

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

January 2014

NALC preaching conference to focus on Law and Gospel

“From Death to Life: Preaching Law and Gospel in Lent and Easter” is the theme of the NALC Preaching Conference Feb. 18-20 at Westin Hotel Orlando North in Lake Mary, Fla.

The conference will provide practical teaching on Law and Gospel preaching, as well as inspiring Bible study of the lectionary Scripture readings for Lent and Easter.

Teaching on the Lutheran understanding of Law and Gospel will be the Rev. Dr. Carl Fickenscher II, Dean of Pastoral Education and Certification and Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. His teaching at the seminary is primarily in the area of preaching.

Dr. Fickenscher, a pastor of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is editor of *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, a preaching journal published by Concordia Publishing House. He has published numerous articles, essays, sermons and curricular pieces, receiving an award from Concordia Historical Institute in 2012 for a series of articles on the preaching of C. F. W. Walther.

Speaking on challenges and opportunities facing Lutheran preaching today, and how preaching moves people “From Death to Life,” will be the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary, and a member of the faculty of Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa.



Carl Fickenscher



James Nestingen



Amy Schifrin

The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, Professor Emeritus of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., will lead in-depth Bible studies on the lectionary Scripture texts for Lent and Easter.

Dr. Schifrin and Dr. Nestingen are both NALC pastors and members of the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine.

Included in the program are three preaching practicums. Clergy participants are invited to bring an Ash Wednesday, Lent or Easter manuscript sermon. Three sermons will be selected for presentation in three practicums. Reflection will take place on the Law and Gospel understanding of each sample sermon.

Another highlight of the conference will be an unstructured discussion with the three professors on any topic related to Lutheran theology, Law and Gospel, preaching, etc.

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Regional mission conferences to focus on house churches

The North American Lutheran Church will be offering a series of seven regional conferences focusing on House Church Ministry.

The theme of these conferences, “The Missional Church – House Churches,” is based in Acts 2:42-47. This passage of Scripture gives a brief snapshot of life in the early Church. Each of the large group sessions is based on key points from this passage: A Biblical Case for House Churches, A Practical Approach to House Churches, Missional Hospitality, and Growing a House Church.

“It is our hope that each congregation from the NALC will strive to consider this topic and prayerfully discern who God might be calling from their congregation to be involved in such a mission as this,” said Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions.

If you have any questions about house churches or the regional gatherings, please contact Jenny Brockman in the NALC Missions Office at 614-777-5709 or jbrockman@thenalc.org.

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The conference will conclude with a panel discussion titled, “What Does This Mean: Practical Implications for Lutheran Preaching,” aimed at integrating the learning for parish practice. It is suggested those who are interested might read C. F. W. Walther’s *Law and Gospel*.

The cost of the conference is being defrayed by an anonymous NALC donor to support the renewal of Lutheran preaching. Those participating will need to cover their own transportation and hotel.

Registration for the conference is \$50 for NALC pastors and seminarians and \$100 for others. More information is available online at www.thenalc.org.

Here are the dates and locations that have been set for the seven conferences. 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 2 - Canada

June 13-14 - Pennsylvania

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

NALC house church starting in St. Paul, Minn.

A new NALC House Church is starting in St. Paul, Minn. The first gatherings will be for Bible Study and informal worship on Sunday evenings starting Jan. 12. Those who are interested will be gathering for the Word and prayer and to explore the possibility of a continuing presence and mission in the Twin Cities area.

Professor Jim Nestingen will be the Bible Study leader for a series in Epiphany, entitled, “Who is Jesus?” — looking at the Biblical basis for our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. Pastor Steven King will be serving as the coordinating pastor.

For more information or directions, please e-mail: MNHouseChurch@gmail.com.

NALC, LCMS, LCC leaders meet

The leaders of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Church—Canada and the North American Lutheran Church met for their semi-annual consultation Dec. 16-17 on the campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo.

The Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer, president of the seminary, opened the meeting with a welcome, introduction to the ministry and mission of the school, and a tour of the historic campus.



Leaders of the North American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and Lutheran Church—Canada met at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo.

The consultation joined the campus community for daily worship in the seminary's Chapel of Saint Timothy and Saint Titus, with consultation participant, the Rev. Robert Bugbee, President of the Lutheran Church—Canada, preaching.

The theme for this consultation was "The Gospel and Our Common Witness in the Public Square," and included a keynote evening lecture and forum open to the campus community and the public.

