

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

February 2014

NALC leaders consult with Lutheran leaders in Africa

By Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism

Bishop John Bradosky and the Executive Staff of the NALC boarded a plane (yes, all four on one plane!) just after the New Year to travel to three countries in East Africa for important conversations with leaders of four Lutheran church bodies.

Bishop Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, and Assistants to the Bishop Pastor Gemechis Buba and Pastor David Wendel

traveled to Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania for almost two weeks of high-level meetings.

The trip was initially planned to facilitate a face-to-face meeting between the NALC and our first and only Full Communion partner, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

In conversations with President Wakseyoum Idosa of EECMY during his visit to the 2013 NALC

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NALC leaders meet with leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This was one of several significant meetings between NALC leaders and the leaders of African church bodies held in January. The EECMY is one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world with 6 million members.

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Convocation last August, it became clear that further discussion was needed to understand what this relationship means and how it will move forward between the two partner churches.

Because the NALC is significantly different from other existing Lutheran church bodies, the nature of the Full Communion partnership will be different — intentionally so. For example, the NALC does not receive, nor will it send large sums of money to partner church bodies to sponsor ministry projects, whether in Africa or elsewhere. The NALC seeks to foster relationships between its congregations and Mission Districts and Christians in other parts of the world so that mutual conversation, education, mission and ministry may happen on a one-to-one basis as a result of those relationships.



NALC Bishop John Bradosky speaks at a worship service of the Maasai people in a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

To more fully grasp the nature of the NALC, it was necessary for the NALC Bishop and staff to travel to Addis Ababa for meetings with President Isoda, the EECMY General Secretary Berhanu Ofgaa and other EECMY church leaders.

Because EECMY celebrates “Orthodox Christmas” on Jan. 6, the meeting was held on Friday, Jan. 3, after the NALC staff arrived in Ethiopia that morning. In spite of the demands of international travel, the meeting was positive, helpful, exciting and set a course for developing this church-to-church relationship as we move forward. The next step will be to appoint a team of four persons (two from each church body) to communicate and coordinate directly.

On Saturday the NALC staff traveled to Arusha, Tanzania, where they were able to visit with Dr. Steve and Bethany Friberg in Ketumbeine village, near the Tanzania-Kenya border. Dr. Friberg has served as a Lutheran medical missionary in this area for a quarter of a century, developing a medical clinic and clinic for women and children in Ketumbeine, as well as 15 satellite clinics among the Maasai.



NALC leaders pose with Maasai leaders inside of their new church building which is being constructed near Kitumbeine, Tanzania.

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Due to the work of German and Swedish missionaries in this area, many of the Maasai are Lutheran, so Bishop Bradosky and our staff worshiped on Sunday morning in a Maasai congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).

This particular congregation wanted to welcome our delegation because Bishop Bradosky had been part of a mission team work group some time ago which provided the funds for the roof of their church building.

The NALC staff were warmly welcomed by the elders who had roasted a goat as “refreshments” for the Bishop and staff before the worship service. More roasted goat was shared after the service, with chai.

They also visited a larger church building being constructed nearby to replace the existing building which they are outgrowing!

Sunday afternoon, the NALC delegation had a tour of several Maasai villages to view their old mud huts with thatched roofs as well as the new design for their homes with more space and metal roofs that won't leak during the rainy season.

This project is especially meaningful to the NALC because much of the funding has come from the Maasai women's bead project, featured at the 2013 NALC Convocation. More than \$2,000 was raised at our Convocation by sales of their beaded jewelry and other items which went directly to the purchase of materials needed for building the new homes for the Maasai.

This change in home design is significant in that it reflects the changing culture of the Maasai from being nomadic, to more settled in one location with more permanent homes. The Maasai expressed great appreciation for the support of the NALC!

As the NALC staff were preparing to leave Arusha, they were able to visit the Tumaini University-Makumira Seminary of the ELCT, being welcomed by Dr. Joseph Parsalaw, vice-chancellor of the seminary. (ELCT Presiding Bishop Alex Malasusa is the chancellor of the seminary.)



Participants in the meeting between leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the North American Lutheran Church in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, were, from left: Ambassador Richard Mariki, Pastor Mark Chavez, Bishop John Bradosky, retired Presiding Bishop Hans Mwokobana, Pastor David Wendel, and General Secretary Brighton Killewa. The ELCT is one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world with 6 million members.

The staff were also able to meet and visit with the Assistant to the Bishop of the Kenyan Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), the Rev. Johnes Melijio, who was studying at the seminary and who arranged an additional visit in Nairobi with Bishop Zacharia Kahuthu of the Kenyan Evangelical Lutheran Church, one of two Lutheran church bodies in Kenya.

The group had planned to travel to Nairobi, to meet with Archbishop Walter Obare of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) who had expressed interest in such a visit during his conversation with Pastor Wendel in Fort Wayne last September.

Archbishop Obare has been a bold and faithful Lutheran leader, especially as he consecrated the first bishop of the Swedish Mission Province, whose motto is, “Bringing the Gospel Back to Sweden.” In spite of much criticism, he consecrated the first bishop so that other pastors committed to the truth of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions could be ordained in Sweden for the sake of reform and renewal of Christianity in Sweden.

