

Making connections for mission in India

By Pastor Gemechis Buba
Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

In February, Bishop John Bradosky and I traveled to India for two major purposes:

1. To see firsthand the work of United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and India Transformed (IT).
2. To visit the NALC's missionary family based in Ranchi, India. The Ekkas provide leadership for a Bible college that trains future Lutheran pastors and leaders for the nation of India.

The trip was eye-opening in more ways than one. United Evangelical Mission is fully engaged in church planting, child sponsorship, and Christian-based private education with a great school established in Bangalore, India.

So far UEM and IT have planted over 800 mission centers and house churches throughout India.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, poses with Pastor Nijhar Minz-Ekka, an NALC missionary in India, and her husband, Neeraj, and their children, Maani, Urbas, Puna and Jhumpa.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, teaches at the Bible School established by Pastor John Peter of United Evangelical Mission.

These new churches are planted by pastors and leaders who are raised and trained in the UEM and IT two-year mission and ministry training program. A compulsory requirement for graduation is planting and developing one or more house churches.

Bishop John and I visited India with a goal of establishing strong ties with this ministry and paving the way for mutual support in the mission of bringing the

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Gospel of Jesus Christ to one of the most unreached nations in the world. With more than 1.3 billion people living in India, only about 2 percent of the population are confessing Christians. Therefore, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

We in the North American Lutheran Church are called to pray for and partner with our brothers and sisters in India as they work hard to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to this great nation.

Our first sign of commitment to this call is that we currently have a mission family — Pastors Nijhar and Neeraj Ekka and their four children — serving in India. They are fully dedicated to raising up leaders and training them for the mission and ministry of the kingdom of God.

The second sign is the NALC's Executive Council's approval of United Evangelical Mission and India



Bishop John Bradosky speaks at United Evangelical Mission's Church Planters Conference in India. Seated at the table are Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions; Pastor Don Miles of India Transformed; and Pastor John Peter Kirubargaran of UEM.

Transformed as a ministry partner. This partnership puts us in a position to strengthen our work in India.

To celebrate and inaugurate this new official partnership, the NALC is hosting a pilgrimage with India Transformed to learn from our family in India.

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NALC Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, pose with Pastor John Peter Kirubargaran (third from left), leader of United Evangelical Mission, and others at UEM's headquarters in India.

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Highlights of the upcoming trip include time spent with UEM's leaders at their office in Bangalore, visiting the Talitha Cumi ministry, a one-day conference in Ranchi with the NALC's missionaries, and the possibility of extending the trip to do some sightseeing in Delhi.

The main focus of the trip will be a two-day conference, entitled "Stay Faithful and Be Fruitful," for pastors, lay leaders, and volunteers. The conference is meant to empower church planters and pastors to stay focused on what God has called them to do: to preach, teach and disciple, and establish multiplying discipleship congregations.

We will depart on Sunday, Feb. 1, 2015, and return on Monday, Feb. 9. (Those who wish to stay and sightsee likely will return on Feb. 12.) This trip is open to any and all who wish to join, whether pastor, lay leader, or volunteer! We look forward to taking a delegation with us to celebrate what God is doing!

More information on costs and specific details will be available soon. For more information, contact Jenny Brockman in the NALC Missions Office at jbrockman@thenalc.org or 614-777-5709.



A baptism being performed in India. "A break in the worship service and the rite of baptism had to occur so that demon possession could be addressed. This is a common practice and necessity in India. A similar situation occurred when we were handing out Bibles. Demonic possession is not a medical issue in India, but a spiritual one. Exorcism had to be performed before worship could continue," Pastor Buba explained.

Finally, it gives me a great pleasure to call upon all of our pastors, lay leaders, members and congregations to pray for our partners and missionaries in India as we work hard to deepen our joint commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ under the authority of Holy Scriptures.



Participants in a conference at the Bible School in Ranchi, India, pose with Pastor Nijhar Minz-Ekka, an NALC missionary who teaches at the school, and Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions.

NALC Convocation is July 24-25

Convocations and Theological Conference to be at The Citadel

“Standing With...to Withstand” is the theme of the 2014 Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church July 24-25 in Charleston, S.C.

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

The Convocation will focus on the persecution of Christians throughout the world, and our hope to “stand with” these disciples as they witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in spite of opposition and, in some places, suffering.