A keynote lecture on the theme was presented by NALC associate member and retired Roanoke College professor, Dr. Robert Benne. Responses to the lecture were then offered by LCMS theologians, the Rev. Dr. Charles Arand and the Rev. Dr. Leopoldo Sanchez. Time for questions from the audience followed.

The consultation included sharing of updates regarding the life and work of each church body; discussion of inter-Lutheran and ecumenical conversations; possibilities for cooperation in areas of joint concern including disaster relief, the sanctity of human life, religious freedom, marriage and human sexuality, and immigration.

The group also received an update regarding a forthcoming book of essays on the Lutheran doctrine of Law and Gospel by theologians of the three church bodies. It will be edited by the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen (NALC) and the Rev. John Pless (LCMS).

Participants included the Rev. Matthew Harrison, LCMS President; the Rev. Robert Bugbee, President of the Lutheran Church—Canada; the Rev. John Bradosky, NALC Bishop; the Rev. Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary; the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, Executive Director, LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations; the Rev. Dr. David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism; the Rev. Larry Vogel, Associate Executive Director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations; the Rev. John Pless, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.; the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, retired professor, NALC. Also joining the discussions were the Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr., LCMS First Vice-President.

The next meeting of the consultation will take place in June 2014 at the office of the Lutheran Church—Canada, in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

On Being the Church in These Precarious Times

Dear Friends:

I was asked by Dr. Carl Braaten to write a foreword for the soon-to-be-published book from our 2013 Theological Conference, "On Being the Church in These Precarious Times." In reading the transcripts of each presentation, I was reminded of the Epiphany Season and the revelation of the Scripture regarding the nature and identity of Jesus. In the secularized church of North America, this subject generates more questions than answers. Reading the presentations also caused me to reflect on how we measure growth and progress in our lives and in our life together in the Church, a pertinent subject for those making resolutions as they begin 2014.

Even the title of our Theological Conference invites us to reflect on how we define the Church: "This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, Article VII).

The presentations explored some of the most foundational elements of our theology: the Trinity, the Gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit, the Office of the Ministry, the Sacraments, worship, oversight, church order, and a variety of other topics that are necessary for a meaningful discussion among those concerned with being the Church in light of the challenges we face.

These are precarious times. According to Webster's dictionary, *precarious* means depending on the will or pleasure of another; dependent on uncertain premises, insufficient foundation; depending on unknown conditions, uncertain developments characterized by a lack of security or stability that threatens with danger, peril, or great risk.

This is a time of growing uncertainty among Christians. Interest in denominational institutions is waning. Mainline denominations are in a state of statistical free fall. Biblical illiteracy abounds. More Christians seem unsure of what it means to believe in Christ



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

and live a Christian life. Fewer Christians seem interested in world mission. Many believe, but few are equipped to share their faith with others. Even fewer seem concerned about the instability, danger and risk that are consequences of our struggle. Other forces seem stronger while the faithful either accept the presumed powerlessness of their context or resolve to join forces with those who presume to have power and use it. Could it be that both groups compromise the Christian faith in their struggle to cope with this context? One wallows in hopelessness, and the other denies there is a problem.

There seem to be at least two forces at work making this a precarious time: popular pressure from the culture around us to conform and pressure from within the Church to preserve its organizations and institutions by adapting to cultural pressure, compromising for the sake of accommodating the values of those it hopes to incorporate into its life.

This secularization is evident in the devaluing of the Bible as one authority among many other authoritative books in the world. The secularized church no longer considers the Word "the norm" of its life and faith. Since they believe there is no ultimate truth, relativism is not only acknowledged but embraced. In such a relativistic world, it is impossible to make the assertion that Jesus is what He claims to be in Scripture: "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). His self-disclosure was affirmed by the Church in Acts 4:12: "And there is

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salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” Today those who preach and teach these things as literally true are considered divisive and are marginalized by many who claim to be Christian.

In the secularized church, mission work and evangelism are considered passé. The grace of Jesus Christ becomes the amorphous love of human invention requiring little or nothing from us except to tolerate, accept and include. In such a relativistic culture, sin for one person is righteousness for another, so the less said about sin the more “loving” we seem. Moralism and political agendas become the “new gospel” proclaimed in liturgies and preaching and taught in Bible studies and Sunday School lessons. The new moralism is designed to subvert Biblical morality and replace it with new understandings, including new teaching in human sexuality, marriage and the family.