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ELCK is also of interest to the NALC because it is a full member of both the Lutheran World Federation and the International Lutheran Council, the international group affiliated with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and many of its partner churches.

The NALC-ELCK meeting took place the morning of January 8 in the ELCK offices at Luther Plaza in Nairobi. That afternoon, the meeting between NALC leaders and KELC Bishop Kahuthu took place at the Hilton Hotel in Nairobi.

The next day the NALC delegation flew to Dar es Salaam for the final meeting with leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania at the Lutheran Center.

While the NALC has only one “Partnership Full Communion Agreement” (with EECMY), a “Memorandum of Understanding” with ELCT was signed at the 2013 NALC Convocation. While not a formal “church-to-church” agreement, the Memorandum is a first step in the development of a relationship between the NALC and ELCT.

The presence at the 2013 NALC Convocation of Bishop Peter-Israel Mwakiolili of the ELCT Konde Diocese and Ambassador Richard Mariki, General Secretary of the ELCT Eastern and Coastal Diocese, followed two invitations to Bishop Bradosky to speak at ELCT events in Tanzania.

As with the meeting with EECMY, the topic for discussion in Dar es Salaam addressed the unique nature of the NALC and the goal of developing relationships for mission and ministry, rather than simply providing funding for projects.

Also discussed was the Lutheran Junior Seminary at Morogoro and the many needs there, as presented at our Convocation by Pastor Herb Hafermann, longtime missionary to Tanzania.

After the meeting, the NALC staff made the long (and arduous!) driving trip to Morogoro to visit the school, meet the director and learn about the program. At the foot of the beautiful Uluguru Mountains, it is a high school for 600 students. It is



NALC leaders pose during their visit to the Lutheran Junior Seminary in Morogoro, Tanzania. The Uluguru Mountains are in the background.

now suffering because of cuts in financial support by Lutheran church bodies in North America and Europe.

Visiting the Junior Seminary, it became obvious that there will be no “quick-fixes,” but what is needed is an integrated team approach to long-term development and sustainability. The developing relationship between the NALC and ELCT will seek to address these needs and may include a major conference in Morogoro in the summer of 2014, involving leaders of both churches.

All in all, the visit of NALC Bishop and staff to three nations and four national church bodies in east Africa brought forth great fruit and accomplished our goals. Such relationships and conversations happen best face-to-face, and the willingness of our Executive Staff to make such a trip indicates our commitment to these relationships, our desire to be involved and engaged with the global Lutheran community, and our desire to be a church body that builds relationships which are mutually respectful, supportive and faithful.

As the church leaders of EECMY, ELCK, KELC and ELCT have pledged to pray for the NALC, let us also remember to pray for them — for their bishops, presidents, pastors, leaders and all the followers of Jesus who are part of the Body of Christ in these vibrant, growing Lutheran churches!

Radio Ministry of Pastor Eddy Perez

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

Pastor Eddy Perez of Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Fla., was born in Cuba in 1968. He became a follower of Jesus in January of 1992. That same year he received a Doctor of Medicine degree in July and was married in August — so he considers 1992 “a very blessed year.”

Soon after coming to Christ, he became involved in ministry, but the Cuban government did not like his being a pastor as well as practicing medicine. He faced such severe opposition from the government that eventually — in the year 2000 — he fled Cuba and came to the United States.

In the United States he was introduced to the Lutheran Church. He became a Lutheran pastor in 2005 and has been serving Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami since 2009.

Pastor Perez serves on the Steering Committee of Lutheran CORE, is dean of the Caribbean and Hispanic Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church. He is also currently completing a term on the NALC Executive Council.

Pastor Perez remembers the importance of the radio during his childhood in Cuba. The government maintained strict control over all of the media, whether it was the radio, television, or the newspapers. “The only thing we could hear was the news the government wanted us to hear. If we wanted to be informed of what was going on in the world, even in Cuba, we had to rely on foreign radio stations,” he said.

He remembers growing up listening to radio stations that were broadcasting from the United States. “Even though I was not living in Miami, I knew what businesses in Miami were advertising on the radio,” he said.



Pastor Eddy Perez prepares to broadcast his twice-weekly ministry outreach radio program. Reaching listeners from central Florida to north central Cuba, this ministry has been an important evangelism tool of Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Fla.

When he was a high school student, he was invited several times by local radio and television stations to be a part of their programming under strict supervision of the authorities. On a number of occasions he would read a book and then sit on a panel that would discuss that book.

“The Lord used all of that training. At that time I did not know the Lord. I was not a Christian, but the Lord was working in my life, preparing me for this work. I also lost the fear of being in front of a microphone and a camera,” he said.

Because the same control over the media continues in Cuba today, Pastor Perez is very excited about the opportunity he now has to reach Cuba, as well as Cuban immigrants here in the United States, with the message of salvation. He said, “To me it is a tremendous joy.”

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Two years ago, in 2012, he was given the opportunity to begin a program on a small, local, radio station. He called his program *Tiempo de Alabanza*, which means “Praising Time.” Initially he was given the 10 p.m. time slot on Saturdays. Soon he was given an earlier time of 7 p.m. Eventually he moved into the 6 p.m. slot — opening the block of Christian broadcasting on that secular station.