The Convocation — which will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 24, and conclude at 5 p.m. Friday — will include:

- + Reception of reports and sharing of information about the life and ministry of the NALC.
- + Election of persons to open Executive Council and Court of Adjudication positions.
- + Update on the establishment of the North American Lutheran Seminary and the election of representatives to the NALS Board of Regents.
- + Updates about the discipleship initiative being undertaken in partnership with The Navigators, together with small-group breakout sessions about discipleship.
- + A keynote presentation by Robert Brock of Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry dedicated to supporting persecuted Christians around the world.
- + Welcoming Bishop Roland Gustafsson and the Rev. Bengt Birgersson, General Secretary of the Swedish (Lutheran) Mission Province, who are “Bringing the Gospel Back to Sweden.”
- + Report on the NALC’s application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation.



+ Welcome and receive greetings from guests from the IKBG — International Christian Network, an ecumenical confessional association headquartered in Germany.

+ Displays which will introduce NALC missions and ministries, together with the chance to meet other NALC members from across North America.

+ Traditional Carolina-style barbeque hosted by the Carolinas Mission District at The Citadel’s Isle of Palms Beach House on the Atlantic coast.

+ Festive Service of Holy Communion on Friday morning with Bishop Gustafsson as preacher.

The NALC Convocation will be preceded by three significant gatherings.

Lutheran CORE’s Convocation will meet July 21-22 under the theme “Sharing the Hope that is in Us.” The Lutheran CORE Convocation is set to begin at 7 p.m. on Monday, July 21.

The annual Theological Conference sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE is held between the Convocations.

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering is on Wednesday, July 23. This year’s theme is “We are His Workmanship ... Created for Good Works.”

Registration information for all four events was sent to NALC congregations and is available online at www.thenalc.org. A list of hotels offering discounted rates is also available online.

2014 Theological Conference

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

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

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

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

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



Robert Benne



Mark Granquist



Stephen Hultgren



R. David Nelson



Amy Schifrin



Christopher Seitz



David Yeago

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. David S. Yeago
Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics
North American Lutheran Seminary

Fanning the Flames of Discipleship to Face the Future

How do we face the future?

I love the conversation between Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy says, “Life is like a deck chair. Some people place it so they can see where they are going, some place it so they can see where they have been, and some place it so they can see where they are at the present.” Charlie Brown looks up and says, “I can’t even get mine unfolded.”

Trying to plan for the future sometimes seems beyond the realm of possibility as we struggle to merely survive in the present.

On that day of Pentecost, when the Church of Jesus was born (Acts 2:3), the Spirit’s presence was manifest by fire — “tongues as of fire.” Fire is an interesting subject to explore in the Scripture. Fire is used in two ways that are in sharp contrast. In one sense, fire is used as a sign of God’s judgment, wrath or purification. In the other sense, it is a sign of the power of God’s presence with His people. Are we on fire with the Spirit or under fire from conflicts within, pressured from the world without?

For many, the Church is an institution designed to give us a feeling of control over our world. Ministry is a means to make people happy or to help them feel good about themselves. We care for people in many ways but avoid the spiritual solutions for fear of imposing our faith on them and causing them to question their own beliefs. We seldom pray with them, anoint them, or ask Jesus for discernment, direction or knowledge about their problems so He can use us as His instruments of complete healing in their lives. Even when we refer to the Holy Spirit we often expect little to happen.

Some have suggested that the best way to silence a group of Lutherans is to bring up the subject of the power and work of the Holy Spirit. While we seldom preach and teach about it, many of us had to memorize Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed:



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

“I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. ...”

Luther is saying there is nothing we can do apart from the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity should not be relegated to one Sunday in the Church year.

Our partners in Ethiopia — a place where the Church continues to grow at the fastest rate — have confirmed the importance of their focus on the Holy Spirit. They are compelled and sustained through their complete reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is additional evidence that our Lord cannot and will not be institutionalized to give us an unhealthy sense of control over our lives and our world. He will not be entrapped by our theologies so that everything is reasonable and easily understood. He will not sanctify our empty goals of acceptance and tolerance when He commands that we love. He will not declare our personal opinions to be holy when he provides the truth of His Holy Word.

Jesus says, “I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled” (Luke 12:49).

