanish-speaking congregation. One of the family members preached at Iglesia San Pedro on a Sunday morning and spoke on Pastor Eddy's radio

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program. (See the February 2014 NALC News for more information on Pastor Eddy's radio ministry, which is reaching Spanish-speaking people from central Florida to central Cuba.)

Julie Sprung, Bethel's organist and music leader, also visited Iglesia San Pedro. During her visit Ms. Sprung sang at a Sunday morning worship service and spoke with Pastor Eddy on the radio program. She talked about the relationship between Bethel Lutheran and Iglesia San Pedro.

Pastor Doug plans to preach at Iglesia San Pedro on Sunday, July 20, and to travel with Pastor Eddy to attend the Lutheran CORE and NALC Convocations and the Theological Conference, which will be held July 21-25 at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

"Giving Goes Both Ways" is when established congregations make connections with mission or ethnic congregations. Through these mission connections, both groups are blessed, because both groups have much to share. Established churches have financial resources to share, while mission and ethnic churches are inspiring examples of commitment, faith, courage, and fervor. As an example, Pastor Eddy's congregation has added Bethel's Ethiopian mission partner congregation to its prayer list.

Describing the personal value of his congregation's relationship with Pastor Eddy and Iglesia San Pedro, Pastor Doug said, "We are developing a real friendship. This one-on-one connection stuff really works." He added, "It is more than just sending money. Sending money is the way we did it before. Now we have an investment, a relationship, and a partnership that is a blessing both ways."

Pastor Eddy preached at Bethel Lutheran after Easter last year and the hope is that he will return for a visit later this year. "We had a great time together. The people here enjoyed him so much," Pastor Doug said. "We are talking about going to Ethiopia together in 2015 to attend an evangelism conference and to get more connected with Pastor Gobena and his Senbete church. I want to be with them on a Sunday morning and experience the church up close and personal."



Bob Hanson, a member of Bethel Lutheran Church in Noblesville, Ind., speaks at Iglesia San Pedro in Miami, Fla., in November as an expression of the partnership relationship between the two congregations. Pastor Eddy Perez translates.

Both pastors are leading a Lenten series on the life of Joseph in the Old Testament book of Genesis, but each is using a different resource. Pastor Eddy's series will be based on a Max Lucado book, *You'll Get through This*, while Pastor Doug will be speaking on, "God Can See You Through," based upon the lectionary readings for the day. "We will have the same theme, though we will be using different Bible stories. Here we are — a thousand miles apart, two different cultures, but united in our study of how God gets us through the turmoil and difficult moments of life," Pastor Doug said.

Regarding making and maintaining mission connections, Pastor Doug commented, "You have to be really intentional about keeping communication going. It is so easy to let it slide. You have to put it on your calendar to email or call so that the contact is fostered, grows and deepens."

Bethel's Missions Committee has a missions corner in the church newsletter every month and works to keep the articles readable, fresh, and interesting. "The people here really enjoy listening to reports about mission," said Pastor Doug.

One Bethel member went on a mission trip to Kenya and told the story of her trip in January. "Everybody enjoyed and appreciated what she had

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Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation as Antidote to Lethal Me Culture of Today

“Strong Medicine: The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation as Antidote to the Lethal Me Culture of Today” is the theme of the annual Canadian Rockies Theological Conference May 5-8 at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center in Canmore, Alberta. Canmore is about an hour west of Calgary, near Banff National Park.

Featured speakers are Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto and Dr. Irving Hexham.

Dr. Siemon-Netto is the Executive Director of the Center for Lutheran Theology and Public Life in Capistrano Beach, Calif. A native of Leipzig, Germany, he has been an international journalist for 53 years. In mid-career, he turned to theology, earning degrees from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and Boston University. His books include *The Fabricated Luther: Refuting Nazi Connections and Other Modern Myths* and *Duc: A Reporter’s Love for the Wounded People of Vietnam*.



Uwe Siemon-Netto



Irving Hexham

Dr. Hexham is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary. He earned his doctorate in history and his master’s degree in theology and religious studies from the University of Bristol, England. He has published more than 20 books and numerous articles. His books include *Understanding World Religions*, *The Concise Dictionary of Religion*, and

Understanding Cults and New Religions. He has also authored Christian travelers guides for France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy. Dr. Hexham is married to Dr. Karla Poewe, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Calgary, who will also be present for the conference.

One of the highlights of the week will be worship led by the musical group Krystaal. Krystaal is an award-winning, multi-talented group of three brothers who excel in various genres of music including R&B/Pop, Gospel, Urban and World (African). They are characterized by their tight vocal harmonies and an ability to fit any audience. The brothers are natives of the Democratic Republic of Congo and are performing at the theological conference as a way to thank the Lutherans attending for the work of Lutheran World Federation in helping them while they lived in refugee camps in Kenya.

More information on the conference is available on Facebook or by contacting Pastor Phillip Gagnon at pphil1961@icloud.com.

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to share. If you can get people excited about missions, who knows what the next chapter will be?” Pastor Doug asked.

A Sunday bulletin insert includes thoughts and prayers on mission for the week. The prayers include their four mission partners: Pastor Gobena in Senbete, Ethiopia; Pastor Eddy Perez and Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Fla.; and two other NALC mission congregations of the NALC — Living Faith Lutheran Church in Wabash, Ind., and Pastor Jeff Cottingham and Trinity Lutheran Church in Gothenburg, Neb. Bethel Lutheran has sent \$1,000 to support Trinity Lutheran’s building efforts.

Pastor Doug Gast and the people of Bethel Lutheran are an outstanding example of what Mission Connect is all about — encouraging pastors and congregations to enter into a direct, personal, hands-on relationship with at least one domestic and at least one global mission or ministry.