At the same time, he was given the opportunity of conducting a second program for no additional cost, on Wednesday nights from 11 p.m. to midnight. For two years he preached the Word of God, played Christian music, invited people to church, and gave people the opportunity to call in and receive prayer ministry over the phone.

Even though the station was broadcasting with only 1,000 watts of strength so that it could only be heard in the immediate area, Pastor Eddy’s program received very positive reviews and became a tremendous evangelism tool for the congregation.

Eventually, however, Pastor Perez heard that the station was being sold and that the new owner would not be continuing with the Christian programming block. At the same time, he also learned about another station that had time available for purchase. This other station was much stronger, broadcasting not with 1,000, but with 50,000 watts of power. It could be heard over a much wider area, from central Florida down into the



Pastor Eddy Perez

Florida Keys, the Bahamas, and even into north central Cuba.

Pastor Perez was very excited to hear that this station was broadcasting to Cuba with the same strength — 50,000 watts of power — as the station that he had been listening to as a child in Cuba. He also said that because there are relatively few stations that broadcast from Cuba, it can be relatively easy to pick up a foreign broadcast in Cuba.

Pastor Perez feels that God was giving him further confirmation when he heard what broadcast times were available: two o’clock and three o’clock in the afternoon.

It is Pastor Perez’s ministry goal to reach Hispanic immigrant families here in the United States, particularly younger families, so he saw the availability of these two times as converging with his ministry priorities. He said, “At other times young families are on the Internet or are watching television. At two o’clock and three o’clock, people are picking up their children from school. The only time they are listening to the radio is when they are in their cars.” So he was especially excited to be able to purchase the time from 3:10 to 3:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.



Pastor Perez and congregation members lay hands on and dedicate a memory stick containing audio of the radio ministry.

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“Reaching Cuba and reaching young families are both extremely important to me. People in Cuba rely on U.S. radio stations to bring them the news. Now we can also bring them the Good News of Jesus,” he added.

The new radio station’s name is *Vida*, which means “Life,” and it broadcasts at 1080 AM. Pastor Perez is currently on the air two days a week and is praying for time availability five days a week. But a major factor is the cost. He had been paying the previous station only \$75 a week for two hours of programming time. The cost for broadcasting on the new station is \$350 per week for two 20-minute time segments.

The previous station was much less expensive, but the program was only being heard in the area around his church in Miami. With the new station his program is being heard all the way from central Florida to north central Cuba. Regarding the increased cost, Pastor Perez shared, “Many people will say, ‘That is impossible.’ I would say, ‘Nothing is impossible for God.’”

Wanting to get the word out about the opportunity and the need, Pastor Perez was planning to write a letter. A close friend, Pastor Raymond Scheck, recommended that he make a video instead. Pastor Perez wrote the script for the video and then involved his two daughters. His older daughter, Elisabet, did the videotaping, while his younger daughter, Debora, did the producing. Pastor Perez said, “It was a real blessing to me that my entire family was working together with me.” You may view the video on [YouTube](#). Pastor Perez also wants to thank Pastor Rebecca Heber of Oasis Church in Lake Mary, Florida, for assistance with text editing.

In the video Pastor Perez asks for help in three ways. First, he asks that people pray for this ministry. He knows that nothing will be accomplished if God’s people are not praying. Second, he asks that people talk with their neighbors, friends, co-workers, and family members to find out what problems people are facing. Pastor Perez wants his messages to address from a Christian perspective the real life issues with which people are having to deal. He began the new year



Pastor Eddy Perez and his wife, Yuddy.

with a series on how to overcome fear, because he had heard from someone that many people at this person’s workplace were facing many fears. The third issue addressed on the video is financial support, asking people to donate if the Lord lays it upon their hearts to do so.

Pastor Perez shared how this radio ministry has been a tremendous evangelism tool, as it has been reaching many Spanish-speaking people, including young families and recent immigrants from Cuba. It has also been a powerful means of outreach to people in prison. Among the known listeners are male inmates in a state prison, as well as both male and female inmates in federal prisons in Miami. “Inmates have sent me letters and Christmas cards. One even made a bracelet for me,” he said.

Pastor Perez concluded our conversation by saying, considering the cost of broadcasting on the new station, “If it were just me, I would say, ‘This is impossible.’” Then he added, “I did nothing to be in this place. If I had not been persecuted in Cuba, I would not be here in the United States. If the other station had not closed, I would have just stayed with the smaller station. I am now able to do so much more and reach so many more people than I would have been able to do if I had just stayed in that little town in Cuba.”

Pastor Perez and his radio ministry are worthy of our prayer and financial support. Gifts may be sent to 3360 W. Flagler St., Miami, FL 33135. You may contact Pastor Perez at 305-445-0626 or pastoreddyperez@yahoo.com.

Called to bear witness to the Light

As disciples of Jesus, we who have been gathered, enlightened, redeemed and sanctified have also been called and entrusted with the most important responsibility of our lives: to bear witness to the Light in word and deed, to make disciples of all nations until the whole world knows and has the chance to believe in Jesus.

The Apostle John writes about the personal and internalized nature of our mission. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1-3).