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His goal was to burn away that which needed to be destroyed so that the fire of the presence of God might be clearly revealed. Jesus came to set us on fire!

The record of Scripture underscores the fact that **the authentic nature of the church is to be on fire.**

1. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush.
2. Israel was led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and fire.
3. God answered the prayers of Elijah with fire on Mount Carmel.
4. The sacrifices in the temple were consumed by fire.
5. The smoke from the burning incense filled the holiest places in the temple.
6. God tells Jeremiah, "God's word is like fire."
7. John says Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
8. Jesus says everyone will be salted with fire.
9. Paul says fire will test every believer's work.
10. Paul also says that Jesus will come with blazing fire.
11. James says a spark or small flame will start a forest fire.
12. Revelation reminds us that God's eyes are like blazing fires.

Jesus says, "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled."

When I think of the image of fire in the Scriptures, I always remember the story of Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, who refused to bow down before the idols of a godless king. Because of their faith they found themselves in a burning fiery furnace.

What is the lesson here? Could it be that we too must be singed with the fire of conflict and confrontation? Could it be that a church that is on fire is filled with



Pentecost by El Greco (1541 -1614)

people who are willing to burn for what they believe? The witness of the Scriptures is clear. The event of Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2, and, by Acts 3, some of the disciples are already in jail because of their fiery faith. While we contemplate whether or not we have lost our fire, Christians in

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many other places in this world are “burning” (dying) because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to strip away those things that hinder the redemptive power of God’s Word and God’s will to redeem the entire world. It is necessary because it is easy to exchange the truth of His Word for a feeble sense of controlling our world and structuring our lives. It is easy to exchange the truth of the Word for our own inane interpretations.

As we reflect on the day of Pentecost we must ask ourselves, are we a part of Christ’s redeeming mission to make disciples or is the world making us its disciples?

The world around us values every culture, every faith and every concept of God equally. Truth and morality are personal possessions subject to change as situations vary. Evangelism has been replaced by acceptance, affirmation and tolerance. Selfishness had been disguised to appear to be love. Family is anyone who cares. Our children have little respect for life even as they become victims of those entrusted with their care. We keep adding to the list of places where rage abounds. Our list of addictions grows longer as we are led more by feelings than by faith. Even athletics promote violence among participants and spectators alike. Common decency has been replaced with greed, lust and an insatiable thirst for power. We live in greater fear as the world sees little hope for finding peace.

This is a world longing for the Gospel of Jesus, but can the church deliver the Gospel apart from complete reliance on the Holy Spirit? Perhaps the church is under fire because church is not on fire!

What should we do? Jesus said, “set it on fire!”

I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is still accessible and ready to bring fire, but the church cannot be on fire until it is composed of combustible material. Fire cannot take place when it is in an environment that is hostile to combustion. We must allow ourselves to become infused with that which will cause a spiritual reaction that creates both heat and light.

Just prior to Pentecost the book of Acts describes important preparation for the disciples participation

in the fiery ordeal of Pentecost. They were a part of a 10-day Prayer Vigil (Acts 1:14).

1. They stayed together. For 10 days — from Ascension to Pentecost.
2. They grew from 12 to 120 in those 10 days.
3. Their hearts became obedient and confident of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.
4. They were convinced of the presence of Jesus.
5. It produced unity as their focus shifted from self to Jesus.
6. Prayer provided inner peace and boldness.
7. When disciples of Jesus were content to dwell in His presence and experience His presence within them, they became combustible material.

Whenever fire breaks out, it is hard to keep it in one place. It’s contagious. Those men and women who followed Jesus and experienced Pentecost began to go everywhere telling others about Jesus. Difficulties disappeared and individual goals disintegrated when they took their eyes off of themselves and made Jesus their focus. Problems became possibilities for new ministry and stumbling blocks became stepping-stones. What they thought was defeat became their greatest victory.

Those first disciples moved from personal survival to a passionate mission. There was no doubt that they were part of a Church that was on fire. This fire of light and truth can transform the world. We have a fire that can replace falsehood with truth. We have a fire that can warm hard hearts and make them pulse with the passion of Christian love. We have a fire that can give strength to the weak, hope to the hopeless, power to the powerless, and love to those who have no love. Through Word and Sacrament we proclaim this life-giving, redeeming grace of Jesus and lead all who believe in Him into the wonderful journey of discipleship — following Him and leading others to the Way the Truth and the Life.