These forces of secularization have kept many in the Church acquiescent and silent. Other believers are content to become participants in the formation of a utopian world designed by philosophic and psychological principles that often have little in common with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven He announced, His sovereign rule, a Kingdom only realized through God’s direct intervention in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus have been all but abandoned by many Christians.

Instead, they search for what the world will deem relevant to meet their needs and their desires. Amid such futile attempts at relevancy and popularity, the secularized church in North America becomes increasingly less effective in its ministry and less popular with those it seeks to please in the culture. These pressures from within and without diminish its redemptive capacity when the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not its clear and unequivocal proclamation.

These divergent paths have resulted in the formation of new church bodies and painful separations in denominations in an attempt to bring clarity in the proclamation of the Gospel and both renewal and transformation in the redemptive capacity of the Church as it engages in mission and ministry.

The way forward in the midst of these precarious times is back to the Scripture and its authority, affirming the teachings of our Confessional heritage.

In his lectures on the Psalms, Luther writes, “What pasture is to the beast, ... the nest for the birds, the stream for fish, the Scriptures are for believing souls. To the arrogant, of course, they are a stumbling block; he will have nothing to do with them, since they offer him nothing. But to him who approaches the Scriptures with humility they open themselves and themselves produce humility, change a man from a desperate sinner into a child of God. They give everything which the soul needs, and it is to tempt God, if anyone will not be satisfied with the Scriptures. They are the fountain from which one must dip. Each word of the same is a source which affords an inexhaustible abundance of water to everyone who thirsts after saving doctrine. God’s will is completely contained therein, and we must constantly go back to them.”

Regarding what it means to be the Church, Luther reminds us, “It is not the Word of God because the Church says so; but because God’s Word said so, therefore is the Church. The Church does not make the Word but is made by the Word.”

All of the theologians at our conference encourage a return to the Scripture, inviting the faithful to read, study, meditate and be guided by the truth it holds. We were also encouraged to consider and embrace again the foundations of our faith in our Confessional heritage and the rich tradition of those faithful believers who preceded us and passed on the faith to us. Their witness reminds us that we are not the first Christians to face precarious times or great difficulties. The Biblical and historical record of the Church is replete with examples of previous generations that endured such difficulties and responded with an even stronger and more passionate conviction in their proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of these precarious times of struggling to be the Church, some have turned to the culture to establish standards for measuring success. It is not uncommon to hear the litany of institutional standards used by corporations as the way to measure “success” in the church. Investments, budget, buildings, political influence, programs, attendance are a few of those

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measures. Yet Jesus calls His disciples, His Church, to faith in Him, marked by obedience, anchored in the Scripture. An important part of our struggle is to discover again the measures based on discipleship, the Great Commission evidenced by the transforming power of the Gospel in our lives.

The measures for our life together are in the Word and in our Confessions. Even in the *Small Catechism*, Luther offers us a set of faithful measures for being the Church. In his teaching on the Lord's Prayer not only does he focus on the primacy of prayer in the lives of those following Jesus, but in his explanations we find helpful measures for shaping our future. His explanation to each petition is helpful in guiding our life together, but for the sake of brevity let me remind you of the first three.

Hallowed be Thy name.

What does this mean?

God's name is indeed holy in itself; but we pray in this petition that it may become holy among us also.

How is this done?

When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven. But he that teaches and lives otherwise than God's Word teaches profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Heavenly Father.

Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean?

The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also.

How is this done?

When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and yonder in eternity.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What does this mean?

The good and gracious will of God is done indeed

without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is this done?

When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end. This is His gracious and good will.

God's name is to be Holy *among us*. God's Kingdom is evident *in us*, in our individual lives and our life together. God's will is done *by us*, in our commitment to His mission in reaching the world with the Gospel in word and deed. *Among us, in us, by us* — these are measures that are far more important, far more profound. It is the hope to which we were called.

We have great reason to be hopeful even in the midst of precarious times. There is good reason for us to remain silent no longer, to acquiesce no longer, but to cling to the hope we have in Christ and boldly proclaim the Gospel — following Christ as His Disciples, committed to proclaiming the Gospel until the whole world knows, believes and becomes His Disciples.

Without underestimating the serious issues that divide the Body of Christ, in our quest to face these precarious times we must remember the first affirmation of Article VII in the Augsburg Confession: "It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever."