This is no easy task for those who live in these precarious times. However, the world for those John is addressing was just as precarious. He told those who read his letter that they were living in the last hour. Many would pull people away with false gospels. People would be attracted to lies, while others engaged in deceit. They would deny that Jesus is the Christ and proclaim they could still believe in God and be “spiritual.” John made it clear that if you deny the Son you cannot know the Father.

My letter next month will deal in greater detail with the precarious position of the Church in North America. We must take consolation in the fact God is able to use a remnant in far more powerful ways than any political majority. These times call for us to be confident and assured of the truth of our faith. John writes, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth” (1 John 1:20-21).

Paul also reminds us of how important that anointing is. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

We recognize that some of our missionaries are on the front lines of such oppression and opposition, but the truth is that such opposition is closer to home than we care to recognize or admit. While many live in denial — acting as though nothing has changed — others have acquiesced to the values of culture, abandoning the content of the Gospel we were called to proclaim. Many more are unsure of what Christians believe, uncertain about the nature and identity of Jesus. Most in the church are not equipped or prepared to share their faith with a neighbor or friend. Far fewer have a consistent method or process for making disciples of those who do come to faith in Christ.

As exhausting, disheartening and challenging as these times are, it is still a great privilege to be counted worthy to be called by Christ to proclaim Him no matter what we must suffer.

A faithful response in these difficult times does not consist of simply making a financial contribution and slipping back into the comfort of our familiar behaviors. Instead, the deeper and more costly challenge is to put ourselves on the front lines, not just our pastors but every disciple of Jesus in every congregation of the NALC.

This greater challenge will draw us closer to Christ and to one another. It will call us to be better equipped to share our own faith and to take seriously the command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations. It will encourage us to strengthen our

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relationships through prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the joy of life in Christ.

So today, I would like to renew my invitation and challenge to our congregations in the North American Lutheran Church. As a church and as a movement, we have adopted a congregational vision for mission we call “1+1+1.”

That call is for every congregation to see itself on the front line of the mission field, to support a mission effort at the local level (in the immediate community of the congregation), to support one national mission within North America so we continue to expand our witness here, and to support one global mission partner.

The truth is that we have more opportunities to expand our mission than we have resources to support those opportunities. I long for a time when we have sufficient resources to respond with immediate action to meet the needs of those struggling to faithfully proclaim Christ in word and deed.

This is not a request for financial support. My challenge is for us to grow in our passionate love for Jesus and in our obedience to His command, such that we put ourselves on the front lines of this spiritual battle — the front lines of proclaiming His Kingdom.

I have been privileged to know numerous missionaries during my ministry. They have one thing in common. They are willing to risk everything for Christ and the proclamation of His Gospel. When we get to that point, money will not limit our work.

Please check out the Great Commission Society’s web pages for more information — www.thenalc.org/great-commission-society.

Don’t just pray for our missionaries. Pray for the missionary zeal of every disciple of Jesus in the North American Lutheran Church. Pray for every member of your congregation. Pray for strength and assurance so the Lord can use you on the front lines of mission, in your community, throughout North America and around the world.

With you following the One who commands us to “Go Now!”

IMPACT
National Youth Event
June 26-29, 2014
Cleveland, Ohio

Equipping young people to live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

Youth ENCOUNTER
Partnering with Christian communities to strengthen their youth ministry.

Congregational reports reveal Mission-Driven churches

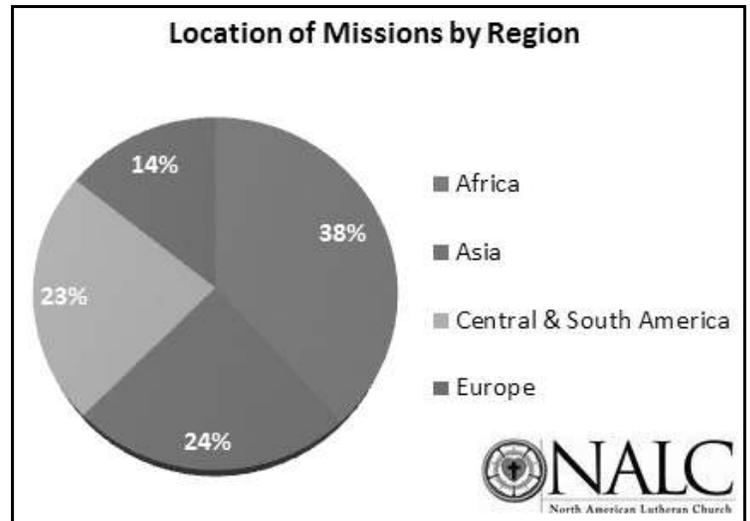
We believe that the mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel and to make disciples for Christ. We believe that making disciples — in our congregations, in our communities and nations, and around the world — must be a priority of the Church in the present age.

Mission-Driven is one of the four core values of the North American Lutheran Church. From its beginning, the NALC has encouraged congregations to make disciples “in our congregations, in our communities and nations, and around the world.” In other words, they are to do mission!

Congregations are encouraged to relate to at least one domestic and one global mission. The 2013 congregational reports indicate a majority of NALC churches are taking this request to heart and are Mission-Driven!

