

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

August 2014

‘Standing With ... To Withstand’

NALC Convocation meets at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

Nearly 700 members of the North American Lutheran Church gathered July 24-25 at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., for the 2014 NALC Convocation under the theme, “Standing With ... to Withstand.”

Keynote speaker Robert Brock of Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry dedicated to supporting persecuted Christians around the world, told the Convocation that more Christians faced persecution for their faith in the 20th century than in all of the preceding centuries combined. He said more than 200 million Christians face persecution today.

A refrain echoed throughout Brock’s two keynote addresses: “Christians still suffer. Remember them. You can make a difference.”

“Suffering can open our hearts to see more of God than we’ve ever imagined,” he said.

“You will give your life. The question is what will you give it for,” Brock said. “Be willing to stand up for your faith — no matter how costly it is.”

Following Brock’s addresses, Bishop John Bradosky said, “These words are not easy for us to hear, but they are important for us to hear.”

The Convocation theme was based on Ephesians 6:10-20, where St. Paul describes the whole armor of God, encouraging followers of Jesus to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to



Nearly 700 people gathered in Summerall Chapel at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., for the 2014 NALC Convocation.

withstand in the evil day.” The theme was explored in Bible study, devotions, and by Bishop Bradosky in his sermon for the opening worship service.

The Convocation heard from guest speakers who are serving in places where standing up for the Christian faith is difficult.

Pastor Valery Hryhoryk of Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship explained some of the struggles he has had in trying to reestablish the Belarus Evangelical Lutheran Church after the fall of Communism. Belarus is said to have the last

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dictatorship in Europe. Unregistered religious activity is forbidden in the eastern European nation.

Bishop Roland Gustafsson and General Secretary Bengt Birgersson of the Swedish Mission Province told of their efforts to bring Confessional Lutheranism back to Sweden.

The Rev. Dr. Werner Neuer of Switzerland and Pastor Martin Fromm of Germany represented the International Christian Network which is attempting to renew Lutheranism in Europe.

The NALC's emphasis on discipleship was visible throughout the Convocation. Discipleship workshops were offered and there were "discipleship minutes" throughout the event where people shared the difference that the discipleship emphasis has made in their own lives.

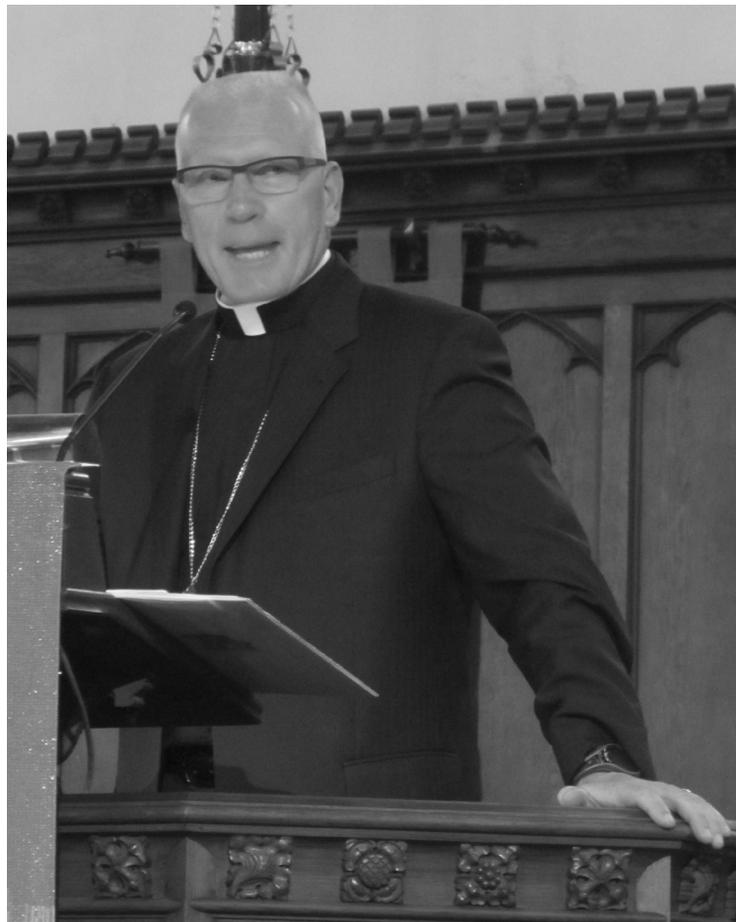
Delegates elected members of the NALC Executive Council, Court of Adjudication, and the North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents.

The Convocation heard an update on the North American Lutheran Seminary from the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, seminary president. The NALS was established by the 2013 NALC Convocation. (See *Pages 20-21 for her report.*)

A constitutional amendment allowing more flexibility in scheduling for the annual Convocation was approved. The amendment now goes to NALC congregations for ratification.

Two resolutions from Pastor Russell Saltzman, dean of the Great Plains Mission District, were received by the Convocation. Both resolutions were referred to the NALC Executive Council for further study and consideration. One of the resolutions asked for a reconfiguration of Mission Districts. The other called for a plan to equalize the compensation of NALC pastors.

The Convocation also received reports from Bishop Bradosky; Pastor Mark Chavez, General Secretary; Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions; and Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism. Their written reports are available online.



Bishop John Bradosky presided at sessions of the 2014 NALC Convocation.

A \$1.7 million budget was approved for the church for 2015. Budgets were also approved for the Theological Education Fund and Great Commission Fund. Copies of the budgets and the treasurer's report are available at www.thenalc.org.

The 2015 NALC Convocation will be Aug. 13-14, 2015, at the Hyatt Regency Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. It will be preceded by the Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology, and the Lutheran CORE Convocation.

Video recordings of Convocations and Theological Conference

You can watch video recordings of the sessions of the NALC Convocation, Theological Conference, and Lutheran CORE Convocation online at www.thenalc.org.

Braaten, Jansak and Jones elected to Executive Council

Pastor Mark Braaten, Richard Jansak, and Pastor Melinda Jones were elected by the 2014 NALC Convocation to fill three positions on the NALC Executive Council.



Mark Braaten



Richard Jansak



Melinda Jones

Pastor Mark Braaten serves Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Tyler, Texas. He also serves as dean of the NALC's North Texas Mission District. He was elected to a three-year term to fill a position on the Executive Council vacated when the Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin was called to lead the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Richard Jansak of Hendersonville, N.C., is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Fletcher, N.C. He is retired from Steelcase Corporation in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he served as Director of Product Development. He was elected to a four-year term as a lay member of the Executive Council.

Pastor Melinda Jones serves Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church in North Charleston, S.C. She was elected to a four-year term as a clergy member of the Executive Council.

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

Gale and Johnson elected to Court

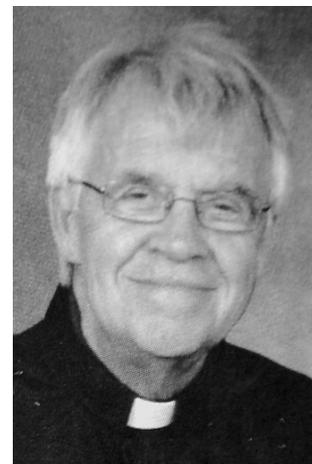
James Gale and Pastor K. Glen Johnson were elected to four-year terms on the NALC Court of Adjudication. The Court of Adjudication hears disciplinary claims and appeals from disciplinary decisions and resolves questions of the interpretation of governing documents.

James Gale, an attorney in Washington, D.C., has served on the Court of Adjudication since the founding of the NALC. He was involved in the drafting of the NALC constitution and other governing documents.

Pastor Glen Johnson recently retired after serving Ascension Lutheran Church in Calgary, Alberta. He served as the president of Augustana University College (formerly known as Camrose Lutheran College) in Camrose, Alberta, for 28 years.



James Gale



K. Glen Johnson

North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents members elected

The 2014 NALC Convocation elected 10 members of the Board of Regents for the North American Lutheran Seminary to a variety of terms.

Donna Evans, Pastor Jeffray Greene, Frank Merrell, and Bishop Paull Spring were elected to two-year terms.



Donna Evans



Jeffray Greene



Franklin Merrell



Paull Spring

Pastor Wendy Berthelsen, Pastor Phillip Gagnon, and Pastor Donna Smith were elected to four-year terms.

Pastor Dieter Punt, Pastor Mark Ryman, and Dr. M. Roy Schwarz were elected to six-year terms.

Because of a tie vote on the final ballot, 10 members — rather than nine — were elected. In the future, three members of the board will be elected to six-year terms every other year.

Donna Evans of Pittsburgh, Pa., is a public relations-issues management professional. She is a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Pastor Jeffray Greene serves American Lutheran Church in Rantoul, Ill.

Franklin Merrell is a retired college professor from Salisbury, N.C. He is a member of Union Evangelical Lutheran Church in Salisbury, N.C.

Bishop Paull Spring of State College, Pa., is bishop emeritus of the North American Lutheran Church.

Pastor Wendy Berthelsen serves Hope Lutheran Church in Cedar Hill, Texas, with her husband, Joel. She also serves as president of Call, Inc.

Pastor Phillip Gagnon serves St. Albert Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Alberta. He is also the dean of the NALC Canada Mission District.

Pastor Donna Smith of Champaign, Ill., is retired. She is a member of Prince of Peace, St. Joseph, Ill.



W. Berthelsen



Phillip Gagnon



Donna Smith



Dieter Punt



Mark Ryman

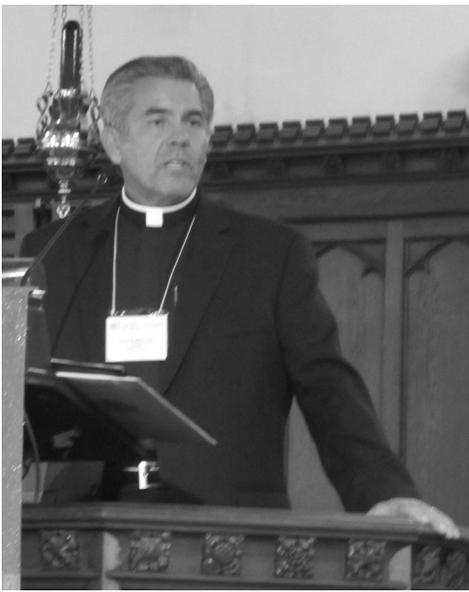


M. Roy Schwarz

Pastor Dieter Punt serves Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Troutman, N.C.

Pastor Mark Ryman serves St John's Lutheran Church in Asheboro, N.C.