We cannot destroy the Church. It will remain forever. The question is: will it be among us, in us and its mission advanced by us? As for the Word of God, according to Jesus, it will endure even after heaven and earth pass away. The question is: will it endure among us, in us and be heeded by us? There is great consolation in the certainty of the Church and the Word. But there is also great responsibility for those who have been called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified by the one Holy Spirit, to remain in the one true faith in Jesus Christ, depending completely on that same Holy Spirit to believe in the promises that spring eternal from the Word, promises of forgiveness and eternal life.

It is my prayer as you as you begin this new year that you will find that hope, promise and encouragement for being the Church in these precarious times.

NALC missionary to South Sudan is safe

Pastor Matthew Riak, an NALC missionary to South Sudan, and his family have escaped war-torn South Sudan and are now safe in Nairobi, Kenya. The U.S. government assisted the Riaks in leaving South Sudan.

The building housing St. Luke's Theological College, where Pastor Riak serves, is currently under the control of the military and being used as their office.

Violence in South Sudan began Dec. 15 with a political dispute between the nation's president and its former vice president, but it quickly escalated into fighting between their two ethnic groups. The violence has killed more than 1,000 people and driven 180,000 from their homes.



Pastor Matthew and Achol Riak and their son, Emmanuel

NALC leaders met with Pastor Riak during their recent trip to Africa.



NALC leaders are visiting Africa

Leaders of the North American Lutheran Church are visiting Christians in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania during January. They will be meeting with leaders of church bodies, missionaries, and other Christians.

Here are a few photos from the first part of their time in Africa. Full reports from the trip will be in the *NALC News* for February.

The NALC Call Process

As we begin a new year of grace, it seems appropriate to take a few moments to answer the question that continues to surprise me: “Do we have a process for calling a pastor in the NALC?”

The question catches me off-guard because I’ve been in this position now for two years — guiding the NALC call process, working with pastors and congregations as they seek the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We do indeed have a structured process for calling a pastor in the NALC, and let me share a bit about that process.

If you are not familiar with our process, I encourage you to take a few moments to take a look at the newly expanded *NALC Manual for Calling a Pastor*, which is posted on our website at www.thenalc.org, under the button for *Resources* and then *Call Process*. In addition to the Call Manual, you will also find blank profiles for congregations with a pastoral vacancy seeking a pastor and for pastors available for call in the NALC.

When entering into the call process, either as congregation or pastor, the Call Manual is the natural place to start. Then email me or call my cell phone — these are the quickest and most effective ways to reach me. My email address is dwendel@thenalc.org and my cell is 719-650-8171. Yes, I encourage you to call my cell phone!

One of the first things you will note about the Call Manual is that it begins with a Bible Study! The process of calling a pastor — or for a pastor being open to a new call — is a spiritual process, and what better way to begin than turning to God’s Word to see what the Lord God says about “call.” There are a number of appropriate and thought-provoking Scripture passages highlighted in the study which will help pastors, councils and call committees to focus their thinking on what it means to “call” and “be called” by God.

Remember, the call of a pastor is not the congregation’s call, but God’s call for this pastor to come serve this congregation. The pastor and the



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

congregation are seeking God’s will, asking that He reveal to us all which person God has chosen to be the congregation’s next pastor.

The Bible study encourages pastors contemplating a new call to meditate on the Scriptural passages, considering:

1. How do I experience the call of God today? Is God calling me to something new and different? Is God calling me to continue on where I am?
2. Am I aware of the presence of Jesus Christ in my life leading and guiding me? Or am I often distant from Him?
3. Do I see myself as a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ or as a professional church worker?
4. Am I attuned to the Holy Spirit, seeking the will of God, or following my own will and way?
5. How might I be renewed and re-energized for ministry?

The Bible study challenges congregational leaders and call committees to reflect on the Scriptural passages asking:

1. How has our ministry been going?
2. What was the nature of the relationship between our last pastor and congregation? Positive? Struggling? Cooperative? Tense?

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3. How did our congregation work together with our last pastor? An equal partnership? Fruitful? All using their gifts and talents fully?

4. How might our congregation prepare for the coming of our next pastor in light of these Bible passages? What needs to change in our congregation to create a healthy, cooperative spirit between pastor and congregation? How can we effect these changes?

These are important questions to be considered by pastors and congregations and, hopefully, they will open both to the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Now having heard and heeded God's Word, the call process begins.

It is important to understand that because the NALC serves pastors and congregations throughout the North American continent, the call process is continental in nature. Most calls in the NALC do not happen within one Mission District, but pastors often move from one Mission District to another. In some cases, pastors may be considered for call across national borders — for example, from the United States to Canada.