The reports indicated that NALC congregations are involved in a wide variety of missions around the world. Global mission fields were widely spread with the highest percentage in Africa, followed by Asia, Central and South America, and Europe.

Almost two-thirds of the congregations reported that they had or planned global mission people-to-

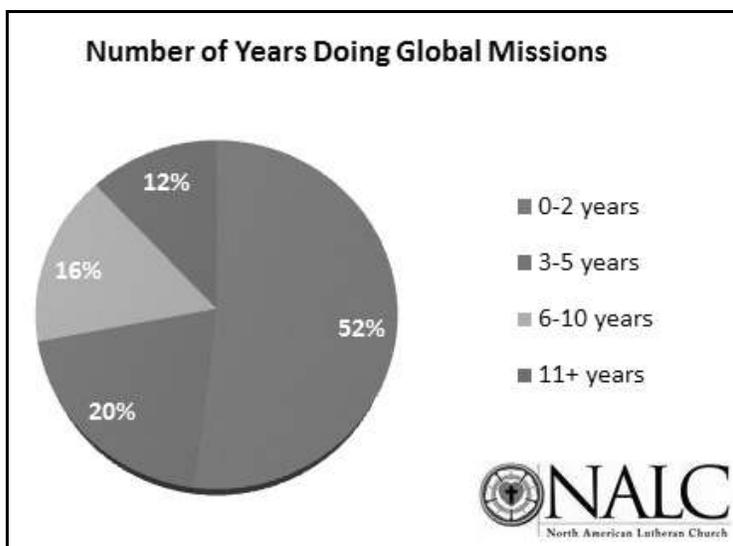


people experiences. Missionaries had visited and spoken at many of the congregations, and a third of the congregations had already done or planned to do mission trips. These people-to-people contacts and experiences in turn promote higher interest and participation in mission!

“It was very encouraging to note that more than half of the congregations reported that their global missions were less than two years old. In other words, NALC congregations are increasingly hearing and acting on the call to become Mission-Driven not just at home but abroad!” said a report from the International Missions Team.

48 percent of congregations reported more long-standing global mission projects — some of them decades old. This suggests that global missions, once established, can become an important part of a congregation’s DNA.

“Whether relatively new to the global mission field or experienced, the indications are that global missions have taken root and are growing in the NALC. God be praised for His blessings that are allowing NALC churches to be a blessing to the rest of the world and to make disciples for Christ!” the report said.



House Church Ministry

By Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

We are at a great turning point in the history of our journey. For evangelical Christians, especially for Lutherans, and particularly for us in the North American Lutheran Church, the Lord has blessed us with a good vision so we can continue in this journey.

In Matthew chapter 16, we hear Jesus teaching: “I will build my Church.” Jesus is not outsourcing the work of mission planting to others. He is the chief builder and architect. We are called to be witnesses. Jesus never spoke of “planting churches” but rather of raising up disciples.

The 2013 NALC Convocation adopted a resolution to grow to at least 1,517 congregations by 2017. So we have to start working hard! That’s less than four years away!

Our first step as we continue in this spirit of developing from the ground up is to renew all of our congregations. That may seem like backwards thinking! However, we have to be strengthened to such an extent that our congregations can start giving birth to new congregations and house churches.

Our ultimate goal is not the typical “American Dream Church,” having a building and a pastor. Our dream is bigger than that. Our dream is giving birth to more and more congregations and bringing up more and more disciples

One of the visions, goals and dreams is to plant more and more house churches because it’s financially responsible and Biblically sound, in the style of the New Testament life. This is what’s done all over the world and what we can achieve.

Our plan is to hold training events in various regions all over North America to train up to 2,000 people — an average of six people in every congregation.

Here are the dates and locations that have been set for a series of seven regional conferences focusing on House Church Ministry. More information about each event will be available on the NALC website as details are finalized.

February 21-22 - West Coast

St. Timothy Lutheran Church - San Jose, Calif.

February 28-March 1 - Canada

St. Albert Lutheran Church - St. Albert, Alberta

June 13-14 - Pennsylvania

Zion Lutheran Church - Pittsburgh, Pa.

August 8-9 - Iowa

September 11-13 - Southeast

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church - Gastonia, N.C.

October 31-November 1 - Texas

November 6-8 - NALC Mission Festival

Upper Arlington Lutheran Church - Hilliard, Ohio

You did not read the last statement incorrectly. Our goal is to send out missionaries from our local congregations into our neighborhoods and communities. Just as we read in Scripture, Jesus sent the disciples out two by two, and so our vision is for each congregation in the NALC to commission three pairs of people to begin local house churches.

We are not sending people out unequipped for this journey. Through these regional conferences, the Mission Office of the NALC is developing mentors who have gone down this road before and a prayer team that is meeting monthly to specifically pray for this mission. We will continue the work of equipping disciples to witness and testify to what Jesus has done for us on the cross and the joy of the empty tomb. Please continue to hold this movement in prayer and join us in the adventure!

From Ashes to Easter

A Lenten Devotional Booklet for NALC Members and Friends

First, I would like to thank all those who made use of the Advent 2013 Devotional Booklet, "Come, Lord Jesus" I prepared for members and friends of the NALC.