If you would like more information about entering into a similar mission or ministry connection, please contact Jenny Brockman in the NALC Missions Office at 614-777-5709 or jbrockman@thenalc.org.

NALC missionary begins work with refugee children from South Sudan

By Pastor Frank Rothfuss

On Sunday night, Dec. 15, the dry tinder of political unrest and tribalism was ignited by a gunfight within the elite Palace Guard. The fighting spread to the streets of South Sudan's capital city, Juba, where the bodies of soldiers and civilians began to litter the streets.

A civil war quickly spread throughout the country, with the heaviest fighting happening in Bor where St. Luke's Theological College had just finished its first year of classes.

NALC Missionary, Pastor Matthew Riak, founder and principal of the College, was in Juba. Three days after the fighting broke out, the U.S. Embassy evacuated him to Nairobi, Kenya, along with other American citizens.



NALC Missionary Pastor Matthew Riak visits refugees from South Sudan at a refugee camp in Adjumani, Uganda. Pastor Riak has started a ministry to the children in the camp.

The college itself was looted by the rebels, and people fled Bor in fear and panic, swelling the ranks of refugees to over 500,000 displaced persons.

It is Matthew's most sincere hope that the fighting in South Sudan will dissipate and that St. Luke's Theological College will be able to reopen its doors in September for the new semester.

Matthew, who had felt called by God to help equip leaders for church and community in South Sudan, now felt called to do something to help the South Sudanese refugees.

Having spent 20 years in a refugee camp as one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan," Matthew knew something about such camps, and he thought St. Luke's Theological College could help.

In January, Matthew visited Adjumani, Uganda, where more than 36,000 refugees flooded a camp



Pastor Matthew Riak poses at the sign for the refugee camp at Adjumani, Uganda, of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN refugee agency.

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built for 400 people. Basic resources were in short supply — new arrivals had to wait for shelter; people stood in lines for hours to get water and food. Eighty-five percent of the refugees in Adjumani were women and children. Many of the children were separated from their parents and families.

Matthew's heart went out to these children, who were at great risk of neglect, abuse, trafficking and forced military recruitment. As Matthew discussed the situation with relief agencies, and St. Luke's administrators and supporters from the United States, the vision of a mission center where displaced children could find a child-friendly environment where they could feel safe and secure began to come into focus. Recreational activities would draw children in and give them something to do: playing soccer or dodge ball, singing and dancing, listening to Bible stories and praying together. Volunteer adults from the camp would lead small-group discussions as the children reflected on the Bible stories and their own experiences.



Refugees from South Sudan at camp in Adjumani, Uganda.

These small-group leaders would encourage children to express their feelings and talk about the trauma they had witnessed and experienced. A professional counselor would be available to help those children who needed more in-depth counseling to process their terror and trauma. The mission center could also be used to provide some food — perhaps snacks during the day or even a meal once or twice a week.

St. Luke's CORE — Child Outreach in Refugee Empowerment — is a short-term mission at the Adjumani refugee camp with a capacity for 100 children. This ministry of St. Luke's with refugee children in its short time of existence has already brought God's message of hope and love in the midst of fear, uncertainty and need.

Working together with various NGOs, Lutheran World Federation, the United Nations' World Food Project, and other United Nations' agencies, Matthew is seeking to provide for the most basic of people's needs.

At this time there is great need for prayers and financial assistance. Please consider supporting this mission by visiting the Great Commission Society's website to adopt this family and mission today: www.thenalc.org/great-commission-society.



Pastor Matthew Riak poses with sign from St. Luke's outreach program to refugee children.

Bishop's Easter Message

Dear Disciples of the Risen Lord Jesus,

As I was praying for you and anticipating the wondrous joy that is ours because of the Resurrection of Jesus, I was reading the Gospel accounts thinking about the mixed emotions that filled the first witnesses who arrived at the tomb. Mark's Gospel helps us to recount the emotional, intellectual and spiritual breadth and depth of this experience.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8 NIV)

The central day of Christian faith begins with a group of women walking toward the rocky hillside, the tomb of Jesus. They were so overwhelmed with grief that they could barely lift their heads to carry on a conversation. Making their grief even worse, all their planning to finish the job of anointing Jesus' body was probably wasted effort. They forgot one important detail in their plan: "Who will roll the stone away for us?"

This day that changed human history began not with celebration but with grief, tears and frustration.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Every time I look at these words in Scripture, I have to ask, "What kept these women walking toward the tomb?" Doesn't it make sense that if you started out and thought of that stone in front of the tomb, realizing that you couldn't move it, you would have just turned around and said, "What's the use, forget it, let's go back home."

Those who join us for worship on Easter are just like these women, just like us, overwhelmed by grief, remembering loved ones who have died or are dying. Perhaps they are dealing with their own illness or broken relationships. Perhaps like these women, they will be fear-filled and insecure, in a world rocked by terrorists, extremists, tension, civil war, nuclear proliferation, and unstable leaders. Perhaps that sense of loss and despair is rooted in financial struggles, insufficient funds for retirement, trying to find a job or keep the current one. In the midst of grief, tears and frustration, people will join us searching for answers, hope and faith to keep them moving through overwhelming circumstances.

I am convinced that what kept those women moving forward was more than a sense of duty, obligation, commitment, or righteousness. It was love for the one whose body they were to anoint. They trusted Jesus. They believed in Jesus. These were women of faith!

Faith tells us that, despite the stones that seem immovable and despite mountains along the way that seem insurmountable, we need to keep going! Faith is not trusting in our own ability to move mountains. Faith is believing in a God who moves the immovable and overcomes the insurmountable.