Caution: This fire will consume you with Jesus.

So may it be among us!

With you this Pentecost — on fire for the future!

Healing Hearts in South Dakota

When Vicki Breeman, a member of Christ the King Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Yankton, S.D., became the deacon overseeing the Outreach Committee, she was instrumental in helping the congregation focus upon local and regional ministry opportunities.

Breeman is constantly on the lookout for opportunities to serve. One day she was driving by the Avera Sacred Heart Cancer Center and decided to introduce herself. She asked, "What can our congregation do to help?"

Many people come to Yankton to receive treatment for cancer. Appetites become poor because of treatment side effects and, of course, budgets are stretched. Along with input from the cancer center directors, Breeman came up with a few ideas.

One of those was their pillow outreach project. Christ the King members began sewing heart-shaped pillows for people with painful incisions.

"Those pillows have been a blessing to many individuals. Last month, I visited a lady who had had surgery. She was sitting in a chair with pillows under both arms. I recognized the pillows right away as some we had made," said Pastor Dani Jo Ninke.

Members were also able to help by making "soup cones." For years, members of Christ the King have gathered items to make soup mixes. The youth group, outreach team, or a Sunday school class put the spices and noodles in a plastic "cone" that is then closed with a rubber band and ribbon. (The cones usually hold icing for decorating cakes.) A can of chicken is attached to the cone, along with cooking instructions and a note telling the recipient that members of Christ the King will be praying for them.



Members of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Yankton, S.D., make heart-shaped pillows for local cancer center patients.

"We make the cones up in batches of 50; it takes about an hour," Pastor Ninke said. "We receive many grateful notes from the recipients thanking us for the cones and for the prayers. So many people are touched by cancer; it is overwhelming. This is one way we can reach out and let people know they are not alone, and that the Church cares about them."

In addition to the cancer center patients, Christ the King also reaches out to American Indian reservations in South Dakota. Pastor Dani Jo knew that other congregations in the area frequently took mission trips to places far away, but she was troubled that some of the poorest of the poor live right in Christ the King's backyard. The proximity of the Pine Ridge and Lower Brule reservations to the congregation made it easier to build relationships and become more sensitive to needs. Christ the King has spearheaded blanket and winter coat drives and has collected children's books for libraries.

For more information about the soup cone ministry or heart pillows, contact Christ the King at christtheking8848@msn.com.

Update from Slovakia

By Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

What a wonderful ministry time we had in Slovakia. The East European Mission Network had extended an invitation to partner with EVS (Slovenské Evanjeliza né Stredisko) at their latest conference.

With over 800 pastors in attendance at this conference, it was a blessing to represent the NALC and to teach on Ephesians 5:14 using the theme, “Waking up, Getting up, Staying up, and Moving up.”

The people in attendance were all from former communist countries and were ferociously hungry for the Word.

Our leader and host during the conference was a powerful young leader named Slavo Nightingale.

I was also incredibly grateful for the help of a precious new friend, Martin Viglaš, who was my gifted translator. A peculiar thing happened during one of my keynote addresses. The Lord spoke to me, asking me to give him my Bible in the middle of my message. The people’s response was overwhelming. My hosts then shared the reason for the response and a story with me.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, speaks at a conference in Slovakia. Martin Viglaš translates.

Communism had a great hold on Slovakia and many countries in Eastern Europe. During this era, special cars were constructed with secret containers and compartments to smuggle Bibles into the country. It was dangerous but necessary work as people were so hungry for God’s Word.



After many, many years and the collapse of communism, a Swedish pastor decided to test to see if it was truly safe to now openly bring Bibles into the country. In the customs interview, he was asked what he was bringing into the country. The pastor replied and told them that he had 1,700 Bibles in the car. The customs agent shook his head as the pastor stood his ground with great courage. The customs agent simply replied, “Problem, problem, problem.” The pastor thought, well, perhaps freedom has not come, but he was caught off guard as the

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customs agent continued, “My friend, that is too few Bibles. We need more.”

I came home with a great love and affection for Eastern Europe, especially for these great people in Slovakia. For many years, Christians were openly persecuted, and it is now such a joy to be able to gather so many people together for training and to celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ!



Pastor Gemechis Buba speaks at a conference in Slovakia.