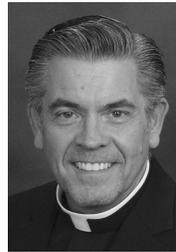
I would also say that I appreciate having received so many comments from those who were blessed by the devotions. When such a resource is made available, you never know if anyone makes use of it and what their experience has been.

Encouraged by the reception of the Advent devotional booklet and because many have asked, I would like to share with you that a resource for devotions during Lent has been prepared and will be available prior to Ash Wednesday (March 5). The booklet is titled, *From Ashes to Easter: A Lenten Devotional Booklet for NALC Members and Friends*.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with a devotion for Easter, each day provides a short Scripture verse taken from the longer readings assigned in the *Lutheran Book of Worship Daily Lectionary*.

The LBW provides a two-year series of daily readings different from the three-year lectionary for Sundays and festivals. We are currently in Year 2 of the daily lectionary and each day of the devotional booklet begins with a verse from those readings. The complete reading is listed in the booklet, even though the devotion normally focuses on a verse or two. A meditation/reflection based on the reading follows, concluding with a brief prayer.

Trusting that most folks will be attending Sunday worship hearing the assigned Scripture lessons proclaimed within the congregation, devotions are not provided for Sundays during Lent. It is also worth noting that Sundays are properly "*in Lent*" — not "*of Lent*." In other words, Sundays are always feast days and not fast days, as Sundays are always celebrations of our Lord's resurrection. As I say in the introduction to the devotional booklet, this



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

is a Lenten "loophole" if you need one — no need to keep the Lenten fast on Sundays!

How might one make use of the Lenten devotional booklet? The simplest approach would be to keep the booklet on your nightstand or kitchen table to be close at hand for reading the daily devotion in the morning or nighttime, by yourself.

However, I have heard from many NALC folks about other ways that they made use of the Advent devotions! Many used them as family devotions within the household. One pastor and spouse gathered their children, adapting the devotions to be more kid-friendly. NALC congregational women's groups used them as shared Advent devotions, several Bible-study groups used them as their Bible studies during Advent, and one congregation used them as part of their mid-week Advent services.

Although many of our NALC members and friends did print out the devotional booklet in regular or large-print versions, I was surprised how many let me know that they never printed them out but kept them on their smartphone or computer in e-format, having them always available electronically.

In short, there are many way to use the Lenten devotions in the booklet — so long as you open the booklet and use them!

And that really is the point of providing such devotional booklets; it encourages folks to read the

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Word of God, to meditate on it, digest it, take it to heart, and offer up a prayer in response!

If the NALC in all its parts — congregations, members, families and households — are to be renewed in faith, obedience and discipleship, it will only happen by remaining in the Word of God — dwelling in the Word richly (Colossians 3:16).

There is no other way for the Church to be renewed, refreshed and yes, resurrected, than by the Means of Grace shared among us!

Because Lutherans admit they find it difficult to remain in the Word of God regularly, my hope and prayer is that these little devotional booklets will help our members and friends to develop a pattern — a habit or a custom during Advent and Lent — that will carry on through the remainder of the year. I commend the Lenten devotional booklet to you for just that purpose.

As before, an email will be sent to all congregations announcing the Lenten Devotional booklet and instructing you how and where you can find it. It will be available at www.thenalc.org as downloadable PDFs in large-print and booklet formats for reading and printing.

Nominations sought for NALC positions

Nominations for leadership positions in the North American Lutheran Church are being sought by the NALC Nominating Committee.

All NALC congregations and pastors will receive detailed information and nominating forms by email before the end of February.

The 2014 NALC Convocation July 24-25 in Charleston, S.C., will elect members of the NALC Executive Council and Court of Adjudication as well as members of the Board of Regents for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

The Convocation will elect two pastors and one lay person to the Executive Council. One of the clergy positions will fill a vacant position on the council.

One pastor and one lay person will be elected to the Court of Adjudication.

The Convocation will elect the nine persons to the North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents. Because this is the first time electing members of the Board of Regents, all positions will need to be filled. However, in future years, three members of the board will be elected to six-year terms every other year.

Please consider prayerfully if God may be calling you to serve in one of these positions or if God is suggesting to you another person to nominate.

The Nominating Committee has set a deadline of April 12 for nominations to be received. For more information, contact Pastor Michael Tamorria at nominations@thenalc.org. Nomination forms may be sent to that same email address.

Great Commission Society website enables mission

The Great Commission Society (GCS) of the North American Lutheran Church has launched a presence on the NALC website to provide congregations and individuals with a listing of mission partners and projects they can support directly.

Visitors to the Great Commission Society site — thenalc.org/great-commission-society — can study and learn about the exciting work being done locally and throughout the world.

The Great Commission Society is made up of people who are passionate about making and mobilizing disciples for Christ's mission in the world.

Celebrate Water Sunday on March 23

NALC congregations are encouraged to consider celebrating Water Sunday on March 23.

Water Sunday is a Sunday that a congregation dedicates to talking about the global water crisis and taking a special offering to provide safe water to people around the world. Offerings may support Water Missions International — one of the ministries featured at the 2013 NALC Convocation.



March 22 is the United Nations' World Water Day. The next day is recommended for Water Sunday.