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How much faith do you need? This was a question that even Jesus' own disciples asked Him. Jesus responded by telling them all they needed was faith as big as a mustard seed. That was the faith that summoned those women to the tomb on that first Easter morning. It was faith sufficient to believe in His promises, to love Jesus in the midst of the worst of circumstances. This is the faith that kept the women walking toward the tomb.

This is how Easter breaks into our lives, when all seems lost, when we least expect it. When they arrived at the tomb they saw the stone rolled away.

Every time I look at this Easter Gospel, I think about the stone. Why was it rolled away? It didn't need to be rolled away by an angel to let Jesus out. I trust Jesus could have moved the stone by His own power. In fact, he could have walked right through it. The Scripture records the fact that he appeared to his disciples by walking through a closed door. The rock couldn't have stopped Him. I wonder if the stone was moved in anticipation of the question these women were sure to raise. "Who will roll away the stone?"

This mountain-moving God had already acted, moving the stone, raising Jesus triumphant and victorious. In addition to the stone being rolled away, God meets them just inside the tomb with an angel who has an even more powerful message. "Don't be amazed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

What do we do with this experience, this message? I am convinced that we must read the Scripture not as though it is the historical record from the ancient past, but as though it is happening to us — our experience — now! You are the one on your way, you are the one taking those painful steps to the tomb. You are the one amazed by the stone that is rolled away, overwhelmed by the angel and his words. The Easter proclamation is God's intervention in your life and our life together.

This is intervention we desperately need as we struggle to survive in a world filled with fear and hopelessness, where people are confused and skeptic of all our human solutions that fail to

overcome our largest problem, sin and its consequences. This intervention is vital as we have become addicted to our own solutions. When will we finally admit that governments cannot save us? That all the well-intended humanists striving to create a utopian society cannot save us? When will we learn that our wealth cannot save us, nor will our innovation, our science, our technology, nor all our combined knowledge?

Many in our culture are working endlessly to lead us away from the empty tomb to trust in something far more empty. C.S. Lewis, a scholar who began his journey as an atheist but became a follower of Jesus, writes about the bias of scholars and their rejection of miracles. In his treatise called "Fern-seed and Elephants," he writes,

"As many academics look at the Scriptures they begin with the assumption that miracle passages must be unhistorical, that is, they never happened. Such a belief is not one they learned from the Scriptures, but one they bring to the Scriptures. They are therefore not true students of the Scriptures but students of the culture. Their own cultural bias is superimposed on the Scriptures. This however is not true biblical scholarship. The authority of those who speak in this way count as nothing for they speak only as men, influenced by and uncritical of the culture in which they have grown up."

The message of Easter draws us into not just any miracle but the greatest miracle of all, Resurrection. Jesus, who died, is now alive! The entire mission, power and faith of the Body of Christ is focused on this one central miracle. Yet even in the church today there are those who minimize the critical nature of the Resurrection.

One lady was so confused about Easter after listening to her pastor's sermon she asked this question in an online blog:

On Easter, my pastor said that Jesus just fainted on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?

*Sincerely,
Bewildered*

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The host of the blog wrote back,

Dear Bewildered,

Beat your pastor with a lead-tipped whip 39 times; nail him to a cross; hang him in the sun for six hours; run a spear thru his side ... put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours and see what happens.

*Sincerely,
Truth Seeker*

This humorous anecdote is an apt description of our human response to those things we don't understand. Miracles give us a glimpse of a Biblical worldview — a Kingdom of God worldview that Jesus proclaimed. Miracles have no place in our secular worldview and our first reaction is to reject them or find some reasonable explanation.

Some have tried to share with me their experiences that defy reason. They have difficulty finding words. Even some of the best communicators realize the limitation of word choices and communication skills. They simply declare, "This is beyond words!" Some experiences seem so out of the ordinary, so bizarre, that people fear recounting them because others will think they have lost their minds.

I understand this not only from the reported experiences of others but also my own. Contemplating this reality will help us understand even more deeply the experience of these women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

Some time ago, I remember reading the words of an author who wrote, "at the cross our hearts are broken, but at the empty tomb our minds are broken."

Perhaps God knows that, before we can glimpse the depth and vastness of His Kingdom, both our hearts and our minds have to be broken. With a broken heart and mind, we are forced to realize that we can't save ourselves. There is only one source of salvation, only one power that can redeem and save us from our perilous situation.

God calls us to a new understanding of love and a new worldview in the Cross and Resurrection of

Jesus. Resurrection is what you get when you combine God's power with God's grace — love so powerful nothing can stop it, nothing in life and nothing in death.

How much faith does it take for this Easter Gospel to transform our lives as it did these women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection?

It takes just enough faith to take one step in the direction of Jesus and then another and another. It takes just enough faith to trust in the promise, to trust in His profound love for you in life and even in death. Every step in His direction will convince you that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is salvation in no one else. His love draws us in and His Holy Spirit empowers us even before we take that first step or the next one.

In many ways, the Word of God is so believable because it is so painfully honest about the human experience and condition. If this was a story of human invention, the Gospel would not end this way. In spite of the angel's proclamation and instruction, the women run in fear. In Verse 8, we read, "They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid." The most powerful, defining story of their lives and human history and they said nothing to anyone! How can this be?

When we consider our own culture in North America, our lack of going and telling is now showing. The number of those who proudly declare that they have no religious faith is expanding. Agnostics and atheists are organized as a political movement. Not only have mainline denominations been in a state of decline for the past two decades, but even Evangelicals are declining, and mega-churches are struggling. We so desperately want to fit in with our culture, fearing what others may think of us, we say nothing to anyone. We try to do good without telling. We try to love without sharing the love of Jesus.