It was such a gift to be among people who had to live lives of secrecy for so many years in such deep persecution.

There was a bishop that was imprisoned under communism. The authorities finally agreed to release him from jail if he promised to not preach the Gospel anymore. For 40 years this bishop lived under heavy surveillance, but he could not be silenced. For 40 years, he wrote a sermon each week and gave it to other evangelists while he worked in a factory day in and day out.

What a beautiful day when communism was no more. The Iron Curtain fell, and he could openly preach the Gospel!

Our prayers continue to be with our brothers and sisters who endure such terrible persecution for the sake of the Gospel and we rejoice with those who may now openly proclaim the news that the tomb is empty! May God bless them more and more. Amen.

NALC leaders considering response to Lutheran World Federation

Leaders of the North American Lutheran Church are considering an appropriate response to the notification they have received from leaders of the Lutheran World Federation that the NALC's application for membership would not be approved but is considered "pending."

"At this time, the NALC leadership is considering an appropriate response and such a response will be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the NALC Executive Council in Rapid City, S.D., July 8-9. A full report of the NALC's response will be provided in due time," said Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism.

In a letter dated May 7, 2014, the Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, informed NALC leaders that "the LWF communion office will not, for now, pursue further discussions with NALC regarding its application for membership in the LWF. This means that the NALC membership application remains pending."

The 2012 NALC Convocation approved a resolution seeking membership in the LWF. That resolution was then ratified by NALC congregations.

The LWF is a global communion of 142 churches in the Lutheran tradition, representing over 72 million Christians in 79 countries.

NALC pastor involved in ministry response to Washington mudslide

By Pastor Jack Richards

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure."

With those two opening verses from Psalm 40, Chaplain Coordinator Ralph Fry gathered a volunteer group of chaplains from several counties in northwest Washington and prayed that we might be instruments of such heeding, help and healing for the families and first responders that became our sudden mission field.

On the first non-rainy and decent day of March, a beautiful morning, a 600-foot hillside let go and rolled head-long at fierce speed upon an unsuspecting riverside subdivision of modest homes, cabins and trailers. The mix of trees, rock, sand and mud was so huge that many of the homes and inhabitants were instantly buried in depths of "miry bog" totaling over 60 feet.

The slide also buried a mile long section of State Highway 530 that provides the only good connection between the mountain town of Darrington and the Oso-Arlington-Interstate 5 link "below."

And if that weren't trouble enough, the slide effectively formed an earthen dam, backing up the waters of the famed steelhead fishing paradise known as the "North Fork of the Stillaguamish River."

While the very first responders were risking their own lives plucking survivors out of quicksand and mud conditions, one eye was nervously kept on the increasing volume of water backing up with little or no usual outlet. As one Oso volunteer fireman put it, "Even my buddy who often swears like a trooper, could only mutter an 'Uff da ... God help us!'"

And God did.



Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Monte Burnett, right, Air Force Master Sgt. Caleb Guthmiller, left, and Air Force Staff Sgt. James Tabarus, center, clear debris to help drain water as they search for survivors in Oso, Wash., March 30, following a deadly mudslide. (Washington National Guard photo by Army Staff Sgt. Rory Featherston)

In those first few minutes, people stopped, called others, and even the Coast Guard and Navy — which were fortunately conducting a training exercise just 25 miles west over Puget Sound — came in a moment.

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Because there was no textbook for this kind of situation, the work was difficult, but courage, compassion and rural ingenuity kicked in.

After the initial wave of rescues, however, the reality of an unknown number deeply covered set in. Hours became days and weeks.

After seven weeks, the remains of only two people have not been recovered, but efforts are yet being carefully expended. Backhoes accustomed to taking much bigger bites were skillfully poised to take smaller amounts. And by each machine, two to three spotters carefully checked each of these small bites for items of value and, especially, for human value — human remains.

Within days, the square mile of slide-covered devastation was the temporary home of police, fire and rescue units from all over Snohomish County, the State of Washington, and even units from communities on the other side of our nation.