The lectionary readings for March 23 correspond with the water theme. March 23 is the Third Sunday in Lent. The Gospel reading for that day is John 4:5-42 — the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well where He speaks of "living water." The Old Testament reading is Exodus 17:1-7 — the story of the Lord providing water from a rock for the Israelites in the wilderness.

"We want your congregations' eyes to be opened to how God is at work through the ministry of safe water and how God can use them to tangibly impact the world. Join a movement of churches across the country committed to not just talking about the problem, but solving it," said Kevin Herr of Water Missions International.

The global water crisis is a silent killer. Half of the world's hospital beds are full of people sick from water related illness. Diarrheal illness is the second leading cause of death worldwide. While you rarely hear about it on the news, the crisis is urgent, causing the death of one child under the age of five every 21 seconds.

We can save lives by providing safe water to people in need. Then, by meeting the physical need for safe water, we provide a platform for local ministries

to build relationships and share the Living Water message of Jesus Christ.

Water Missions International is a nonprofit Christian engineering ministry that transforms lives through sustainable safe water solutions in developing countries and disaster areas. Since 2001, Water Missions International has responded to the world's largest natural disasters and daily tackles the world's single biggest cause of illness — lack of safe water and sanitation — by providing safe water and access to the Living Water message to more than two million people in 50 countries. Through the provision of safe water, doors are opened to tangibly share the love of Christ with people in need around the world.

Water Missions International implements safe water projects with full-time, indigenous staff members in 10 countries: Haiti, Honduras, Belize, Mexico, Peru, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Indonesia.

Water Missions International has received Charity Navigator's top rating seven years in a row, a rating only achieved by 2 percent of charities.

Water Missions International will provide free resources to help congregations hold a Water Sunday. For more information visit watermissions.org or contact Kevin Herr at 843-769-7395 or Kherr@watermissions.org.

Forty Mile Lutheran Parish

Bow Island and Foremost, Alberta

Forty Mile County in southeast Alberta is a rural community that is economically based on agriculture and the oil/gas industry. The Forty Mile Lutheran parish consists of two congregations — Zion Lutheran Church in Bow Island and Trinity Lutheran Church in Foremost — inside the county.

Both towns are experiencing significant population changes. The people who grew up and farmed in the community are slowly leaving due to retirement, health conditions, etc. They are being replaced by Mexican Mennonites fleeing the drug trade violence. That leaves the congregations with a shrinking membership and little prospect for growth. The parish is struggling to discover its place in God's work in this community.

One thing the parish has done is to free their pastor, the Rev. Mac de Waal, to offer chaplaincy services to emergency workers. He is a chaplain for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and is able to spend time ministering to them.

His ministry of presence among them allows for an opportunity to witness a life directed and sustained by Christ. When opportunities present themselves to directly talk about Christ or what life looks like under His direction, they are taken.

Attempts are being made to expand that service to other emergency personnel. The congregations



Pastor Mac de Waal poses with one of the RCMP emergency workers he ministers to as part of his chaplaincy work.

support this ministry by prayer and financial backing for any material items the pastor may need to do the work. They also feel more connected and conscious of the emergency workers in their communities and provide a level of continuity in their witness of Christ to these people.

To learn more about Forty Mile Lutheran Parish, contact Pastor Mac de Waal at pastormac@telus.net or 403-952-7817.

Journey with LWR this Lent

Lutheran World Relief is encouraging congregations to join in a special journey together this Lent, caring for Jesus in "the least of these."

LWR is asking congregations to spend this Lent collecting items for Personal Care Kits.

Personal Care Kits include a towel, toothbrush, comb, nail clippers, and two bars of soap.

The kits are often given to those who have lost everything. The very simple gesture of giving a Personal Care Kit can give someone the encouragement to start anew, starting with a bath. You can share God's grace and love by providing that simple comfort.

Information on the LWR Lenten project and how to prepare the kits is available at www.lwr.org.

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.

Speakers for the Theological Conference include:

+ Dr. Robert Benne, Jordan Trexler Professor Emeritus and Research Associate at Roanoke College in Salem, Va. He has earned degrees from Midland Lutheran College and the University of Chicago. He is the author of several books including *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* and *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*.

+ The Rev. Dr. Mark Granquist, Associate Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. He has earned degrees from St. Olaf College and Yale University Divinity School and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is the co-author of *The Augustana Story: Shaping Lutheran Identity in North America*.

+ The Rev. Dr. Stephen Hultgren, Lecturer in New Testament at Australian Lutheran College in Adelaide, Australia. He has earned degrees from Gustavus Adolphus College and Luther Seminary. He has a Ph.D. in New Testament from Duke University. He is a member of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States.

+ Dr. R. David Nelson, a Lutheran theologian, who serves Baker Publishing Group as Acquisitions Editor for Baker Academic and Brazos Press. He earned an M.Div. at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, and a Ph.D. at King's College, University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

+ The Rev. Dr. Christopher Seitz, Senior Research Professor, Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology in the University of Toronto. He has degrees from the University of North Carolina,



Robert Benne



Mark Granquist



Stephen Hultgren



R. David Nelson



Amy Schiffrin



Christopher Seitz

Virginia Theological Seminary and Yale University. He was Professor of Old Testament at Yale and at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He is the author or editor of 16 books including two commentaries on Isaiah. His other books include *The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible*.