I contend that our conformity to culture makes it even more difficult for Christians in other parts of the world to continue to be bold in their witness. They have much to teach us as they risk imprisonment and even death for going and telling.

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Isn't it interesting that churches in North American and Europe that have sold out to contemporary culture are dying? Their members are loyal to institutions and organizations, playing it safe, risking little or nothing.

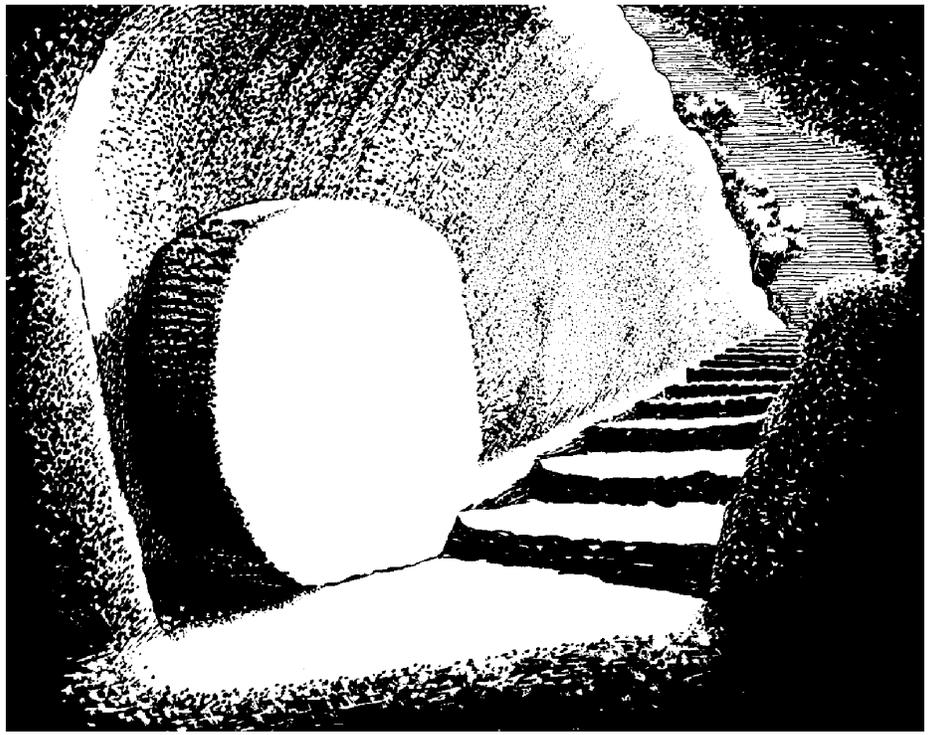
Yet, where churches have remained faithful in their proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even in the midst of harsh persecution, their churches are growing. Those disciples of Jesus are risking everything, even giving their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Leaders in some of those churches have offered challenging words to us. Not long ago I met with several pastors from Rwanda who were concerned about what they found after spending six months in North America. They offered these two comments that will haunt me forever. They said, "Your problem is that you no longer believe that Jesus is the only Way, the Truth, and the Life, but we do. Your second problem is that you no longer believe that the Gospel of Jesus is Good News that needs to be shared with the whole world, but we do."

Jesus' instruction is the same to all He encounters following His Resurrection: "Go and tell!"

We come this Easter to worship a living Lord Jesus who is still moving mountains, softening hardened hearts and igniting the spirits of His people to go and tell. He is just as personally present today as He was when He met those disciples on the first Easter morning. He is calling us to have faith in Him, to keep moving in His direction, nurtured by a community of faithful followers relying on the Holy Spirit, the truth and power of Word and Sacrament.

His Resurrection guarantees our forgiveness, salvation and new life in His Kingdom that is eternal. Death has no power over us. Sin and brokenness are defeated. Guilt can no longer hold us captive. Restoration of relationships is assured and the hope we have is real and permanent. This is the Good News we have to share with the whole world: "The stone is rolled away, and Jesus is accessible to all."



They are only waiting for someone to let them know. Jesus is depending on us to get out the message of Easter.

As I speak about discipleship I recount Dietrich Bonhoeffer's contention that faith and obedience are inseparable. I have also learned that love and obedience are also inseparable. "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands." (2 John 1:6).

The Easter Gospel does not end in silence. The additional verses had to be written to conclude Mark's Gospel account. These women who loved Jesus were also obedient. They did go and tell the other disciples. They were the only ones who could share this experience with us. They may have been silent for a little while, but not long afterward they followed the angel's instruction. They went and they told others, and so must we!

No fear or threat is stronger than this Easter proclamation.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

Have a blessed celebration of our Lord's Resurrection,

Bishop John Bradosky

Advent Lutheran Church Kings Mountain, N.C.

Advent Lutheran Church of Kings Mountain, N.C., has purchased 13 acres of land.

Advent is a mission congregation of the NALC — the first NALC mission in North Carolina. The congregation now has 130 members, with average worship attendance of 70 to 75 each Sunday.

With the faithful giving of the congregation, Advent moved from part-time to full-time support of its pastor, the Rev. Marty Ramey, in July of 2012. Pastor Ramey has been with the congregation for most of its existence, starting as the



Members of Advent Lutheran Church pose for a group photo.

regular supply pastor in December 2010, shortly after the congregation formed.

The congregation currently meets in the Lawrence Patrick Senior Center in Kings Mountain. Weekly activities are graciously hosted by local congregations that have supported Advent in its mission. The Wednesday Bible study meets at Boyce Memorial Presbyterian Church. Mission Team meetings are held at Boyce and at East Gold Street Wesleyan Church, which has also provided an office for the pastor.