Dr. M. Roy Schwarz of Winchester, Va., is a retired physician and medical school professor. He is a member of Advent Lutheran Church in Winchester, Va.



*Pastor David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop for
Ministry and Ecumenism*



*Pastor Mark Chavez
NALC General Secretary*



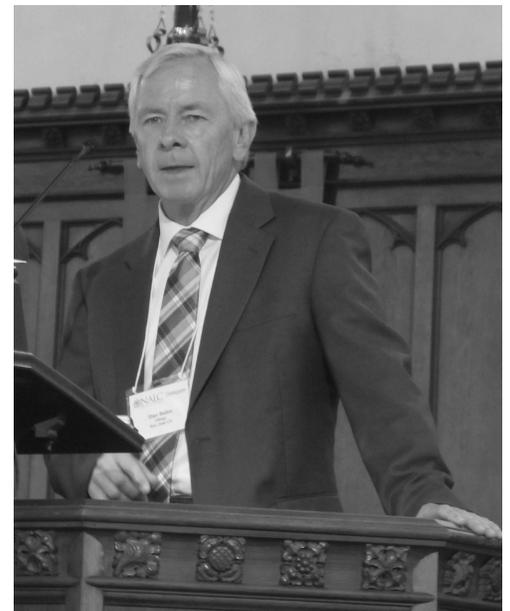
*Pastor Gemechis Buba
Assistant to the Bishop for Missions*



Representatives of NALC ministry partners were introduced.



2014 NALC Convocation



*Pastor Dan Selbo of St. Timothy's
Lutheran Church in San Jose, Calif.,
led a Bible Study on Ephesians 6:10-
20, the theme text of the Convocation.*



Pastor Carl Johnson of St. John Lutheran Church in Kittanning, Pa., chaired the elections committee and oversaw the voting and counting of ballots for the Convocation.



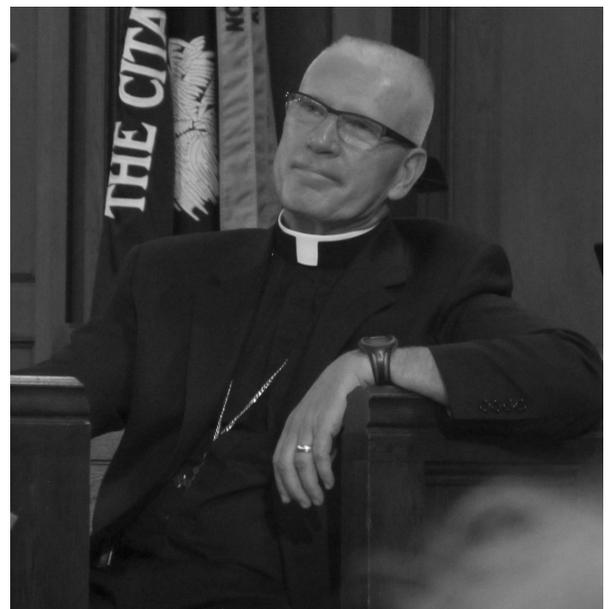
Volunteers assisted in counting ballots at the Convocation.



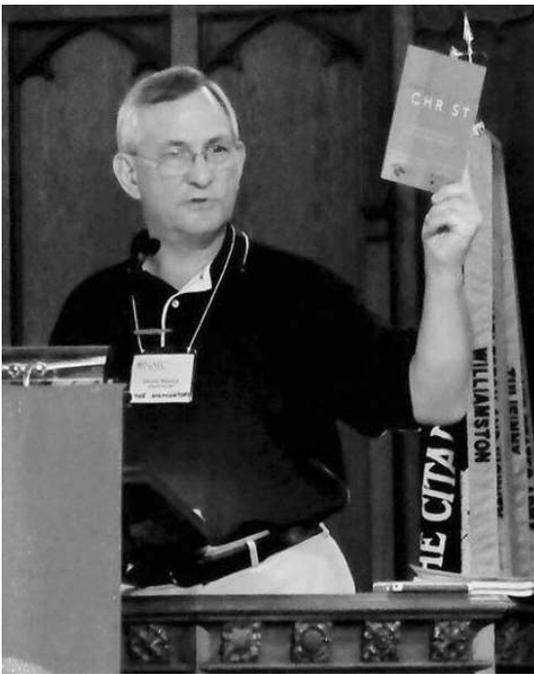
Newly elected Executive Council, Court of Adjudication, Board of Regents, and Women of the NALC leaders were installed.



A variety of ministries had displays at the Convocation.



Bishop Bradosky listens to one of the presentations at the Convocation.



Dennis Blevins of The Navigators led one of several workshops on discipleship.



Military chaplains were recognized. Chaplain Gary Califf (center) of the U.S. Air Force addressed the Convocation.



Meals were shared family style in The Citadel's dining hall.



Pastor Mark Chavez with Becky Seifert, NALC Assistant to the Executive Staff, who kept minutes of the Convocation.

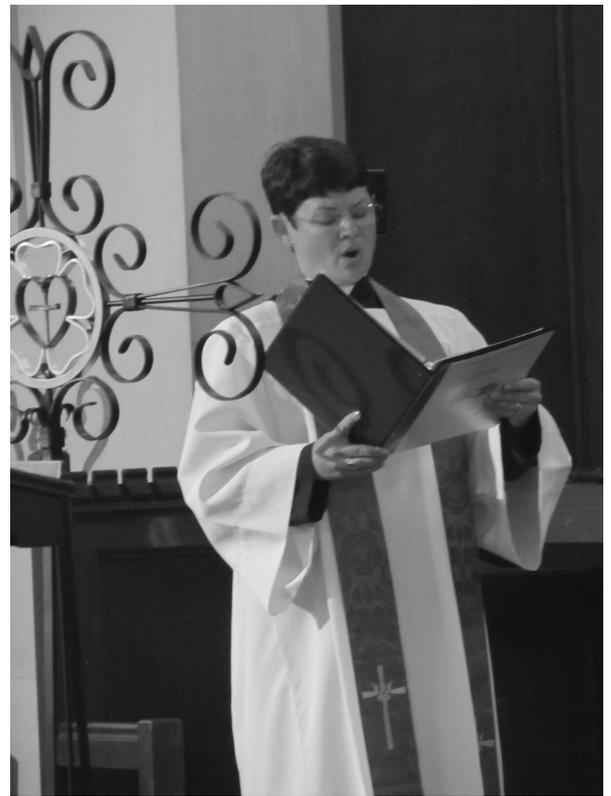


Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Chavez

*Photos by Pastor David Baer
and Pastor Samuel Nieva*



Worship at NALC Convocation



Pastor Melinda Jones of Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church in North Charleston, S.C., served as chaplain for the Convocations and Theological Conference.



Musicians from St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Goose Creek, S.C., enriched the worship services.



Bishop Roland Gustafsson of the Swedish Mission Province preached for the Festival Service of Holy Communion.





Pastor Warren and Cindy Reichert of Grace Lutheran Church in Eaton, Ohio, shared their experiences as a part of the NALC's discipleship emphasis.



Randy Hanna, a member of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Grafton, Iowa, shares his experiences as a part of the NALC's discipleship emphasis.

Discipleship Minutes and Devotions



Pastor Carl Haynes of Christiana Lutheran Church in Salisbury, N.C., led a devotion. He also serves as dean of the Carolinas Mission District.



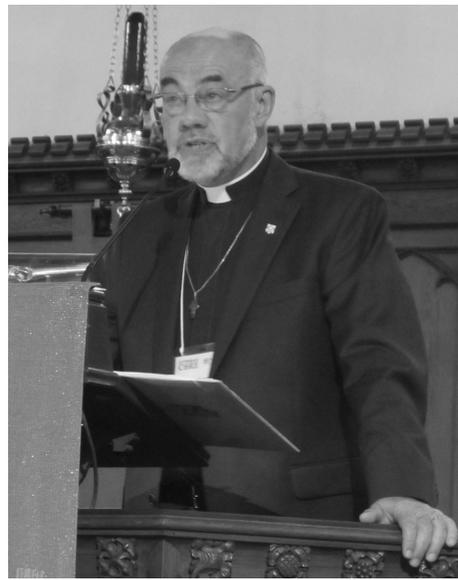
Pastor Dan Powell of Grace Lutheran Church in Springfield, Ohio, shares his experiences as a part of the NALC's Discipleship emphasis.



Pastor Brad Hales of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va., led a devotion. He also serves as dean of the Virginia Mission District.



*The Rev. Valery Hryhoryk
Belarus Lutheran Missionary
Fellowship*



*The Rev. Dr. Bengt Birgersson
Swedish Lutheran Mission
Province*



*The Rev. Martin Fromm
International Christian Network
Germany*

International and Ecumenical Guests

International and ecumenical guests addressed the 2014 NALC Convocation.



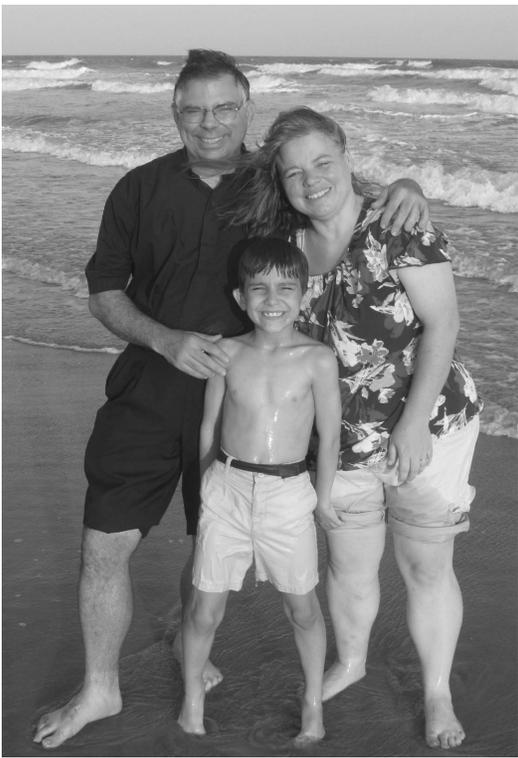
*The Rev. Rudy Pastucha
Lutheran Church—Canada*



*The Rev. Dr. Travis Boline
Anglican Church in North America*



*The Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*



Pastor Mark, Amy and Jordan Werner

Barbeque at the Beach

Those at the NALC Convocation enjoyed a traditional Carolina barbeque at The Citadel's Isle of Palms Beach House. The barbeque was suggested by the Carolinas Mission District.