+ The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary and its Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa. She has earned degrees from Arizona State University, Northwestern University, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, and The Graduate Theological Union.

+ Dr. David Yeago, Professor of Systematic Theology for the North American Lutheran Seminary House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. He has degrees from The College of William and Mary, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg and Yale University.

Reflections and Observations

Full-time ministry for me began as a lay minister focusing on youth ministry and evangelism. Three years later I returned to seminary for my senior year and was ordained in 1981. All told, 35 years in ministry. During that time I served congregations in California, Wisconsin and Oregon. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I also worked with synods and churches as an evangelism consultant (26 synods and hundreds of congregations). In addition, there is my Lutheran heritage as a third-generation pastor with roots going from the NALC back to the ELCA and, before that, the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Free Church.

Given all this, I can say with some confidence that I have learned a few things about Lutheran culture and ministry in the American context. In fact it's sobering when you reach the age where recent history is not just something you've read about; it's something you lived through.

Now for the point behind this personal, anecdotal information. I have four observations regarding how church life and ministry has changed over these last 35 years. I hope my background information will lend some credibility to my observations.

First observation: The countless predictions over the last 35 years of mainline Protestant decline have come true. What can I say? Author Lyle Schaller (among others) warned us. I mentioned in a previous column that the peak in American mainline Protestant church attendance was back in 1964. It's been all downhill since then. My personal conviction is that at least five common mainline (and Lutheran) congregational practices have contributed to our decline:

- + A professionalized model of the ordained ministry that discourages lay leadership and ownership.
- + A bias against contemporary worship music, judging it as inappropriate for the worship setting.
- + Seminary educations that emphasize theory over practice and where there has been a continued theological drift away from orthodox, Biblical Christian teaching.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

+ Not enough congregational ministry initiatives that intentionally focus on reaching those who are not yet a part of the Body of Christ.

+ Our tendency to reinforce the public perception of Lutherans as parochial while increasing numbers of self-identified Christians describe themselves as nondenominational.

Second observation: The evangelical church subculture — which includes nondenominational congregations as well as Pentecostal and theologically conservative denominations — has relative institutional vitality when compared to most mainline denominations. I believe this is due to two characteristics found among many evangelical churches and often absent in most mainline congregations:

+ Evangelical churches are more likely to emphasize the need for non-believers to convert and be transformed by their faith. One part of this is an emphasis on becoming Christ followers and less of a focus on formal membership. As our culture becomes increasingly unchurched this emphasis actually appeals to people who need a reason to attend. Custom and denominational loyalty no longer motivate most Americans to consider church involvement.

+ Evangelical congregations — when it comes to ministry *practice* — tend to be more innovative than mainline congregations. This is especially true when it comes to ministry strategies that effectively connect with the unchurched.

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Third observation: American culture is becoming increasingly secular. No surprise here. Factors contributing to this include:

- + Fewer Americans belong to voluntary organizations of any kind.
- + The digital age allows for social connections without actual face-to-face encounters.
- + News and entertainment media has become increasingly hostile toward organized religion in general and Christianity in particular.
- + A public view of morality that is more and more at odds with Christian, Biblical teaching; resulting in the public perception of Christians as intolerant and judgmental.

Fourth observation: Our secular culture's litmus test regarding whether Christians are intolerant is currently focused on issues related to human sexuality. In one sense we should not be surprised that our secular culture's "push-back" against the church has become focused on sex. Sex, after all, seems to be something of an obsession in American culture. We keep hearing that these controversies are about equality and individual rights. However, I tend to believe that the underlying value driving much of our secular culture's priorities on this issue is, at least by Biblical standards, sexual promiscuity. So we should not be surprised when there are objections to any worldview which advocates for more Biblical, traditional sexual morality.

I have been monitoring the developments within the Presbyterian Church (USA) these last two years. Their move toward changing denominational policy in regards to ordination and marriage, as well as the resulting conflict, has been remarkably similar to what happened in the ELCA. And what most of us experienced in the ELCA — starting in 2009 — was remarkably similar to what happened in the Episcopal Church beginning in 2004.

How do we account for the amazing similarity in regards to the issues in three denominations — all within the period of approximately eight years?

I believe it is because these changes were, to a large degree, driven by our culture.

However, one of the challenges for NALC, Lutheran CORE, and LCMC congregations is not to slip into the trap of defining their mission in reference to this single controversy. In other words, we need to be defined primarily by what we are *for* — including faithfulness to Scripture and the Great Commission — rather than by what we are *against*.

So what about your congregation's ministry? Are you keeping the changing American ministry context in mind as you lead your congregation and plan for the future?

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

Canadian Rockies Theological Conf.

"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 in Canmore, Alberta. Featured speakers are Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto and the Rev. Dr. Walter Sundberg.

Dr. Uwe 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.

Dr. Sundberg is Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. He has earned degrees from St. Olaf College and Princeton Theological Seminary. His books include *Worship as Repentance* and *The Bible in Modern Culture*.

More information on the conference is available at www.thenalc.org. or by contacting Pastor Phillip Gagnon at pastorphil@me.com.