Advent Lutheran Church joined with East Gold Street Wesleyan Church to offer Ash Wednesday and mid-week Lenten services every Wednesday during Lent. They will also have Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services together. All of the services were held at the Wesleyan church but have followed Lutheran liturgies — a new experience for many of the Wesleyans, and one they seem to have appreciated greatly. On Ash Wednesday, they had over 70 in attendance and



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for the Wednesday services an average of about 40. "This ecumenical worship opportunity has enriched both of our congregations," Pastor Ramey said.

Over the past three years, the Advent Growth Fund grew to the point where the congregation was able to purchase land for its future home. The church is now in a new growth phase to begin the process of setting aside the financial resources needed to fund its initial building.

Advent has received generous support from several congregations in the Carolinas Mission District. They have received financial assistance but, even more importantly, the prayers and interactions with these congregations. The spiritual support of others reminds the congregation that it is not alone, that it is part of a greater network of Christians who work together to serve Christ and carry out his Great Commission.

Advent will celebrate the acquisition of this property with a service of dedication on May 18 at the property. Pastor Carl Haynes, Dean of the



Pastor Scott Whitney (left) of East Gold Street Wesleyan Church and Pastor Marty Ramey of Advent Lutheran Church. The two congregations worshiped together for midweek services during Lent and Holy Week.

Carolinas Mission District, will lead the dedication, and the congregation and its mission partners will enjoy the fellowship and good food of a Carolina barbeque following the service.

Nestings travel to China on mission

The North American Lutheran Church and China Service Ventures partnered to send Jim and Carolyn Nestingen to teach at Wuhan in Hubei Province (next to Hunan Province), China, as part of the Theologians Without Borders program.

These two provinces are where Lutherans started mission work more than 100 years ago, and they are among the poorest areas in China.

Jim, a retired professor at Luther Seminary, taught an intensive two-week course on Luther's Small Catechism as a document for mission. Carolyn taught English.

They taught at the Protestant seminary in Wuhan, an industrial center of 10 million people on the Yangtze River. Classes at the seminary are held in the building where Dr. Paul Martinson — a retired professor at Luther whose parents were missionaries



Caroline and Jim Nestingen

in China and co-founder of China Service Ventures — went to school, and where he and his family endured the first years of World War II.

'My Lord and My God'

***A Message for the Second Sunday of Easter
based on John 20:19-31.***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

(Genesis 1:1-2)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.

(John 1:1-3)

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

(Genesis 2:7)

And Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you." When He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

(John 20:21-22)

And the man became a living being.

(Genesis 2:7)

Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and My God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

(John 20:28-29)

The creation of faith is no less spectacular than the creation of life itself. Indeed, we could even say that until we cry with Thomas, "My Lord and my God, My Lord and my God," we are not truly alive. Could we live without forgiveness? Could we live without peace? Can we live without the breath of God?

While the Crucifixion was scandalous to those in ancient Palestine who sought to know God, in these times it is the Resurrection that dogs our hearts like a hound caught in the scent of a chase. Try as we will to shake it, there is no easy escape. The world asks the question of Resurrection that Thomas



From the Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin

asked. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in His side, I will not believe." "Come on, prove it to me, God — are you really there? Are you really here?"

You would never know it from the disciples' behavior. Locked in the house for fear of the Jews, John tells us. But I think they were locked in the house for fear of one Jew in particular — the one whom they had betrayed, denied, and abandoned. They had good reason to fear, for if He really were God, what would happen to them? Well, He is, and He came breathing forgiveness into their mortal bodies.

Now it's a week later, and they are still behind closed doors. Maybe if they had stepped out of their self-made tomb, maybe if they had trusted that He who is the door for the sheep was open to them, maybe if they lived without fear, Thomas would have believed.

So now, again, love flows like water from His riven side. "Put your finger here. ... Reach out your hand and listen. ... Peace. ... Peace. ... Peace," He breathes. "It's a new life that I am calling you to. It's what God has promised to you from the beginning of time."

Jesus comes to him, not as a corpse which we might sorrow over, and not as a ghostly apparition of which we would be afraid, but He comes as a body, a real body, the body of God with spike-torn hands and bleeding side. He comes, for not even death can stop Him from coming. "Peace be with

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you,” He speaks, His voice coming from His scarred, yet perfect, body. “Peace be with you.” “Chaos and fear be gone. Put your finger here and touch forgiveness. Reach out your hand that you may feel mercy beyond all human knowing.”

He who is the door for the sheep is holding it wide open. He who is the way, the truth, and the life is leading us into His resurrected life. He, who indeed is the resurrection and the life, is bringing eternity into ours, so that even when all we see around us is marked by death, His promise will sound, breaking down death’s door.

None of us can see from one life to the next. Like an infant yet in the womb, such vision into a new world only comes to us as promise. We hear, but we cannot see. So, when Jesus asks, “Have you believed because you have seen me,” He is teaching us the pattern by which faith takes hold of us. It comes as a breath — this faith — a breath from God’s life into ours. And who can see a breath? We only see what it can do in giving life. Reaching down into the dust, into the material of this earth and breathing life, that’s what God has been doing. Breathing into our nostrils as He did for the first man, so now in the cry of Thomas we discover why He has done so: “My Lord and my God. My Lord and my God.”

It is for faith that He has made us. It is for trust. It is to give glory to Him in all that we are and in all that we do. It is to worship Him, for in giving thanks and praise to the One who makes all things new our lives become what He intended for them to be from the beginning — the worshiping human, and Thomas gets it right. Spectacularly right.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus says to his first disciples, that they might say it to us, we who were not yet born, we who cannot see, so that we might believe. For in faith, not seeing and not believing become seeing and believing. In faith, hatred becomes forgiveness. In faith, chaos becomes peace. For at last, in faith, death becomes life, resurrected life.