For this reason, the call process is shepherded through the Office of the Bishop of the NALC. The Bishop has primary responsibility for working with congregational vacancies and pastors available for call within the NALC. The Bishop offers spiritual and pastoral guidance to all involved in the call process. In his office and under his authority, the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism is the chief contact and facilitator for this process. That's me!

Although congregations and pastors will find the NALC process open and flexible, most are encouraged to find that there is a simple and straightforward process, and that there is a resource person available in the Bishop's office to assist and guide them through this process.

The Mission District deans, while they may be involved in the call process, are not responsible for calls within their Mission Districts. The dean is a resource person for the call process, a shepherd willing to push or pull when needed, a local pastoral

support for all involved in the call process and a helpful contact for congregations and pastors. The Mission District dean does not normally recommend pastoral candidates directly to congregations, nor do congregations request names of pastoral candidates directly from their dean. The call process takes place through the Bishop's office. As Bishop Bradosky's assistant, I have primary responsibility for working with pastors and congregations.

When a pastor resigns, retires, or a congregation experiences a pastoral vacancy for some other reason, the congregational lay leadership will immediately consult with me. It is the responsibility of the church council to make arrangements for pulpit supply on Sundays and to contract with other local pastors who may be able to serve them during the interim period between pastors. This is the first task to be considered during the vacancy. The local Mission District dean may be able to assist the congregation in planning for the vacancy.

Once arrangement has been made for worship and pastoral leadership during the vacancy, the congregation will form a call committee in accordance with its own constitution. The call committee normally elects its own chairperson. Once the call committee chair has been elected, the chair should download the Congregational Profile Form from the NALC website. At the first meeting of the call committee, a conference call with me should be scheduled. During this call, I will provide orientation, explanation and training for the work of the call committee. By the end of the conference call, it is hoped that all will feel prepared to move forward with their responsibilities as the call committee of the congregation.

The call committee, together with the church council, is responsible for communicating regularly and fully with the congregation. These church leaders will be instrumental in assisting the congregation in understanding the nature of the call, the process of calling a pastor, and progress being made.

For example, it will be important for the call committee and council to explain that calling a pastor is not the equivalent of "hiring an employee."

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Many in the congregation will be tempted to think in terms of secular employment: develop a pool of applicants, interview them all, select the best one, and fire them if they don't work out. The call process is much more relational and covenantal. Calling a pastor is much more like a marriage, and the call process more similar to finding a mate for life. In this sense, going slowly and intentionally, seeking God's will, and developing a relationship are more important than lining up skills and needs.

Keep in mind, not every pastor whom God calls to a particular congregation has all the gifts and skills needed to lead that congregation. But God gives these gifts and skills to those He calls! Few pastors have everything they need when called to a new congregation — but God calls them, then assists them in developing what is needed.

Bear in mind, the call of a pastor is open-ended — valid until the pastor may be called elsewhere. In the Lutheran tradition, pastors are not “hired and fired.” Pastors and congregations make a covenantal commitment to one another — to pray for each other, to support and encourage each other, to grow together as needed. It is not unlike, “till death do we part.” The commitment is intended to hold pastor and congregation together through good times and times of challenge. It will be essential that members of the whole congregation understand the unique nature of the call of the pastor within the congregation.

It will also be important to announce the need for prayer! If the congregation does not currently have a regular prayer group, or in addition to such a group, the congregation may want to develop a weekly meeting of folks who will pray for God's guidance and support during the vacancy and call process. Ask that all members be in regular prayer for the call committee and congregational leadership. Ask all to pray that God will be working in the heart and life of the pastor He wishes to call as your next pastor and that the pastor be open to the working of the Holy Spirit. Prayer will be as essential a part of the call process as everything else that the call committee does!

Finally, the call committee and council will want to explain to the congregation that the call process is

about “waiting for the Lord.” In Psalm 27, the psalmist writes, “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!” We read in Isaiah 40, “They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

The call process is a spiritual process in that we are waiting for the Holy Spirit to move and to work. We cannot hurry the Holy Spirit, nor should we wish to! The Scriptures are full of the problems that arise when humans want to “help God” or “hurry God along.” This will require patience and wisdom on the part of congregational leaders, the call committee and the congregation. All need to be reminded, at the beginning, that apparent delays and timing that doesn't suit the wishes of some may simply indicate that God's timing is not our own. God may be using His timing to help the congregation to grow spiritually in some way, as you learn what it means to be patient and “wait for the Lord.”