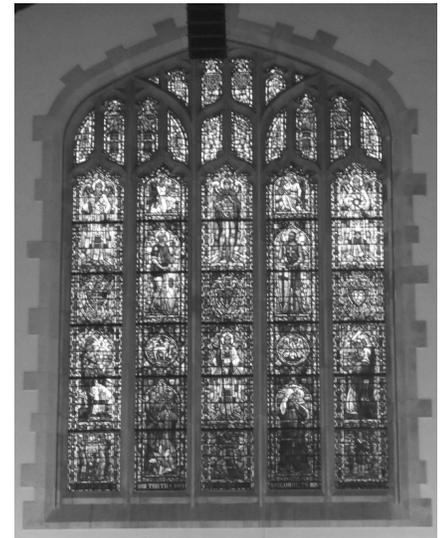


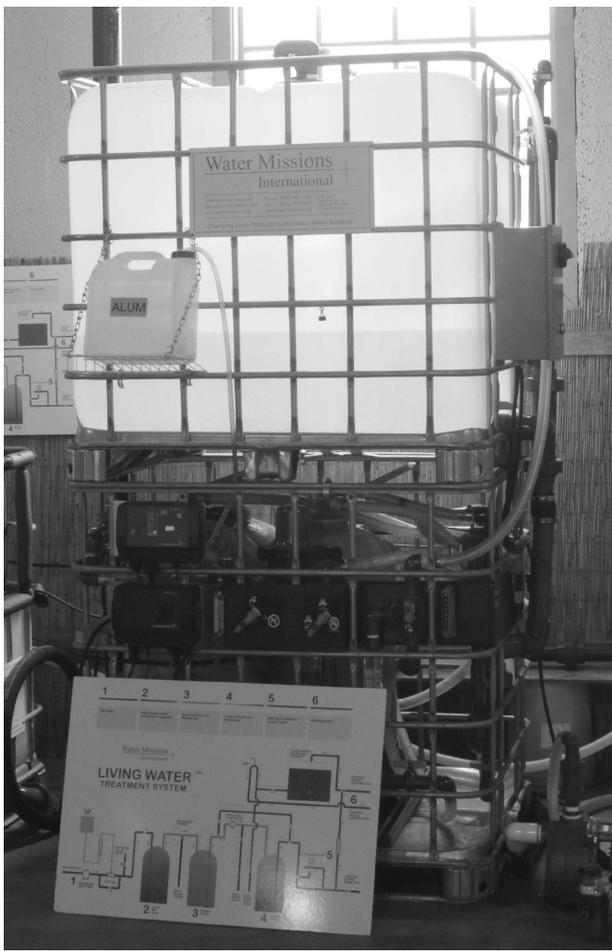
Pastor Steve and Linda Shipman





The Citadel





Water Treatment solutions such as this can provide safe drinking water in emergencies.



Tours of Water Missions International

Those attending the NALC Convocation had the opportunity to tour the headquarters of Water Missions International in Charleston, S.C.

Water Missions International is a Christian engineering organization providing sustainable safe water and sanitation solutions for people in developing countries and disaster areas.

Water Missions International also provided drinking water for the Convocations and Theological Conference.



The "Healthy Latrine" project helps improve sanitation.



Ordination anniversaries recognized at NALC Convocation

The 2014 NALC Convocation recognized NALC pastors who are celebrating significant anniversaries of their ordination this year.

20 years

Pastor Norman E. Dew
Pastor Bradley J. Hales
Pastor Charles Jackson
Pastor Andrew W. Jones
Pastor Herbert G. Kitzman
Pastor Sally M. Meyer
Pastor Karen Tamorria

25 years

Pastor Paul E. Austin
Pastor David J. Baer
Pastor Thomas A. Curry
Pastor Bernard F. Daiker
Pastor Teshome Tesfaye Deingede
Pastor Arlyn H. Eisenbrandt
Pastor Jeffray S. Greene
Pastor Jeffrey A. Morlock
Pastor Dawn L. Nelson
Pastor James Pearson
Pastor Mary Ann Schave
Pastor Allen W. Schoonover
Pastor Michael R. Struck
Pastor David M. Taylor
Pastor Barbara M. Wills

30 years

Pastor Richard Barnes
Pastor Marilou Brook
Pastor B. A. Christ
Pastor Stephen P. Cowen
Pastor Mark J. Daniels
Pastor Peter DeBartolo Sr.
Pastor Randall Eisenbeisz
Pastor Roger A. Herrig
Pastor David M. Phillips
Pastor Amy C. Schifrin
Pastor William Schmidt
Pastor David B. Tholstrup



Bishop Bradosky recognized NALC pastors who are celebrating significant anniversaries of their ordinations this year.

35 years

Pastor Dr James C. Bangsund
Pastor Rolf O. Bjornstad
Pastor Alfredo Casta
Pastor Erik Johnson
Pastor Paul L. Larson
Pastor James T. Lehmann
Pastor Duane P. Marburger
Pastor Daniel M. Powell
Pastor Carl L. M. Rasmussen
Pastor Jerry L. Rhea
Pastor Karl A. Schoch
Pastor Brian F. Shirey
Pastor R. Dawson Tornes

40 years

Pastor Steven L. Dornbusch
Pastor David M. McGettigan
Pastor Gerald A. Miller
Pastor James E. Reiff

45 years

Pastor Gerhardt A. Gosnell
Pastor Harvey S. Mozolak
Pastor J. Larry Yoder

50 years

Pastor Kurt W. Borows Jr.

55 years

Pastor Theodore C. Ager
Pastor N. Dean Haferman
Pastor Ingthor Isfeld
Pastor Edwin Peterman
Pastor Brooke J. Walker

60 years

Pastor William A. Smith
Pastor Jack E. Trethewey

Standing With in Order to Withstand

Here is the text of Bishop Bradosky's sermon from the opening worship service of the 2014 NALC Convocation. The sermon is based on Ephesians 6:10-20.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In these several days you are going to hear stories of Christians around the world who are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. A growing number of authoritarian governments seek to control all religious thought and expression as a way to regulate political and civic life. Christians in some places are considered enemies of the state simply because of their faith in Christ. In other places Christians are the focus of hostility because they are a minority or nontraditional religious group, persecuted for sharing the Gospel and leading others to Christ.

This persecution is happening in a variety of places but these top the list: Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. In many of these places the lack of human rights not only restricts the ability of Christians to live out their faith publically, but it also overlooks the persecution of Christians through extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, extended detention and torture.

Many believe anti-Christian sentiment is increasing in North America. Some believe that, in order to create equality, the predominance of Christians and their influence must be minimized while those of other minority faiths and their influence must be maximized. Those advocating for this approach to equality are all around us and even within a variety of church bodies.

In Canada there are those who want to prosecute any Christian who refers to sexual activity in same-gender relationships as sin concluding they are guilty of hate speech. There are children being prohibited from writing "Merry Christmas" to the soldiers, senior citizens being banned from verbal prayers over their meals in a Senior Center, and some VA facilities have banned the mention of God in military funerals. There have been numerous attempts to have veterans' memorials torn down if they bear the symbol of a cross. Even Christian business owners



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

struggle to find ways to express their faith in the context of their corporations. The list seems endless — so contrary to the freedom and acceptance we once knew as Christians in this culture. In place of mutual acceptance, religious hostility has become the norm that may eventually become violent and even more costly.

I must confess these concerns seem insignificant compared to what Christians are facing in other parts of the world, but something is drastically wrong. Some believe it will take a major crisis to turn us from the consequences of such political and social arrogance. We cannot afford to wait. Today we hear a word from the Scripture that gives us important instructions on how to prepare.

First, let us pray ... (For those suffering persecution and those facing death because of their faithful witness.)

As I prepared this sermon, I was preoccupied with what the early Church fathers had to say about this text, so I will refer to just a few of them as we engage this text.

Just as some Christians doubt so much of the Gospel, so too, even more Christians doubt the presence and power of evil in our world. Yet Paul is very clear about the cause of what is happening throughout our world and even here in our own land. This would be much easier if it were a straightforward battle and the enemy were clearly visible. Paul uses the term, "the devil's whiles." He tries to entice us by a shortcut — an easier way — with deceit. Chrysostom writes, "the devil never openly lays temptation before us. He does not mention idolatry out loud, but presents idolatrous choices to us, by

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persuasive words and by employing clever euphemisms.”

This is not about ordinary temptation but a larger spiritual battle. The scene Paul is painting is a war against the Spirit, and we are part of the battle. We are involved in the struggle. What makes it so difficult is that Satan has transformed himself into an angel of light, trying to persuade us to regard him as a messenger of goodness. It is his nature to use deception and lies. Jerome adds, “Then when he has so ensnared us that we trust him, he says to us, ‘Thus says the Lord.’ This is not flesh and blood deceiving us. It is the work of principalities and powers, the ruler of darkness and spiritual wickedness.” These rulers of this world have not received authority to rule from God but rather they have made people captive, slaves to their own self-centered desires, blind to this larger cosmic spiritual battle that rages.

Paul makes clear this enemy is exceptional. Followers of Jesus must be prepared for this struggle and the persecution that is sure to come. Every soldier knows that you can’t wait for the battle to begin and then start to prepare. Everything you do prior to the battle is preparation for what you are bound to experience. We are being counseled here to do everything we can so that we might be enabled to stand in the faith of the Gospel and not lapse under persecution.

I realize that Paul’s rhetoric is not politically correct and the imagery of the soldier is not popular. While today some have banned “Onward Christian Soldiers” from the hymnal, the Church father Chrysostom writes that “every person’s house should be like a military camp. In this way every regiment is ready for battle.” If that is true then every congregation must also be a training camp for understanding the enemy and being empowered and equipped for the battle. Those who think they can avoid the imagery or the battle have already started to negotiate with the devil.

As a prisoner, Paul must have had many opportunities to observe the dress of the Roman soldiers who were charged with his security. His imprisonment gave him the chance to reflect on their armor in light of the Gospel and to use those discouraging days in prison as a resource for encouraging Christians for the future.

Let us consider the armor with which we are to be equipped. “Fastening the belt of truth” does not seem as strong as “girding one’s loins with truth,” an alternate translation of this text. These words have everything to do with your “core.”

How many here know enough about fitness to know what your core is? (The rest of you are in trouble!) Your core muscles are what enable you to have good posture. Your core muscles equip you to stand tall and firm. If you begin to slouch, you look down and can easily become self-absorbed. Standing tall lets you look out and around so you can see what’s coming. You can spot the enemy before he overtakes you.

Your core is the center of your body, a foundation upon which everything is built. The truth of the Word of God — the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the revelation of His nature and identity — is the truth that holds us together. It is in this truth that we stand tall and firm. Chrysostom comments, “Just like the keel of a ship, the loins are the central balancing support of our whole body.”