When Thomas cries, “My Lord and my God,” it is the cry of faith of one who at last believes what Jesus had spoken, “The Father and I are one.” “I



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Caravaggio

am who I am,” said the God of Israel, when Moses wanted to know who was calling him into the future. “I am the light of the world,” said Jesus of Nazareth to those who sat in darkness. “The Father and I are one,” says our Lord and God. And in taking us to Himself — “Put your finger here. ... Reach out your hand. ... Do not doubt” — He is taking us, by faith, through faith, to the Father, where, in the fullness of time, faith and sight will at last become one.

And so Jesus, our Lord and our God, He who is one with the Father says to us, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” and as in every other beatitude we’ve learned that good news is coming, so now the fulfillment of his blessing is made known as we hear that in the gift of faith we will have eternal life. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe ... that through believing you may have life in His name.”

That life is formed in the confession of Thomas. That life is formed in the font of forgiveness. That life is formed on that glorious day of the week in which the bread is broken and the wine is poured, when what is written in The Book is now spoken in the breath and power of Christ’s Resurrection. For here, that life is formed in the faith of the One who was crucified for our sake and is risen from the dead to live and rule eternally. My Lord and my God. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin is Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary and Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa.

Illini Fighting Hunger

Prince of Peace in St. Joseph, Ill., packs food for the hungry

In 2012, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in St. Joseph, Ill., experienced the joy of helping others in packing meals to help feed the hungry. It was a great event, and they wanted to do it again.

They decided to host another meal packing event in 2014 and began raising money to make it possible.

Last Easter, Stewardship Committee members handed out jelly beans and M&M's in tubes after worship services. They asked for the tubes to be filled with quarters and returned over the next month. As they received the returned tubes, another idea sprung, to fill them with flower seeds and give them out again. This time filled tubes of donations were to honor loved ones for Memorial Day.



During the summer, the Stewardship Committee contacted the Illini Fighting Hunger organization which is a local meal packing program. They also partnered with the Eastern Illinois Food Bank. The committee set the date for March 8, 2014. Committee members were excited to see that \$7,500 would pack 50,000 meals. That was almost twice the meals they were able to pack in 2012.



Stewardship leaders continued creating new ideas for raising funds. They planned a garage sale at the church, held two silent auctions and sold candy bars. Christmas offerings included a \$2,000

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contribution. In February they wrapped up their campaign with the loose change, bills and checks toward the POP Purse account. All this, along with a donation from a United Methodist church, totaled \$7,638.

On the morning of March 8, Prince of Peace began the event with prayer supporting the ministry of feeding others and for the hands preparing it. There were three shifts, each in two-hour increments, and a total of 175 volunteers — most were from Prince of Peace, American Lutheran Church in Rantoul, Ill., and local United Methodist and Church of Christ congregations.

Those involved packed six pallets or 264 boxes and a total of 57,078 meals to feed the hungry. The Illini Fighting Hunger organization said this was their



second largest event since beginning their operation two years ago. The Eastern Illinois Food Bank picked up the product on March 10. Leaders were excited for the amount that was packed. They will be distributing the food to local food pantries in the Champaign County area.



A Word or Two to Congregations and Pastors about the Call Process

Although *Ministry Matters* articles dealing with the NALC call process may not be of interest to all who receive and read this newsletter, it seems this is the only viable place for such discussions.

While some pastors and congregations in the NALC may not be involved in the call process at the moment, my hope is that you will still read these related articles so that when the time comes, you will be better informed about how the call process works in the NALC.

I will add that, as I visit with pastors and congregations throughout the NALC, I receive many positive comments from those who do indeed find it helpful to learn more about how congregations call pastors, and how pastors participate in the call process in their “new” church.

In this month’s *Ministry Matters* submission, however, what I would like to address is not the process so much as the mindset of those congregations that call pastors, and those pastors who are, or might soon be, involved in our process. And what I would share are two things — one aimed at congregations and the other at pastors.

First, to congregations, I would simply encourage them to be open to all pastors of all ages in differing circumstances in life and ministry. It is all-too-common for call committees and congregations to develop an assumption that having a younger pastor with a young family will naturally “bring in” lots of children, youth and younger families.

A side benefit, it is assumed, is that having a younger pastor “right out of seminary” means a lower salary-compensation package due to fewer years of experience.

Each of these assumptions is misdirected at best. As a pastor who is now “older,” I often encourage call committees to be open to all pastors, regardless their age. Many of us “older” pastors bring great experience in ministering to children,



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

youth, and younger families and have passion and enthusiasm for involving the littlest and the least, together with their families.

We have many pastors whose children are grown, now having more time to devote to other children and youth in the congregation — fostering a truly intergenerational ministry climate. It is simply not right or fair for congregations to exclude from consideration pastors of any age, just because of their age. All have varied and differing gifts that bridge age differences.

At the same time, younger pastors often have significant student loans, together with family expenses, that do not allow them to take reduced or more modest compensation packages. More experienced pastors often have a much more flexible financial situation, allowing them to consider a variety of ministry contexts.

The bottom line for call committees and congregations: be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, and do not exclude from consideration any pastor who would like to be considered for call by your congregation. We never know who God is calling to be your next pastor!

Second, to pastors, I would encourage you to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit as well! We have several smaller congregations in small town and rural contexts that are able to offer modest, but full compensation and sincerely wish to grow in

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faith, discipleship and mission, but we are having limited response from pastors available for call, willing to be considered.