The next task of the call committee is to complete the Congregational Profile. Many call committees request input from their congregation regarding “ministry needs” to be listed on the profile. Some call committees complete the forms with input and review of the congregation council. The local call committee determines how the profile will be completed.

Once completed, the call committee will send a copy of the completed Congregational Profile to me. The call committee should also send a copy to the Mission District dean.

I update a summary list of NALC vacancies on a monthly basis. When there is a new congregational vacancy, that congregational profile will accompany the updated list of vacancies sent to pastors available for call in the NALC. After reviewing the new congregational profile, a pastor available for call may request that I forward his or her profile to that congregation. I will also be in conversation with pastors available for call with regard to particular congregational vacancies.

The call committee will receive emailed pastoral profiles of those who are interested in being

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Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

“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.

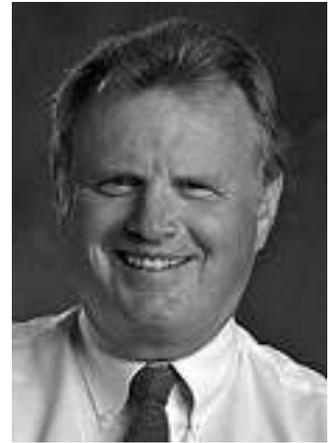
Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto is the Executive Director of the Center for Lutheran Theology and Public Life in Capistrano Beach, Calif. A native of Leipzig, Germany, he has been an international journalist for 53 years. In mid-career, he turned to theology, earning degrees from the Lutheran School of Theology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

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*.

One of the highlights of the week will be worship led by the musical group Krystaal. Krystaal is an award-winning, multi-talented group of three brothers who excel in various genres of music including R&B/Pop, Gospel,



Uwe Siemon-Netto



Walter Sundberg

Urban and World (African). They are characterized by their tight vocal harmonies and an ability to fit any audience. The brothers are natives of the Democratic Republic of Congo and are performing at the theological conference as a way to thank the Lutherans attending for the work of Lutheran World Federation in helping them while they lived in refugee camps in Kenya.

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

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considered for call. The number of such pastoral candidates will be determined by those who are interested, normally three to five.

Once the call committee has received the profiles of pastors available for call, the call committee arranges for an initial contact and then schedules conference call interviews with the entire committee for each pastoral candidate. Call committees may request pastors to provide sermon samples on DVD, or by some electronic means (YouTube, website, etc.) Call committees may conduct a second round of interviews, and if pastors are nearby geographically, may arrange for on-site interviews. Once the call committee has decided on a top candidate, they normally schedule a weekend visit for the pastor and

family so that the pastor may preach and lead worship, meeting the whole congregation. If the visit is well-received, the committee and council recommend the pastor to the congregation, schedule a congregational meeting and vote to extend a call to the pastor. The pastor usually has 30 days to prayerfully consider the call but often responds very quickly. Once the call is accepted, the pastor and council make arrangements for the transition.

While this is a very short summary of the call process, it may answer many of your questions and give you a glimpse into how the call process works in the NALC. I do like to say, however, that this is how the call process works in a “perfect church and world.” Because there are no such things, we try to be flexible, open, and cooperative to adjust to human and churchly realities! Be assured I am here to assist and ready to help our congregations and pastors.

NALC congregations partner with congregation in Ethiopia

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

Pastor Mandy Grimmer first went to Ethiopia in February 2011. Her purpose was to attend a conference of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and to witness firsthand this African church's vitality.

The EECMY and the North American Lutheran Church entered into a full communion agreement in August 2011 which was ratified by NALC congregations in 2012.

"I was floored by what I learned," she said. "At one time, Christian people were murdered by the communists every Tuesday morning in an effort to wipe out Christianity in the country. I had never heard anything about the kind of persecution that was going on in the 1970s, nor had anyone else on the bus."

A second time a trip to Ethiopia was offered — in April 2012 — she signed up with the express purpose of finding a congregation that her congregation, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church of Abington, Pa., could relate to one on one.

In the interval between trips she had tried to find a potential partner congregation, but no one could show her how.



Singers in the chancel of Nifas Silk practice for the afternoon Oromo-language worship service.



Pastor Carl Rasmussen, Pastor Amanda Grimmer, and Dr. Telahun, the Mekane Yesus equivalent of the council president of Nifas Silk congregation.

On this second trip pastors were given the opportunity to preach in a local church. As a woman, Pastor Grimmer did not want to travel alone, so she joined with Pastor Carl Rasmussen of First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Ill.