If you know anything about fitness, you know you have to exercise those core muscles. We must not only be reminded of the truth and be certain of the truth, but we must also apply it.

The breastplate is designed to protect the soldiers’ chests — their hearts. The truth around our loins reminds us that righteousness lives by faith. Our righteousness is only the righteousness of Christ that He graciously provides for us by faith in Him. This righteousness prevents us from being pulled away by the wiles of Satan. This is the place where fatal wounds are inflicted: when our hearts are pulled away from Christ and we fail to respond to His grace with righteous living — doing what is right, following Him and living according to His Word.

Jesus also reminds us that evil has its origin in the heart. It is not what we take in but what comes out of the heart. The breastplate prevents such actions from aiding and abetting the enemy. Jerome reminds us that this armor is designed so we “will not lapse into rage or lust. Rather we will be protected, having a clean heart, having God as the fashioner of our breastplate, since He fashions the whole armor for every one of the saints.”

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This same Church father also reminds us “This war against the demonic puts an end to the previous war against God. As we are making war with the devil, we are making peace with God. Have no fear, beloved, victory is already won. This is the Good News.”

It is this Gospel of Jesus Christ that must be carried abroad. We need track shoes — spikes — so we can dig in, get traction and not succumb to the temptation of the slippery slope of mere maintenance or passive inactivity. Everyone needs to hear it and be convinced of its power. We need to be equipped with speed and urgency. It is by standing on the Gospel of Christ that we have peace — not a peace that makes us passive but one that commands us to go and make disciples of all nations, a peace that makes us obedient to all that Christ commands. If we have peace with Him we don’t argue or dispute His commands. Paul also writes, “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.”

Next, we are commanded in all circumstances to “take up the shield of faith.” Fiery arrows are meant to set the surrounding field and brush on fire so the soldiers are flushed from their cover and become easy targets. So the shield was designed with harder metal covered by wood and a softer metal on the part of the shield that faced the enemy. The fiery arrows could penetrate the softer metal, but would be snuffed out as they lodged in the wood and would never penetrate the stronger metal closest to the soldier.

We engage in battle not by avoiding the arrows but by absorbing them and snuffing them out. We are not to become so hardened that the fiery arrows bounce off of us and endanger others. The shield is a weapon that does more than defend and preserve us, it also protects those around us.

Then there is the helmet of salvation. The helmet covers our head and protects what we see, what we hear, smell, taste and think. In Christ we have a particular worldview. It is the worldview of His Kingdom, a Biblical worldview. Our thoughts and perspectives are powerful. In Second Corinthians, Chapter 10, Paul writes, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Our head is Jesus Christ. He is our salvation, and every thought we think is captive to Christ — no longer rebelling but obeying His teaching, demonstrating our love.

Then there is the sword. Theodoret writes, “By the sword of the Spirit he means the activity of the Spirit. This is the Word of God. This means that just as God fashioned all by the Word, so the most Holy Spirit effects all that has to do with our salvation. With this sword the spiritual person rebukes the devil and the devil flees.”

The Navigators have a great image of a hand grasping the Word, encouraging our hold on it by engaging all five fingers of the hand. Beginning with the little finger: *Hear, read, study and apply, memorize, and meditate.* This is the best way we can grip the sword of the Word and insure that we will use it appropriately to love others and overcome the power of evil. To be strong in the Lord is to be strengthened in word and wisdom and the contemplation of the truth.

Jerome reminds us that to put on the whole armor of God is nothing less than to put on Jesus Christ, for He is the truth, our righteousness, our salvation. He is the Gospel we are sent to proclaim, our defense, and it is His Word by which we live in faithful obedience.

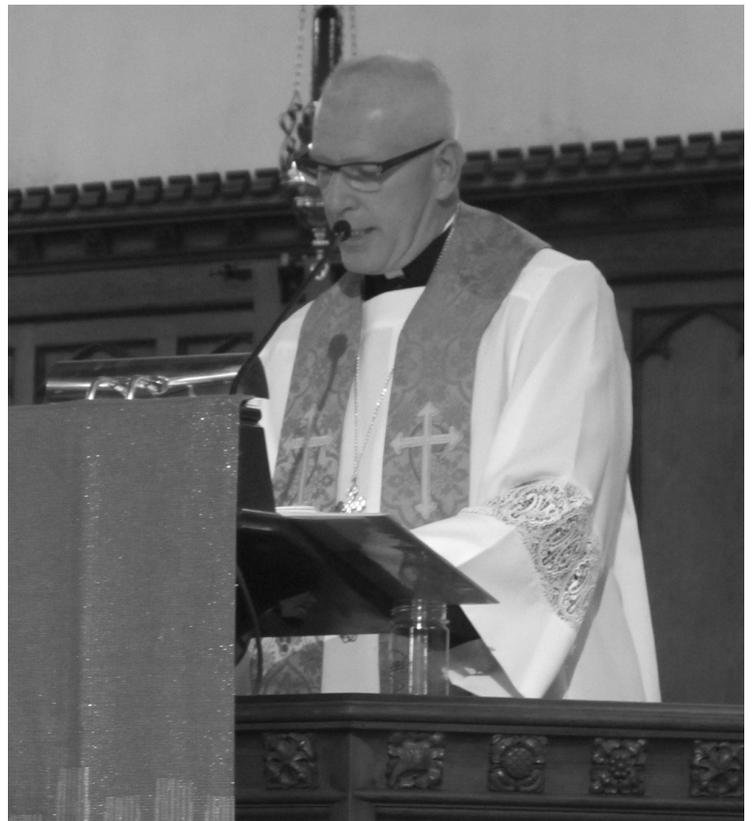
There are some who are content to maintain a defensive strategy. Some think our primary work is to defend and preserve our Lutheran identity, our Lutheran theology, our Lutheran terminology. This is our heritage but not our mission. These are the tools we use to share the Gospel, to help others know it, experience it, and live by it. We are not called to defend our heritage, but to use it. Our strategy is how we can best equip others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Word and Sacrament ministry, a heritage we know and love so well. Our congregations cannot become centers for building fallout shelters, but they must be centers for equipping people with skills and confidence to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, beginning with the person next door.

I share that with you because this is what Luther writes about this text:

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When the Law accuses and sin terrifies you, and you do not feel anything except the wrath and judgment of God, do not despair on that account. But “take the armor of God, the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, and the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:13, 16, 17); and find out by experience what a good and brave warrior you are. By faith take hold of Christ, the Lord of the Law and of sin and of everything that accompanies them. When you believe in Him, you are justified — something that your reason and the consciousness of your heart do not tell you amid your temptation, but only the Word of God. Then, in the conflicts and fears that continually return to plague you, you should patiently look with hope for the righteousness that you have only by faith. ... You are not to be conscious of having righteousness; you are to believe it. And unless you believe that you are righteous, you insult and blaspheme Christ, who has cleansed you by the washing of water with the Word (Ephesians 5:26) and who in His death on the cross, condemned and killed sin and death, so that through Him you might obtain eternal righteousness and life. You cannot deny this, unless you want to be obviously wicked, blasphemous, and contemptuous of God, of all the divine promises, of Christ, and of all His benefits. Then you cannot deny either that you are righteous. ... We must not consult the consciousness of our own heart. No, then we must consult the Word of God, which says that God is not wrathful, but that He has regard for those who are afflicted, are contrite in spirit, and tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:2), and that Christ does not turn away from those who labor and are heavy-laden (Matthew 11:28) but revives them. ... He arouses hope, which endures and conquers evil. A dimly burning wick of faith and hope will soon become like elemental fire, which fills all heaven and swallows up all terrors and sins.

Finally, there is one last weapon that I call your attention to in this text. All the other pieces of armor are to be put on while utilizing this most powerful weapon. Paul says that at all times we are to be praying in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. Another Church father writes, “Those who have wars continually pressing on them do not even sleep. Therefore the apostle tells them under conditions of battle to keep awake and pray constantly, not giving in to the pains of the body but to bear them with the utmost fortitude.”



Bishop John Bradosky preaching at the opening worship of the 2014 NALC Convocation.

He calls us to persevere in prayer, to pray for the saints and for him. We are to pray for the boldness of other Christians and their leaders that they may have the right words to speak that proclaim the truth and mystery of the Gospel.

In putting on the armor, we stand with Christ, that is, Christ is standing with us. In prayer we are standing together with all the saints, with all those who are persecuted and facing death. Isn't it wonderful the way Christ has connected us in His body, the Church? The very people Paul has just admonished, instructed and proclaimed the Gospel to, he now asks for help. They needed his direction, and he needed their prayers.

We can neither craft nor create this unity, but it comes in Christ and through Christ. We need one another to endure the battle. We need all that Christ provides and we need the witness of the faithful on the front lines of the battle. We stand with Christ and with the saints in order to withstand all the forces of evil that assault us. This is the nature of love undying, love that is eternal.

May the Lord give us courage and strength for the battle by putting on the full armor of God, that is, as we put on Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

North American Lutheran Seminary

Sending Laborers into the Harvest

Mission/Vision of the NALS

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we are forming pastors and church leaders for the North American Lutheran Church who will faithfully preach, teach, and live God's eternal truth, through Word and Sacrament, proclaiming Christ's cross and resurrection, making disciples who will renew and grow the church in Christ's name.

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is a delight to report that your Seminary — the North American Lutheran Seminary — is up and running!

We have created a core curriculum and begun to provide an education for pastors and church leaders that is evangelical, orthodox and confessional, an education in which students are formed as faithful servants for ministry in Christ's name.

We work in partnership with existing Christian seminaries, sharing resources so that our students receive a fully accredited seminary education. For seminarians who are discerning a call to ordained ministry within the NALC, we work hand-in-hand with the NALC Candidacy Committee, so that each pastoral candidate will be prepared to enter the Ministry of Word and Sacrament with obedience and joy, as a faithful disciple, ready to disciple others.

The standard number of credit hours for a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree at an ATS (Association of Theological Schools) accredited institution is now 90. Of those 90 hours, 30 will be in Lutheran Studies. Our students will take their Biblical language, Biblical studies, pastoral care, evangelism, and church history courses from accredited ecumenical faculty at our host institutions and their core Lutheran courses from



From the Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin
North American Lutheran Seminary
President

full-time or adjunct NALS faculty. Students who have completed an M.Div. at a non-Lutheran institution and who desire a Diploma in Lutheran Studies may also complete these same 10 courses, which are all geared to preparing seminarians to meet the NALC Standards for Ministry. ATS standards require a minimum of 1 year in residence at an accredited institution, but 2 years of the program may be completed on-line (or in residence).