Small town and rural ministry contexts provide wonderful situations for ministry that is relational, not only within the congregation but also in the larger community. Many of these smaller congregations have not been well-served in recent years and have seen significant decline. In several situations, the congregations have stepped forward in faith to be able to call a full-time pastor. This is no small feat for some of these congregations!

I am hoping and praying that some of our pastors will see this article, prayerfully consider serving in a small-town or rural context, and be in touch with me! At the moment, some of these congregations are located in Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Carolina.

We do not have an over-abundance of congregational vacancies, but we have wonderful, viable small-town and rural ministries in need of pastors. If you are a pastor who has been experiencing some pull (or push) by the Holy Spirit to be open to a new call, please be in touch with me, especially with regard to these smaller congregations!

All in all, our hope, desire and prayer is that in the NALC we are simply opening ourselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit working through our call committees, congregations and in the lives of our pastors to have calls extended and accepted that will result in healthy, vibrant ministries serving faithfully in all contexts. Please keep all our pastors and vacant congregations in your prayers that God's will be done!

Pastor David Wendel is Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism. You may reach him at dwendel@thenalc.org.

NALC Disaster Response Team update

The NALC Disaster Response Team is up and running as a cohesive team. Since they are so spread out in terms of individual locations, they meet via the internet.

A disaster training event was recently held in Texas. Three congregations participated and are ready to meet the challenges of a local disaster, should it occur. Plans are in the works for a training event in Ohio, tentatively in May, and sometime this fall in North Carolina. Watch the *NALC News* and www.thenalc.org for details on these events.

A congregational survey will be coming out very soon to gauge the interest level and experience of NALC congregations as it pertains to disaster preparedness. The team asks that someone in each parish would take a few minutes to complete the survey when it arrives. It will be an online survey much like the one pastors have already received for annual congregational reports.

The Disaster Response Team includes people with a myriad of gifts and levels of experience. They are led by Mary Woodward, who has a wealth of

experience in this area. She has worked with Lutheran Social Services, Roman Catholic dioceses, and many denominations.

Pastor David McGettigan of St. Andrew By the Sea Lutheran Church in Atlantic City, N.J., is the chair and has practical experience in disasters, having lived and worked through Hurricane Sandy.

Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, is the team's guide. Cheryl Ingraham is coordinating the survey. Jessie Phillips is the liaison with the Women of the NALC who are taking on an important role in this ministry.

Bishop Ron Warren and Pastor Bert Schultz are creating a pastoral care handbook that will be available for use in disasters.

The team asks NALC members to consider who in their congregation might have the gifts, abilities, and time to participate in a training event in the near future. They also ask for prayers as they prepare for future disasters.

Youth Encounter President Larry Johnson announces his retirement

After 40 years of leadership, the Rev. Dr. Larry Dean Johnson has announced his retirement as president of Youth Encounter. Thomas O'Neill has been named as the organization's new president.

Under Johnson's leadership, Youth Encounter has reached millions of youth worldwide with the saving message of the Gospel and has developed more than 1,100 professional church leaders through its team ministry program.

"Larry has given his ministry life to this organization, and we are fortunate beyond belief to have had him for so long," said Brian Brooks, chairman of Lutheran Youth Encounter's Board of Directors. "I rejoice in that life of ministry as Larry moves to a new time with new goals and new challenges."

Johnson's caring Biblical emphasis has bridged across church bodies and made Youth Encounter activities a prominent inter-Lutheran gathering point for generations. The organization has partnered with over 50 percent of the Lutheran congregations in the United States and with national Lutheran churches in over 50 countries. Youth Encounter is a recognized Ministry Partner of the NALC.

"Larry Johnson has given sacrificially for many years to lead Youth Encounter and minister to youth. His research and knowledge about youth ministry and the spiritual health of youth and families is unsurpassed. The Church is heavily indebted to Larry for his exemplary leadership and his compassionate care for youth and families. I hope the Church will continue to learn from his wisdom and experience as he takes a well-deserved break from full-time ministry," said Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary.

"In my 36 years of ordained ministry I have never met anyone who understands the issues facing our youth more completely than Larry Johnson," said NALC Bishop John Bradosky. "He has not only studied the



Larry Johnson

problems created by our culture and its twisted values, but immersed himself in significant research to inform and support his understanding. He is not only well-read, but I know of no one who cares more deeply for the well-being of our youth than Larry. Others would do well to learn from his profound insights and be inspired from his passionate concern. While methods to reach and engage youth change, the truth must be passed on. To that end, I pray that Larry will find other ways to serve and share his wisdom."

"It has been my privilege to serve Jesus Christ through the ministry of Lutheran Youth Encounter," Johnson said. "Our Lord has richly blessed me. I trust that He has also richly blessed many others during my years of service. My thanks to everyone who has participated in this ministry. I am pleased to welcome my successor, Thomas O'Neill. I will keep Tom and this ministry in my prayers that God might continue to bless it."

Thomas O'Neill comes to Youth Encounter with significant experience in both the non-profit and corporate world. He spent seven years as the Director of Programs at Camp Luther in northern Wisconsin and most recently as a Senior Community Engagement Leader with Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. He grew up in eastern North Dakota and graduated from North Dakota State University with a degree in Mass Communications. He and his wife Jennifer live in the Minneapolis area with their three young sons.



Thomas O'Neill

"Thomas possesses the gifts Youth Encounter needs at this time in its ministry. We are blessed that God sent him to us at this time," said Brooks.

"I'm extremely excited to be back in youth ministry," O'Neill said. "God has a fantastic plan for Youth Encounter, and I am humbled that He has chosen me to be a part of that."

For more information visit www.youthencounter.org.

Drifting Toward Universalism?