She had brought a number of dresses that members of her congregation had made for the women in Africa. Pastor Rasmussen had brought along a Communion set to give to the congregation.

The story of their visit to Nifas Silk congregation in Addis Ababa turned out to be, as she described it, "an adventure to top all adventures." Their van driver had no idea where he was going. He stopped a number of times to ask people where the church was located and finally asked a woman, who got into the van and led them to the church. After dropping them off, the van driver drove away, leaving Pastors Grimmer and Rasmussen with no confidence that he would know how to find them again. "We have no idea where we are," they told each other, "but God knows."

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Pastor Carl Rasmussen presented a gift of Communion ware from his congregation, First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Ill., to Nifas Silk congregation.

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They walked into the compound and were warmly welcomed. One of the things that Pastor Grimmer found most interesting about the worship service was that even though it was in a language they could not understand — Amharic — the two of them could tell when the people were praying the Lord’s Prayer and confessing the Apostles’ Creed. “You could just tell by the rhythm,” she said. “Your body knows the rhythm.”

When the service was over, they were wondering what to do next. They were certain that the people would not just lock up and leave them there. When they were asked, “Are you going to be picked up?” they replied, “We do not know. We are not sure if the van driver knows where we are.”

A man by the name of Dr. Telahun, a medical doctor and president of the congregation, invited them to his home for lunch and later drove them back to their hotel. Pastor Grimmer later learned



Pastor Carl Rasmussen in nave of Nifas Silk's sanctuary.

that in Ethiopia people have only one name — the name given to them at birth. Only in relating to westerners do they also use a second name, which is their father’s name.

Pastors Grimmer and Rasmussen told Dr. Telahun that their congregations would like to enter into a partnership with his congregation.

Before they returned to the United States, they had a breakfast meeting, where they were joined by officials from the local EECMY synod, Pastor Mark Chavez representing the NALC, two members of the Ethiopian congregation (Dr. Telahun as president and the treasurer of the congregation), and Mr. Jim Gale, a member of Holy Trinity.



The sign for Nifas Silk EECMY congregation.

Although he acted as a Holy Trinity member and not its attorney, Mr. Gale is a lawyer whose legal background proved helpful. Pastor Grimmer commented, “We knew we might need an attorney to help hammer this out, and it turned out we did.” Jim Gale coordinated the drafting of a Covenant of Understanding which was signed by members of all three congregations, one in Ethiopia and two in the United States.

In this document all three congregations promise to pray for one another and to spiritually support one another, but this agreement has nothing to do with giving and receiving money.

Pastor Grimmer is very grateful to Jim Gale and also to another Holy Trinity member with legal training, Ryan Schwarz, who is also the treasurer of

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the North American Lutheran Church, for doing the research into IRS regulations and developing the necessary forms. These forms are the Covenant of Understanding and the Foreign Donation Protocol and Form.

Gale and Schwarz found that if congregations in the United States wish to receive tax-deductible contributions on behalf of foreign churches, then these congregations must be able to show the IRS that they have adequate control over the funds that are sent. Leaders of both the American and Ethiopian congregations must sign the Foreign Donation Protocol and Form, indicating that both groups know how the funds will be used. In addition, the receiving congregation must commit itself to giving regular reports, including sending pictures, of how the money is being used, and to return the money if it is not used in the intended way.

Another thing Pastor Grimmer learned is that Americans and Ethiopians have a different way of looking at forms. For Americans, forms are to be filled out the way they are written, while Ethiopians consider it permissible to edit forms. “We had to explain to them that they could not just edit the form” and meet the IRS standards.

Last year Holy Trinity Lutheran Church sent their gift to the Central Ethiopia Synod in Addis Ababa. The Central Synod then sent the entire amount to the Nifas Silk congregation. In the future, Holy Trinity will wire all contributions directly to Nifas Silk. Wiring the money directly makes it easier to comply with IRS regulations.



Courtyard of the Nifas Silk congregation's compound.



Council members admire dresses made by members of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Abington, Pa., for the women and children of Nifas Silk congregation.

It should be noted that while this partnership involves three congregations (two in the United States and one in Ethiopia), the hope is that other partnerships would involve only two congregations — one in each country.

Pastor Grimmer is very grateful to Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, for all his work in helping set up this partnership. She also wishes to thank Dr. Telahun, president of Nifas Silk congregation, for making sure that all the forms got filled out correctly. She also commented that the Central Ethiopia Synod knows how to help facilitate this kind of ministry partner relationship and is ready to help other American congregations do the same.