NALS M.Div. Lutheran Curriculum:

Systematics (12 credits):

- + Creeds and Catechisms: An Introduction to Theological Thinking.
- + Lutheran Confessions.
- + Introduction to Theology I (Lutheran Track).
- + Introduction to Theology II (Lutheran Track).

Ethics (3 credits):

- + Christian Ethics in the Lutheran Tradition.

Church History (6 credits):

- + Modern Church (Lutheran Track).
- + The Theology of Writings of Martin Luther.

Liturgy and Homiletics (6 credits):

- + Introduction to Lutheran Liturgy.
- + Proclaiming the Word of God: A First Course in Preaching (Lutheran Track).

Mission (3 credits):

- + Discipleship.

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The NALS is also offering a non-credit **Certificate in Lutheran Studies** for lay leaders seeking enrichment. This program offers three courses a year that are taught online and are an opportunity to deepen your faith and knowledge in Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Church History, The Lutheran Tradition, Discipleship, and the Ministries of Caring.

This coming fall we will also be offering an accredited Master of Arts in Religion with a concentration in Lutheran Studies. (The M.A.R. is a 60-hour degree and can fully be completed online or through a combination of online and residential classes.)

Our current full-time faculty members include the Rev. Dr. Mary Havens, Director of our House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.; Dr. David Yeago, Systematics and Ethics, and myself in Liturgical Studies and Homiletics. Part-time faculty includes the Rev. Dr. Monte Luker, Biblical Studies; the Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, Systematics and Ethics; and the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, Church History. I am extremely thankful for such faithful teachers who work to fulfill the Mission/Vision of the NALS.

Conversations continue with regard to further Houses of Study and Extension Sites for the NALS. We are in conversation with Mission District deans, pastors, seminarians and a host of theological institutions. We want to take time for appropriate discernment as we provide regional centers for study.

Our Seminary Center is located at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa., and our first House of Studies is on the Charlotte, N.C., campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Students may attend at either location to complete their studies. You can find the details for all of our programs on our website: www.thenals.org.

If you are discerning a call to ministry, I invite you to consider the North American Lutheran Seminary as the Christian community where you will be formed for faithful pastoral service, where each of you will be prepared to *“Go and make disciples of all nations...”* (Matthew 28:19-20).

If you care about the next generations of pastors and church leaders, I ask for your prayerful support. *“Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”* (Matthew 9:35-38).

If you are thankful for the pastoral care and church leadership that you have received from evangelical, orthodox, confessional Lutheran pastors in the course of your life, I invite you to offer your financial support as an act of thanksgiving and praise for the blessings that God has showered upon you. *“For the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God”* (2 Corinthians 9-12).

May God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless all of you who seek to do His will.

Congregations to consider amendment to NALC constitution

The 2014 NALC Convocation approved an amendment to the NALC constitution which would allow more flexibility in scheduling the annual NALC Convocation.

For it to go into effect, the amendment must be ratified by a two-thirds majority of NALC congregations voting in the ratification process.

The amendment deletes the words “in August” from constitutional language about the NALC Convocation.

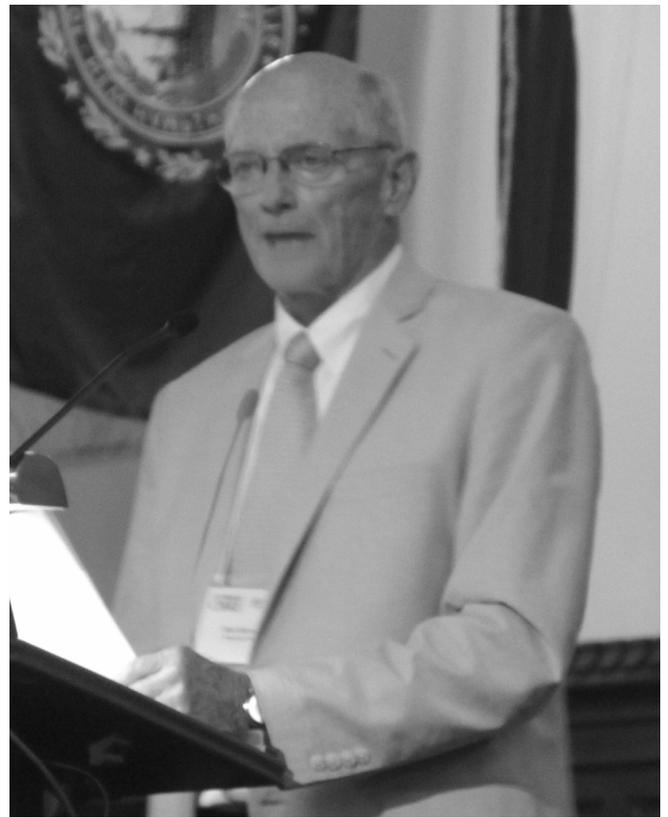
The deadline for congregations to vote on ratification is Jan. 25, 2015 — six months from the close of the 2014 NALC Convocation.

Congregations were sent information about the ratification process. The information is also available online at www.thenalc.org.

Congregational participation is a cornerstone of NALC governance. By requiring congregational ratification of certain key decisions, the NALC ensures that its members are aware of and broadly support those decisions.



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin
*Knowing the Bible through Worship
and the Liturgy*



Dr. Robert Benne introduced the theme of the Theological Conference, “Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed.” The conference has been organized by Dr. Benne and the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten since 2010. Their successors as conference organizers announced that the conference will now be known as the Carl E. Braaten-Robert Benne Lectures in Theology.



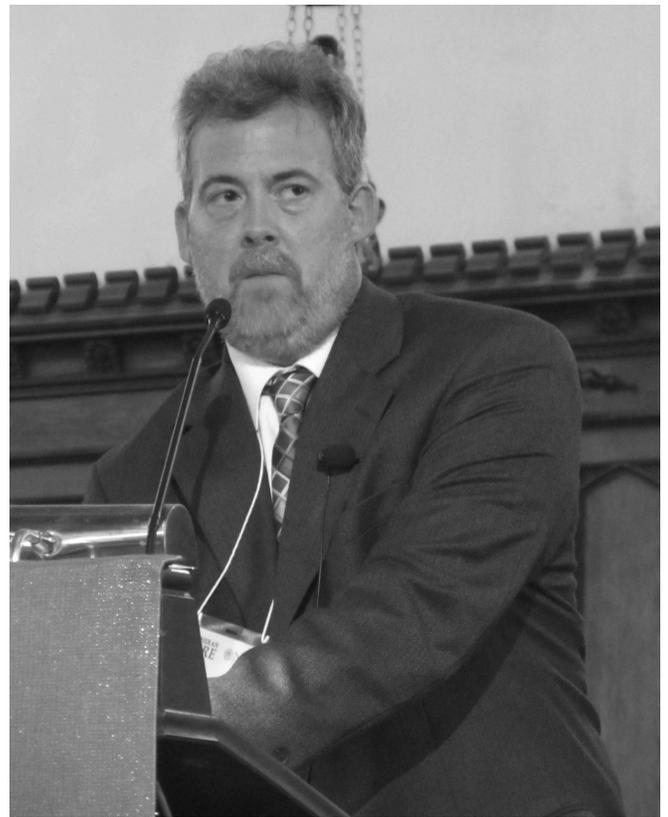
The Rev. Dr. Christopher Seitz
*The Ethics of Sex, Marriage, and the Family
According to the Bible*

Theological Conference





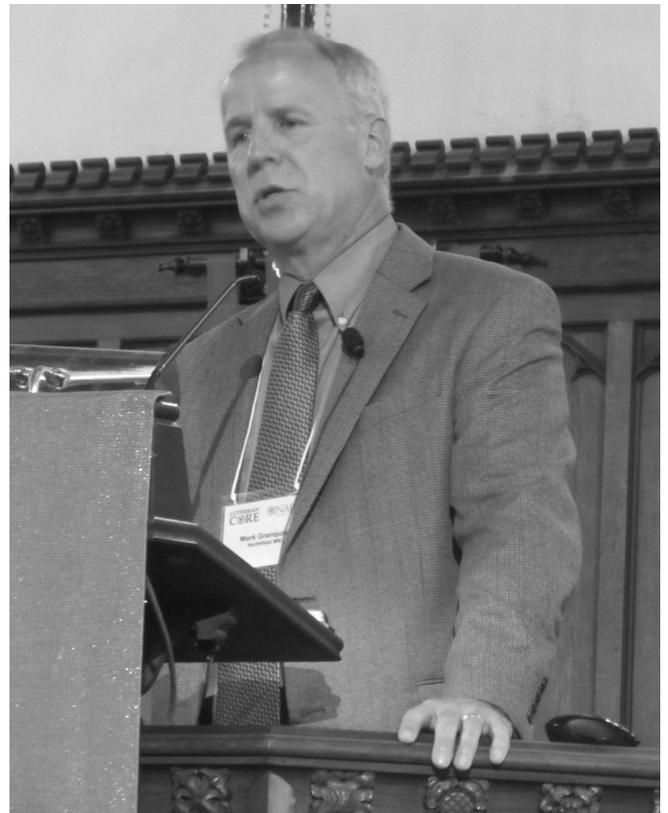
The Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Hultgren
*On Being “Lovers of Truth:”
The Canon of Scripture
and the Church’s Commitment to Truth*



Dr. R. David Nelson
*What Is Theological Exegesis?
Practical Resources
for Preaching the Gospel Today*



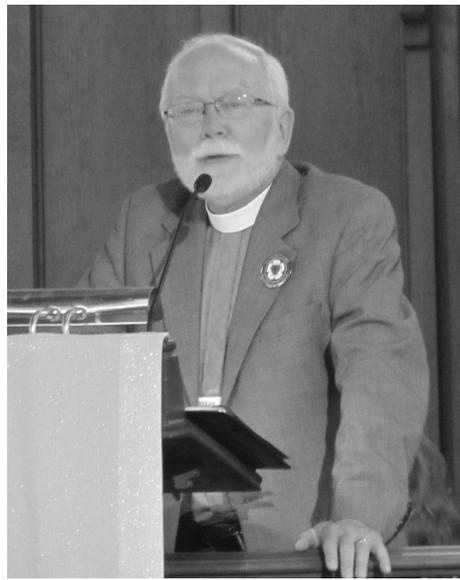
Dr. David S. Yeago
*Luther’s Way of Reading and Interpreting
the Bible*



The Rev. Dr. Mark A. Granquist
*Scripture Controversy in American Lutheranism:
Infallibility, Inerrancy, Inspiration*



*Pastor W. Stevens Shipman
Director of Lutheran CORE*



*Pastor Paul Ullring
Moderator of Lutheran CORE*



*Lynn Kickingbird
Chair of Lutheran CORE*

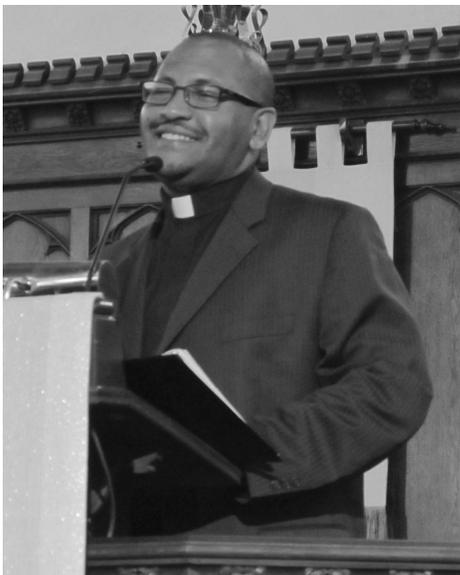


*Pastor Cori Johnson told of Lutheran CORE's
continued efforts within the ELCA.*

Lutheran CORE 2014 Convocation

Lutheran CORE's 2014 Convocation met July 21-22 under the theme, "Sharing the Hope that is in Us." For complete coverage see *Lutheran CORE Connection* available at www.lutherancore.org.