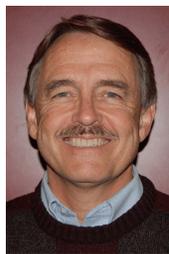
I recently read an article that — more than any other I've ever read — confirmed my suspicion that many mainline Protestant denominations might be drifting toward universalism. The article — entitled “Who Gets Saved” — was Pastor Peter Marty's regular column in the March 2014 issue of *The Lutheran*, the monthly magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The article is also available on the magazine's website.

I am trying not to overreact. Perhaps my response to this article is based, in part, on how it completely negates the very appropriateness of a column like mine entitled, “In Pursuit of the Great Commission.” But the more I re-read Pastor Marty's article, the more convinced I am that he sees no need for the church to encourage or be concerned with evangelism.

Much of the article is a negative, sometimes caustic appraisal of Christians who witness to non-Christians in the hopes of their eventual *conversion*. His negative written comments included the following:

1. The characterization of evangelical salvation theology as nothing more than preaching to non-Christians about how “getting into heaven” is something requiring “tickets.” And that Jesus “is the one who issues the tickets into heaven.”
2. Jesus, according to Pastor Marty, is portrayed by these misguided Christians as a “bouncer who controls entrance into the velvet-roped VIP section reserved exclusively for those who call themselves Christian.” (The word *exclusive* is used two more times in the article.)
3. Evangelistic theology apparently portrays heaven as a “club” involving “tribal membership.”
4. Christian evangelism, in Pastor Marty's view, “shrinks the cross to suit our own version of God.” He characterizes the preaching of eternal salvation as receiving “a club access card because we uttered a specific theological formula about Jesus.”

The above comments constitute a scathing and, to say the least, uncharitable view of Christians who strive to witness to non-Christians. And this blanket



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

condemnation doesn't just apply to the stereotype of fundamentalists preaching hellfire and brimstone. This critique seems to apply to the many *Lutheran* Christians I've known over the years who have a heart for evangelism. Individuals, I might add, with a profound, deep faith motivated by love, not a judgmental attitude.

However, Pastor Marty doesn't limit his comments to a critique of those who witness to the message of eternal salvation through Christ. He also presents his own, more universalistic understanding of the Gospel message:

1. “No religion can save us. God alone saves. We Christians do not believe in Christianity. We believe in God. God alone has the truth. God is truth. No religion possesses the whole truth on God. ... We know that Jesus is larger than any single religion.”
2. “Jesus is universal Lord and Savior, not just my personal Lord and Savior. He saves the whole world, and this doesn't happen through tribal membership.”
3. Jesus “refuses to be co-opted by any culture or possessed by any religion.”
4. Pastor Marty references John 12:32, where Jesus, referring to His coming Death and Resurrection, says that He “will draw all people” to Himself. Pastor Marty's interpretation of this text: “Not some people. Not Christian people. *All* people.” (Emphasis *his*, not mine.)

Universalism is not some minor theological controversy where we debate the meaning of a relatively small number of Biblical texts.

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Universalism directly contradicts a central theme of the New Testament. This New Testament theme — that non-believers are called to *convert* and become followers of Jesus Christ — is not only *explicit* in countless, specific texts, it is also *implicit* in all 27 books of the New Testament.

So here is my question: At what point is the faith we proclaim no longer an accurate and faithful representation of Scripture? Since that was obviously a rhetorical question, let me get to my answer: When any congregation or Christian institution begins to embrace a universalistic theology it has separated itself from Biblical, historical, orthodox Christian teaching.

Pastor Marty's article may not represent current, official ELCA teaching. However, his article is not a guest opinion or a reader's contribution. He writes a regular, monthly column for *The Lutheran*.

His article serves as a clue to the current cross-denominational, secular drift away from Biblical orthodoxy among many mainline Protestant leaders.

If I ever needed a reminder as to why it was important for me — and the congregation I serve — to join the NALC, this was it.

Upcoming Events

May 5-8 Canadian Rockies Theological Conf.
Radisson Hotel - Canmore, Alberta

June 13-14 - Regional Mission Conference
Zion Lutheran Church - Pittsburgh, Pa.

June 26-29 - Impact National Youth Event
Holiday Inn South - Cleveland, Ohio

July 21-22 - Lutheran CORE Convocation
July 22-23 - Theological Conference
July 23 - Women of the NALC Gathering
July 24-25 - NALC Convocation
The Citadel - Columbia, S.C.

Aug. 8-9 - Regional Mission Conference
First Lutheran Church - Manchester, Iowa

Sept. 11-13 - Regional Mission Conference
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church - Gastonia, N.C.

Oct. 31-Nov. 1 - Regional Mission Conference
All Saints Lutheran Church - Arlington, Texas

Nov. 6-8 - NALC Mission Festival
Upper Arlington Lutheran Church - Hilliard, Ohio

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"We are delighted to welcome David Yeago to our seminary," said the Venerable Dr. Mark Stevenson, Trinity's Academic Dean. "David is highly respected in the field of theology, and he will be a wonderful addition to our teaching team."

Fara Pienkosky is also joining the North American Lutheran Seminary staff as Administrative Assistant. "Fara brings to us a wealth of experience in church, seminary, and university settings. She is a woman with a warm heart, a deep faith, and a desire to serve God," said Dr. Schifrin. "We rejoice to welcome her to the staff of the North American Lutheran Seminary and Trinity School for Ministry."

Fara has served as a secretary in both church and seminary settings and worked as the Assistant Registrar of Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pa. The Kent, Wash., native received her Bachelor's degree from Northwest Christian University in Eugene, Ore., and is completing a Master of Professional Writing degree at Chatham University. She and her family live in Pittsburgh.

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Phone: 614-777-5709

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Pastor David J. Baer, editor
news@thenalc.org

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