“Jim Gale and Gemechis Buba are the real heroes in this,” she said. “This has been wonderful, but it has taken forever. It will not take forever for the next congregation. We can show you how. If you walk in these steps, it will not take you two trips to Ethiopia and two years to figure out how to do it.”

If you have any questions about the forms or how they might apply to you, please contact Pastor Mandy Grimmer at NAGrimmer1@msn.com.

Many thanks to Pastors Mandy Grimmer and Carl Rasmussen, Dr. Gemechis Buba, Jim Gale, Ryan Schwarz, Dr. Telahun, and the congregations of Holy Trinity, First Lutheran, and Nifas Silk for paving the way and helping show other congregations how to enter into ministry and mission partnerships with congregations in other parts of the world.

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Pathology of Congregations in Decline

An article from *The American Church Magazine* was passed on to me recently by a friend. "Autopsy of a Deceased Church" was written by Thom S. Rainer, a church consultant. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, shares characteristics of a church he consulted; characteristics that contributed to the congregation eventually closing its doors.

It reminded me of an article I wrote for *Lutheran Partners* magazine back in 1989. In my article, which included the subtitle "Case History of a Patient in Decline," I used the analogy of a critically ill patient to address the issue of struggling Lutheran congregations.

First, eight of Rainer's autopsy "findings." Then I'll add a couple of additional characteristics I think are relatively common among congregations where, even when death is not imminent, their condition is nevertheless critical.

1. "The church refused to look like the community ... the church members had no desire to reach the new residents (of their surrounding, changing community)." This typically happens incrementally, over time. Members often don't notice how insulated they've become from their neighbors. And this insulation can be based on ethnic, socio-economic or generational differences when comparing congregational members with the residents of their surrounding community.

2. "The percentage of the budget for members' needs kept increasing." At the time this particular church finally closed its doors only two percent of their offerings went to people and needs outside the membership.

3. "There were no evangelistic emphases." Bringing the evangelistic mandate to the attention of members is an on-going challenge. Our natural inclination is to focus on the needs of fellow members. Add — in the case of Lutherans — a denominational heritage that rarely emphasizes evangelism, and you have a recipe for long-term decline.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

4. "The members had more and more arguments about what they wanted. As the church continued to decline ... the inward focus of the members turned caustic." Congregational decline, which often involves diminishing resources, can lead directly to internal conflict. Churches that are growing, in contrast, are less likely to find the will, time or energy to fight.

5. "With few exceptions, pastoral tenure grew shorter and shorter." In general the correlation here is that the greater the "turnover" in pastoral leadership, the greater the likelihood a congregation is in decline.

6. "The church rarely prayed together." Rainer noticed a conspicuous lack of prayer in this congregation's life and ministry.

7. "The church had no clarity as to why it existed. There was no vision, no mission, no purpose."

8. "The facilities continued to deteriorate." The members of this church, according to Rainer, "no longer had outsider eyes" when it came to their facilities. In other words, visitors could sense, based on the appearance of the congregation's facilities alone, that this congregation was dying.

I'd like to add to Rainer's list a couple of additional characteristics I've found are common among declining congregations:

1. The worship music is not accessible; i.e., visitor friendly. The question "would a visitor be

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able to sing this?" is never asked. As I've mentioned in previous columns, the issue here is whether our worship music is participatory for non-members.

2. They rarely have a vibrant small-group ministry. Discussion-oriented (and praying) small group Bible studies don't just contribute to the personal spiritual growth of participants, they also contribute directly to congregational health and vitality.

I encourage you to assess your own congregation. Do any of these characteristics or symptoms apply? If so, can they be treated? Which "symptom" would you consider the most urgent? And when can you start treatment?

NALC minister ID cards

NALC clergy and professional lay ministers should have received new identification cards in December. If your card was not received, please contact the NALC Administrative Office at 888-551-7254 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org.

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Upcoming Events

- Feb. 18-20 NALC Preaching Conference
- May 5-8 Canadian Rockies Theological Conf.
- June 26-29 Impact National Youth Event
- July 21-22 Lutheran CORE Convocation
- July 22-23 NALC-LC Theological Conference
- July 24-25 NALC Convocation

Contact information for youth workers is sought

The NALC Missions Office would like to put together a youth workers' network and would like to include as many people as possible. The Missions Office would like contact information for all youth workers — whether an ordained pastor, volunteer, part-time, or full-time paid youth worker. Please send contact information to Jenny Brockman at jbrockman@thenalc.org.

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