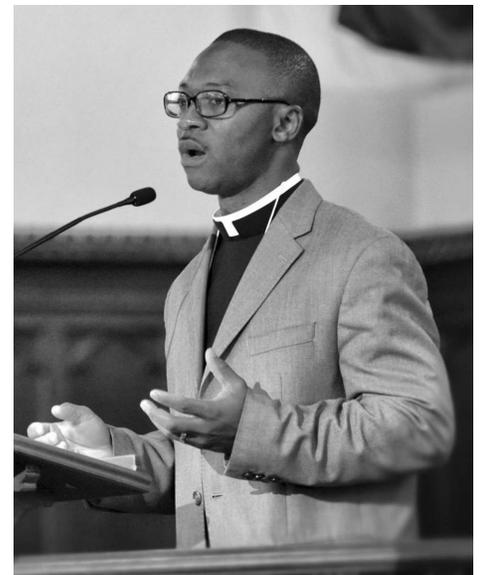
*Photos by Pastor Carter Askren,
Pastor David Baer, and Pastor Samuel Nieva.*



*Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC
Assistant to the Bishop for Missions,
preached at the Convocation's
opening Communion service.*



*The Rev. Dr. Walter Sundberg of
Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.,
delivered the keynote address and
led a workshop.*



*Pastor Stéphane Kalonji, from
Reformation Lutheran in New Bern,
N.C., presented a congregational
program to develop and share faith.*

Dealing with the Seven Major Lies about Mission - Part 1

By Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

Mission is what all churches are sent to do. God justifies sinful human beings by His grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Those He justifies become saints while they are still sinners. That means we are sinners and saints at the same time. These saints and sinners are gathered to become the Church of Jesus Christ, which is defined as a Communion of Saints. That is who we are as a church.

Those He justifies and assembles He also sends back into the world with a clear message and with a mission. They are sent to be witnesses, which means their mission is to go and share the salvation story and testify to the truth of God's Word through which we became believers in the saving person and work of Jesus. Our mission is telling the world about Jesus — how He redeemed us and how He justified us. The Church is not sent to the world to become the savior of the world. We, the Church, are sent to be witnesses, bearing testimony to the One who died on the Cross to redeem us from eternal damnation.

In this process of serving as witnesses, many misconceptions and lies about mission often distract us. These lies become so dominant in the minds of many that they are believed as absolute truths, replacing what is actually the truth about mission. As a result, churches lose their hope and excitement for mission work.

Here are some of those misconceptions and lies:

1. Mission work is difficult!

There are many who love to serve on all kinds of ministry teams and committees in the church. There are many who believe in what we do, and they want to invest time, talent and treasure in the mission of the church. However, in reality, there are very few who are stepping up to become missionaries,

mission leaders, and advocates for mission work in their congregations and communities. Most people believe that the mission of the Church must advance at any cost. At the same time, they strongly believe that it is very difficult; therefore, somebody else should do it.

However, there is one fundamental truth about mission. Our call to mission work is neither easy nor difficult. Thinking about mission in those terms gives us a very dangerous missiological framework. That kind of thinking comes more from doctrine of works righteousness than from our fundamental teaching of justification by faith.

Just as justification of a sinful human life is achieved by grace through faith, mission is also done by grace through faith. Thus, the Christian doctrine of justification by grace through faith must cover every aspect of our Christian faith and life. Justification without grace is impossible. Mission without grace is also impossible.

That is why Jesus commanded His disciples before His ascension, "Don't leave Jerusalem without receiving power from above" (*Acts 1:8*). They were ready to go into the mission field. But mission and ministry without the power of the Holy Spirit are futile. It is even dangerous, leading to leadership burnout, congregational frustration, and church-wide confusion. Therefore, when people say mission work is easy or difficult, it is contrary to the Biblical and missiological truth that is displayed in the Bible.

Mission is neither easy nor difficult. Mission is what we are sent to do; however, we are never sent alone. Jesus promises to be with us always, and the Holy Spirit works in and through our lives. Therefore, never believe it when someone tells you that mission is difficult. Just tell them, "With God, everything is possible." Then act on that faith, and get involved in God's mission without any fear.

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2. Mission is expensive; therefore, we can never afford it!

Doing mission takes a concerted effort of identifying the needs of that mission work, mobilizing resources, and channeling those resources into the hands of the right people, places or projects. We all agree that mission work requires resources in order to succeed.

However, the statement that is often spoken in the lives of many congregations is, "Mission is expensive; therefore, let us focus on taking care of our own church and our needs."

Planting new churches, starting house churches, sending mission planters, and sending missionaries worldwide require many resources. In many churches and mission agencies, lack of financial resources is hurting mission activities.

In order to deal with this reality we have to ask very honest questions. One of those questions goes back to the early church. How much money and other resources did the apostles have when Jesus sent them out to the ends of the earth? According to the Biblical records, they had nothing. Jesus commissioned them for their local and global missions without any money at hand.

There are many mission and ministry opportunities in North America. There are millions of people who are looking for divine healing, comforting and converting. "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (*Luke 10:2*).

The greatest resource behind every mission-driven congregation is not a material resource. The major launching pad to start and sustain a new mission or to renew our existing congregations is having a clear conviction to do something new by trusting in and completely relying on God's providence.

There are many churches and church leaders who are always quick to strike down congregational vision for mission by quoting what Philip told Jesus when Jesus invited 5,000 men and their families to dinner. Philip said, "We can never afford to do this; it is too expensive; and, therefore, it is impossible to do it."

In response, Jesus asked them a great question, "What do you have?"

+ Moses had a staff in his hand. He stretched it in faith, and the Red Sea was divided.

+ David took five smooth stones from the river. He used only one to slay the giant.

+ The widow woman said, "I have a small jar with a little oil left in it." With that they filled up many jars with oil.

+ At the wedding at Cana of Galilee, Jesus was told they had no wine. He instructed them to fill those six jars of stone with water, and wine abounded.

The key question in mission is not "What are we lacking?" but "What do we have?" Your mission is supported by what you have.

There are many who are experts in counting what they lack — what they don't have. They then declare that mission is expensive. Therefore, we are not going to support a missionary; we cannot plant another church; we cannot give to the mission of the wider church; we cannot support a seminary student. In the end, congregations with this mind-set tend to be self-centered and to live by fear rather than by faith. They lose joy, and they may end up ultimately dying. Mission is what sustains congregational life.

Mission is neither expensive nor cheap. Mission is not driven by what you have or don't have. Depending on Jesus alone makes mission happen. Therefore, we should not think about mission in terms of cost but in terms of assets. How much something costs should not kill the fire of mission. We must start by asking, "How blessed or how gifted are we? What kind of gifted people and skilled workers do we have?" That kind of asset-based and abundance mentality propels people into mission.

Mission is never dependent on our resources. God always provides resources for the work of every Christ-centered mission. We have to get rid of our fears regarding the cost of mission. Instead, let us focus on our assets and on our blessings. Then we can confidently declare: "We can always afford to do mission."

The remaining five points will come in next month's newsletter.

Christian Care for the Poor

An Introduction from the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine

August 2014

The constitution of the North American Lutheran Church authorizes the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine to “consider topics of a theological nature” and “to draft statements of a theological nature.” In July 2014, the Joint Commission presented its document, “a reflection piece” on “Christian Care for the Poor” to the NALC Executive Council. For its part, the Executive Council reviewed the document and directed that it be distributed to the congregations of the NALC for study and reflection.

The Joint Commission hopes that both individuals and groups within NALC congregations will review the document and reflect prayerfully on the Church’s concern for the poor among us.

“Christian Care for the Poor” notes that the most important way by which Christians care for the poor is by sharing the Gospel with them and by nurturing their life within the Christian community. The document goes on to describe the Church’s ministry in response to the material needs of the poor — from personal acts of mercy to support for government actions that address poverty both domestically and globally.

Far too many people in North America, including members of the Church, suffer under the burden of poverty, often through no fault of their own.

“Christian Care for the Poor” is a timely reminder that the Church bears a special responsibility to support, sustain, and stand with the many people who lack access to the necessities of life.

The Joint Commission trusts that this theological reflection paper will stimulate individuals and congregations to a more vigorous response to the needs of the poor among us.

Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine

Robert D. Benne
Kenneth H. Sauer
John F. Bradosky, NALC bishop
David E. Hahm
Benjamin A. Johnson
Glen Johnson
James A. Nestingen
Eric M. Riesen
Amy C. Schifrin
Paull E. Spring
Paul T. Ulring, Lutheran CORE moderator
Larry Yoder

‘Christian Care for the Poor’ notes that the most important way by which Christians care for the poor is by sharing the Gospel with them and by nurturing their life within the Christian community.

Christian Care for the Poor

A Reflection Piece for the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine

By Dr. Robert Benne

“There will always be the poor in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your kindred and toward the poor and needy in your land.” — Deuteronomy 15:11.

Concern for the poor within and outside Israel’s covenant community, the requirement to do justice and give alms, the many parables of Jesus concerning care for the poor, His identification with the poor, and the long history of charity in the Christian Church (beginning with Paul’s gathering of money for the poor of the Jerusalem church in Acts 20:1-5) leave little doubt about Christian obligation to care for the poor. There are even parables of judgment for those who do not care for the poor: the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31) as well as that of the Last Judgment (Matthew 24: 31-46).

In Reformation times Luther echoed these Biblical and historical imperatives: “There is no greater worship or service of God than Christian love which helps and serves the needy.”¹ In the “Defense of the Augsburg Confession” in the *Book of Concord* we also find strong concern for the poor: “You ought to see the tears of the poor, and hear the pitiable complaints of many good men, which God undoubtedly considers and regards, to whom one day you will render an account of your stewardship.”²

Such concern is based theologically on two great convictions: that every human is created in the image of God and that Jesus died for all sinners. Both convictions bestow on every individual immeasurable worth. This Christian affirmation became so insistent in the Christian West that it became the center of political life, so the political philosopher Glenn Tinder argued in his famous essay “Can We Be Good Without God?” “It is hardly too much to say that the idea of the exalted

individual is the spiritual center of Western politics.”³ By that Tinder meant that governments have been obligated to treat individuals with care by respecting their rights, to treat them equally before the law, and to include all within the orbit of their justice.

But before these theological convictions gained political relevance they fueled Christian concern for the poor both within and outside the Church. The two central Christian theological convictions issued in action. Faith that they were true became active in love for the poor. That love has certain qualities, qualities that are reflections of the *agape* love of God in Christ for all humans. The love that sets us free in the Gospel at the same time calls us to reflect that love in lives of service and care for others. Agape love reaches out to the needy without regard for return. It is other-regarding love. Agape love includes all; it has a universal thrust. Paradoxically though, it strategically aims at those who need it most — the lost, last, and least. Agape love is steadfast; it is utterly reliable. Further, it aims at restoring the beloved to health and mutuality; it does not aim at keeping the beloved dependent. (All of these qualities of love are taught by our Lord in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10: 25-27.) Agape love is forgiving, it is willing to break the cycle of endless hurt and recrimination in a world of fractured relationships. (This quality is taught powerfully in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32.) Finally, agape love appears as sacrificial love in a fallen world that does not reward but rather punishes it, the crucifixion of Jesus being the prime example.

However, this expression of Christian love toward the needy is complicated by the fact that each individual is not only “exalted,” but also “fallen.”

Continued on Page 30

¹ Martin Luther, LW 45: 172-3.

² Article XXVIII (XIV): Of Ecclesial Power, 3.

³ Glenn Tinder, “Can We Be Good Without God?” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1989, 76. Tinder argues that the Christian doctrines of creation and redemption make each individual “exalted,” even though “fallen.”

The poor are sinners too.⁴ Even in personal relationships, the expression of love for the poor is shaped by prudence. What indeed will be helpful to the needy person? What will restore them to health and independence? Such concerns multiply exponentially when the expression of love in personal relationships is expanded to the expression of justice in social life. Though loving the poor neighbor is sometimes a simple and spontaneous thing, it is often not so. Careful thought must be the companion of love if it is not to become an exercise in sentimentality or worse.

Another complicating factor surrounds these questions: who are the poor and why are they poor? What income — or lack of income — defines the poor? Are the poor helpless victims of external circumstances they cannot control? Are they poor because they lack crucial capacities that enable them to contribute to the economy? Are they poor because they are improvident or lazy? The answer to each question conditions how we treat them, not only in our personal relations with them but especially in impersonal, corporate relationships that aim at justice.

In spite of these complications, we Christians are called to love the neighbor, especially the poor. We are to reflect God's agape love for all, both near and far. What, then, are the ways that we express such love?

The most important way we love the poor is to share the Gospel with them and to invite them into the life of the Church. These actions demonstrate our care for their eternal destinies. In addition, these evangelical approaches convey the love of God and the support of the Christian community to the poor in concrete, earthly ways. As we share and demonstrate the Gospel — through the teaching and support of the Church — we also offer purpose and hope to lives that are often bereft of such goods. Faith and community support are precious gifts that we are called to offer the poor.

⁴ It is important to note that those who care for the poor and the poor are likewise sinful human beings. Both are free moral agents and have the capacity for both positive and negative actions. The poor are not simply objects of our care; they are subjects as well and must be treated that way if positive outcomes are to be realized.

Further, when our churches are alive and effective, as are many NALC and Lutheran CORE parishes, we form our members in the virtues of love and justice.⁵ Those members then express their care for the poor in manifold ways. They volunteer their time in food pantries and kitchens, clothes closets, hospitality networks, home-building organizations, and countless other voluntary associations dedicated to alleviating the plight of the poor. They give their money to innumerable agencies — both large and small — that care for the poor. They organize voluntary associations to address newly discovered needs of the poor. Sometimes they not only offer poor families within their parishes support and aid, but also training in the disciplines that enable them to become independent.⁶ Some Christians are motivated to organize or participate in advocacy organizations that press for changes in public policy. As citizens they vote for candidates whom they think will initiate or support policies on behalf of the poor. Some will even become candidates themselves.

This indirect effect of our church through its laity on behalf of the poor is enormous in both size and impact. Some of it is the product of individual action but much of it flows through the voluntary associations so characteristic of American life. It is often effective because it grapples with plight of the poor in concrete and near-at-hand ways. Prudence and love work together. Some of the action aims at legislating policies that not only alleviate the conditions of the poor but also address the underlying conditions that increase poverty. In this civic exercise Christians of good will and intelligence often agree about the goals of policy but disagree about the means.

Continued on Page 31

⁵ This formation is carried out in manifold ways: in teaching and learning, worship and prayer, and the provision of many opportunities for direct involvement in charitable and justice-seeking practices, both inside and outside the church. While the clergy cannot be involved in all this activity, they are crucial in seeing that it is carried out.

⁶ One thinks here of the great work of Wesley's Methodists in the Victorian Era in which the degraded poor were transformed into good Christians and citizens. See Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Marriage and Morals Among the Victorians*, 1986.

The direct role of the Church

Though the Church's most lasting and pervasive care for the poor is done indirectly through its proclamation of the Gospel as well as through the work of the laity and their voluntary associations, there are good reasons for direct efforts by the Church as an institution. Challenges of helping the poor often go beyond individual action, so the Church throughout history has organized its own charitable institutions — hospitals, homes for the poor and elderly, orphanages, and many other organizations to alleviate poverty.⁷ Such institutions continue to be important institutional vehicles for Christian care for the poor. The best of them not only assuage the poverty of the body but also of the soul.

Further, churches have felt obliged to offer social statements that call attention to the plight of the poor, analyze the causes of poverty, and call for public policies that address those causes. Such efforts inevitably get into public debates in which the church has no special expertise. Good public policy is notoriously difficult to craft since it has to be attentive to unintended effects as well as to account for proper incentives and disincentives. Such legislation almost always involves compromises and uncertainties. Moreover, the movement from core Christian moral convictions to policy involves a number of steps at which Christians often diverge. There are few, if any, straight lines from that core to specific public policy. Given such complexities, it is best for our church forcefully to call attention to the problems of the poor and insist on public action to alleviate them rather than to advocate particular public policies.

However, there are some occasions when the Church simply has to cry out a prophetic “no” when public policies actively and plainly oppress or violate the dignity of the poor. In those cases the Church must not only object to such policies but resist them.⁸

Finally, churches have often engaged in the exercise of political power to affect policy on behalf of the poor. They organize advocacy offices in the midst of state and national governments. In these softer forms of exercising power, they exhort their members to apply pressure to their political representatives to promote specific public policies that they consider just-making. In harder forms they use boycotts and divestment strategies. Such efforts should be employed very carefully and infrequently lest the church damage its universal and transcendent message by involving itself too deeply in coercive and partisan strategies.

In summary, there is little question that we Christians are called to care for the poor. God has commanded such care in His Law and has given us freedom in the Gospel to love the poor neighbor. Our first and most important service to the poor is the sharing of the Gospel and the life of the Church with them. Further, we are called to care for the poor in many other ways in our personal, associational, and civic lives. Our church can best motivate us to take up these callings by a vigorous ministry of Word and Sacrament, of worship and teaching, of modeling and practicing. Such a rich ministry will form in us the virtues of love and justice, which, when expressed in our callings, become the most effective way that we care for the poor. Yet, the Church also has an institutional role in direct care and advocacy for the poor, a role that is best carried out by those who are already formed in those virtues.

⁷ Luther recommended that each German town develop a common chest that would provide interest-free loans to the poor, who would pledge to repay them. This development went beyond individual charity to an institutional approach. Soon there were scores of “inner mission” institutions in the Lutheran lands. This charitable impulse continued and flourished in America as Lutheran churches founded a profusion of such organizations. American Lutherans had their William Passavant, a remarkable founder of charitable institutions, who inspired many others to take up the cause.

⁸ Our national history has had some horrific instances of mistreatment of the poor that were not—but should have been—protested by the church. Sterilization of the mentally challenged, medical experiments on poor people without their consent, the targeting of poor communities for promoting abortion services, and unjust loan policies foisted on the credit-worthy poor are some examples.

Ministry Burnout

Dealing with All Those Expectations

Sometimes we intuit a trend and then find our intuition confirmed by real evidence. For example, I've been under the impression that clergy burnout is on the increase. Then I recently came across the results of a survey of pastors reported in this spring's issue of *Leadership Magazine*. These results were under the heading "Hard Calling."

Included was the following information: Eighty percent of clergy surveyed report that they are "discouraged in their role as pastors." Twenty-five percent have been "forced out or fired from their ministry at least once." Of 1,050 pastors surveyed, every one of them — 100 percent — "had a close associate or friend from seminary who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure."

One more statistic — this one far more bleak than I would have expected — "For every 20 pastors who go into the ministry, only one retires from the ministry." (I don't know if this last piece of information was based on the survey or was also based on information from national church bodies.)

What's going on here? I would guess there are few professions which have this kind of attrition rate. At the risk of making this column even more discouraging, let's consider possible factors that can contribute to clergy burnout.

To begin with the "office" of pastor is not as respected by the wider culture as it was perhaps 30 or 40 years ago. As our society continues to embrace a more secular worldview, clergy are increasingly seen as a throwback to an earlier, "less enlightened" era.

Second, most mainline congregations are dealing with significant rates of decline, adding to the vocational stress of their pastors. One estimate is that the average congregation is experiencing a nine percent drop in attendance each year. This is often equating to a 15 to 20 percent dip in church budgets.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

Added to all of the above is the unprecedented, additional stress experienced by many pastors whose denominations — and congregations — have endured major conflict related to human sexuality controversies. This includes clergy who were (or still are) a part of the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). And this issue is beginning to impact the United Methodist Church as well.

Needless to say, the current rate of attrition among clergy is presenting significant challenges to national church bodies, including the NALC. But I want to focus on the implications of this for those of you who are currently serving as pastors and those of you who, as lay people, want to find ways to be supportive of your pastor.

I have always felt that in many areas of life one of our challenges is to *manage our expectations*. For example, this is an issue I typically bring up in premarital counseling. It's also relevant when it comes to the ordained ministry. One article (also in the spring issue of *Leadership*) captured this issue in its title, "Failing Them Softly." The subtitle was "Disappointing people's expectations is inevitable. Just do it at a rate they can tolerate."

The expectations pastors confront in parish ministry are two-fold: The expectations *their congregations* have of them as pastors, and the expectations pastors place on themselves.

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Expectations imposed by members are sometimes, as the saying goes, “off the charts.” These often include outstanding preacher and teacher, more-than-competent administrator, and effective counselor. And then there is the preferred personality profile: dynamic, personable, and exhibiting an appropriate sense of humor. Added to the above there is often the preference for a pastor who is married (not single) with two to four (well-behaved) children.

Then there are the expectations pastors impose on themselves. These are based, in part, on our sense of call and how we came to the decision to pursue ordination. These expectations are also impacted by our personal faith and how we compare ourselves to other pastors we admire or, in some cases, envy. And then there are those constant reminders — whether from leadership conferences, or books, or articles — of how much more we could (should?) be accomplishing in ministry.

Some suggestions for minimizing your discouragement as pastors:

+ Don't pretend that, as a pastor, you are far more educated and knowledgeable than most of your members. This might have been true for pastors back in 1900, but no longer. So avoid the temptation of theological arrogance.

+ Don't fall into the role of “gatekeeper.” Your people can sense if you feel threatened by the gifts and/or ministry initiatives of your members. Don't allow control to be your over-riding ministry priority. Instead, be vigilant about identifying, recruiting and motivating members who are gifted to lead particular congregational ministries.

+ Establish an on-going friendship with either another pastor, or a Christian lay person who is not a member of your congregation. (Same gender as you.) Meet regularly for support and accountability. If married, do not neglect your family.

+ Establish a regular devotional discipline of prayer and Bible study.

+ Make time for personal renewal; and not just for your days off or trips out of town. Build this kind of

time into your work week. For example, I still find sermon and/or class preparation to be renewing. However, this works best for me if I don't do this at church (too many interruptions) or at home (always a “to do” list). My preference is a coffee shop or espresso bar. What would be the best setting for you? And when is the best time? This particular aspect of ministry is, for many of us, one of the most renewing parts of our call. If that's true for you, find a way to “make it happen.”

+ Develop a congregational **ministry team**. Avoid a solo ministry. You want to do this for your sake *and* to strengthen your congregation's overall ministry. Depending on the size of your congregation this might be a staff team (even if they are all part-timers), or this could be a team made up entirely of volunteer leaders. Meet regularly with your team members — not just for planning, but for support and renewal as well. Affirm your team members in their gifts and calling as ministers of the Gospel. Empower them to not only serve, but lead. This team can go a long way toward preventing a sense of isolation that often characterizes the ordained ministry — an isolation that is a leading contributor to burnout.

2015 Pastor's Conference

“Jesus and the Bible: Authority in the Church” is the theme of the 2015 NALC Pastor's Conference Feb. 10-12 in Orlando, Fla.

Keynote Presenter is Dr. David Yeago, professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Workshops include:

+ Preaching Lent and Easter - Cycle B by the Rev. Dr. Jim Nestingen and the Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin of the NALS.

+ The NALC Discipleship Emphasis and You!

+ Improving Worship in the NALC.

+ Re-igniting Mission Fervor in the NALC.

More information will be available on the NALC website after details are finalized.

NALC leaders join other Christians in defending religious charities

NALC Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, joined with other Christian leaders in signing a statement from the Common Ground Christian Network (CGCN) opposing President Barak Obama's July 21 executive order requiring all federal contractors to practice "nondiscrimination" based on "sexual orientation" and "gender identity."

The North American Lutheran Church is a member of the CGCN. The CGCN statement was signed by 35 people representing church bodies and renewal movements in the United States.

"We decry any government discrimination waged against religious groups under the purported banner of 'nondiscrimination,'" the statement said.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops also expressed grave concern about the president's action. "Today's executive order is unprecedented and extreme and should be opposed," the bishops said. "In the name of forbidding discrimination, this order implements discrimination. With the stroke of a pen, it lends the economic power of the federal government to a deeply flawed understanding of human sexuality, to which faithful Catholics and many other people of faith will not assent. As a result, the order will exclude federal contractors precisely on the basis of their religious beliefs."

Here is the text of the CGCN statement. Go to www.thenalc.org for a link to the statement including the list of signers.

We the Common Ground Christian Network affirm the dignity and value of every human being and we oppose President Obama's July 21, 2014, executive order which seeks to limit the free exercise of religion by organizations doing business with the federal government. The order compels all federal contractors, including religious organizations, to practice "nondiscrimination" based on "sexual orientation" and "gender identity." While designed to proscribe discrimination, the order actually

sanctions it by punishing those whose faith-driven convictions the government does not approve.

The First Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees the free exercise of religion, includes religion-based ethics in the workplace. The President's executive order would force Christian charities and other religious groups, whose services are always extended without discrimination, to hire people whose lifestyles do not conform to the religious beliefs of the organization. This includes the historic Biblical Christian teaching that sex is for marriage between husband and wife. It also violates the First Amendment's disestablishment clause by endorsing "transgender" ideology, the assertion that individuals can reinvent their own self-perceived "gender identity," irrespective of physical reality. Christians whose faith aligns with historic, Biblical Christianity consider this ideology to be Gnostic in its elevation of mind and feelings over biology.

By excluding many religious charitable and educational organizations from government contracts, this executive order will harm the poor and needy who often benefit from the unique expertise and compassion that religious groups offer. More broadly, this executive order represents a growing intolerance for expressions of historic Biblical religious faith in public life. Ultimately the order undermines freedom of speech, conscience and religion for all Americans by coercively imposing through a discriminatory government policy a secular ideology that displaces traditional religious faith and family life.

As Christians and leaders of religious institutions affirming liberty for all persons, religious or not, we pray and hope for judicial and legislative corrections to this misguided executive order. We declare our own commitment to the teachings of historic orthodox Christianity about marriage, sex, gender and the human body. And we decry any government discrimination waged against religious groups under the purported banner of "nondiscrimination."

Lessons in Leadership - Part 2

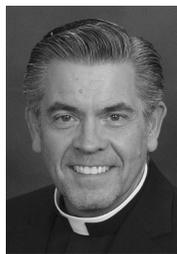
“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” — John 13:34-35

We talk a lot about being disciples and making disciples in the North American Lutheran Church, and we’re learning more about it day by day. One aspect that hasn’t been discussed much is the fact that our discipleship is to be evidenced by our love for one another. Our Lord says, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

One place in the church today where such love is sorely lacking is in relationships between pastors and church councils. Oh, we have many, many healthy congregations where the relationships between the called, ordained servant of the Word and the elected lay leaders is respectful, honest, open and yes, healthy. It’s a blessing to work with such congregations and to see the good fruit being borne. Most of our congregations manifest such love for one another between pastor and lay leaders, and this love is evidence that they are truly Jesus’ disciples.

At the same time, we have all too many congregations in which pastor and church council seem to be continually at odds with each other, showing little respect for one another and not much Christ-like love and cooperation. The number of these troubled congregations is small, but any number is too many because the negative witness they offer to the world causes more harm than the majority of congregations where love abounds!

How many unbelievers would ever consider participating in a congregation which has a reputation of tension and in-fighting between pastor and parish? Let’s not kid ourselves. In every community, people outside our congregations are well-aware of the climate within our congregations. The familiar hymn has it right: “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Similarly, they’ll question our Christlikeness when we are fighting and fussing with each other.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Sadly, tension between pastor and church leaders is not unique to the NALC or to Lutherans. However, I would like to suggest that we become *unusual* and *unique* in the North American Christian landscape by not accepting such tension and difficulty as the norm, but address it straight-on and positively, affirming that such conflict is not worthy of the Body of Christ, nor of His disciples. So, how can pastors and church leaders avoid such tension?

First, remember that the call of a pastor is not of man, but of God. That being said, this does not make the pastor “CEO” — able to make decisions “willy-nilly” in accordance with his or her own agenda or desires — but a servant of God called by God to walk with the congregation and its leaders, cooperatively, respectfully, and mutually accountable for love and goodwill in the congregation. I will say it again: the Lutheran pastor is not a “hired-hand” nor an “employee” of the congregation, able to be “fired” as easily as he or she was “hired.”

The pastor/parish relationship is just that — a covenantal relationship. Bishop Bradosky recently told me: “We need to help our congregations to understand that the pastoral call to serve a congregation is a solemn covenant similar to the covenant of our Baptism. Because it is God’s call to the pastor, it cannot be lightly or easily dismissed or terminated.”

As with trouble in a marriage, conflict and difficulty between pastor and parish requires love, forbearance, communication, honesty and mutual respect — with “divorce” not an option.

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In our disposable society, it is all too easy to think we can “dispose” of a spouse when he or she is no longer meeting our needs. No wonder church leaders think they can also “dispose” of a pastor in a similar way. Working together can be hard — and take time — with no one sure of the outcome. But just as every marriage is stronger after working through challenges, the pastor-parish relationship becomes stronger after honestly and straightforwardly dealing with issues and tensions.

Third, congregational leaders must bear in mind that they are not corporate “boards of directors.” As the pastor is not a CEO with unlimited power and authority, so also our church councils are not corporate bodies responsible for making sure the corporation is providing a sufficient return on their investment.

Every church council and every congregational lay leader is also to be a servant leader, concerned first and foremost for the health and well-being of the community, including the pastor and his or her family. The aim of every church leader is the good of the whole, not the furthering of their own individual wants, wishes and desires.

Finally, the Body of Christ will be best served by an attitude among all church leaders — pastors and lay alike — of humble service. Arrogant, domineering leadership styles have no place in the church, nor are they reflective of discipleship, as modeled and taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. He was called “not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). When we are called to be leaders in the Church, we are called to give ourselves for the good of others, humbly, respectfully, in response to the gift of our Savior. “Lording it over others” has no place in the Body of Christ — whether you are seated in the chancel or in the pews!

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