Beyond machines and manpower, perhaps the most skilled and important resources included what are known as “cadaver canines” — dogs ably trained to detect human remains at depths of more than 10 to 15 feet. Platoons of these wonderful creatures were rotated in shifts. Veterinarian teams



Washington National Guardsmen and local volunteers stop shoveling after discovering an unknown object in the mud to discuss their next step while searching for survivors in Oso, Wash., March 28, following a deadly mudslide. (Washington National Guard photo by Army Spc. Matthew Sissel)



An American flag flies at half-staff as airmen and volunteers search through debris and mud for survivors in Oso, Wash., March 31, following a deadly mudslide. (Washington National Guard photo by Army Spc. Sarah M. Booker)

showed up to provide important care as paws became cut and canine lungs infected from sniffing through sharp and sometimes toxic mire.

National Guard, U.S. Navy, Red Cross, FEMA and a host of other professional and volunteer organizations and individuals continued to arrive and helped wherever and however for whomever.

Our Chaplain Contingent became something of a glue to help connect with these wonderful souls on both sides of “the slide.” Some 20-25 Protestant and Roman Catholic volunteers checked in on families waiting word of any kind, survivors in area hospitals, first responders who became overwhelmed in any way, and area pastors who ministered heroically in the little nearby towns they have been called to shepherd.

A large portion of my immediate ministry focused on coordination with the Snohomish County Medical Examiner’s Office. Positive identification was often a long process and families waiting needed gentle, personal care.

I also served as one of the “bridge chaplains” with our major trauma hospital in Seattle (about 50 miles south of the landslide). We “bridged” communication and care of those rescued with updates from the field. We also began to assess immediate needs that survivors and waiting family

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New NALC congregation in Rhode Island

In September of 2013, several families began meeting in homes in north central Rhode Island. They were led by the Rev. Dr. Larry Nichols, a former Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastor who had served as the sole pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Smithfield, R.I., for 24 years. That congregation had grown in membership from 15 people in 1988 to over 500 by the time Pastor Nichols stepped down in April of 2012.

One of several reasons for leaving that congregation was to complete his Ph.D. at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland. His dissertation is titled *The Ascension of Christ in the Theology of Martin Luther*.

Pastor Nichols obtained his M.Div. at Yale Divinity School and subsequently furthered his Lutheran training at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind. He went on to author four books on world religions, cults, and sects. A frequent guest speaker in the United States, Canada and Europe, Pastor Nichols also teaches in the philosophy department of Rhode Island College and in the religion department of Salve Regina University.

The “bug” for pastoral ministry came back to bite last September. Urged by a number of former members, Pastor Nichols prayerfully considered beginning a new mission congregation. Aware of the recent formation of the NALC, he traveled to Philadelphia in October, where he met and interviewed with Pastor Mike Tavella and Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, with a follow-up visit in November. These meetings led to Pastor Nichols being invited and received as an ordained pastor in the NALC.

The new mission plant began worshiping in homes on Sunday mornings, with each family taking turns being hosts through the weeks. However, while enjoying the intimacy of a close fellowship of believers, the small group of eight soon realized that if growth and outreach were to take place, a larger space needed to be found. The search was on. It would not be until driving home from church in March that one of the families spotted a large “For Lease” sign on a building with a large room



Pastor Larry Nichols celebrates Holy Communion with Our Savior Lutheran Church, a new NALC congregation in Rhode Island.

(formerly a bridal shop), attached to a house. After meeting with the owner, the group unanimously agreed that this would be an ideal location. Obtaining a mission grant from the NALC, a lease was signed. Members voted to call the new mission start “Our Savior Lutheran Church.” A sign was ordered for the building, and then the work began. The goal was to begin worship in their new facility on April 6. Every Saturday throughout March was a work day, tearing down old wallpaper, etc., and getting the sanctuary ready for the big day.

On opening Sunday, over 40 people attended for worship and celebration. At least half were well-wishers from other congregations. Pastor Nichols thanked everyone for attending and asked for continued prayers and support from their respective congregations.

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Rhode Island church

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The members of Our Savior Lutheran Church voted unanimously on May 6 to approve the Constitution of the NALC. On May 15, a letter was received stating that the Executive Council of the NALC had approved Our Savior Lutheran Church as a new mission congregation. The letter was read to an applauding and thankful congregation the following Sunday.

The task now at hand is to continue the work that was begun last autumn, as OSLC has now transitioned from worship in homes to worship in a larger facility. The specific task is the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all that it entails in Word and Sacrament ministry to the hurting and lost people in the small corner of God's kingdom that is the tiniest state in the USA.

The members of Our Savior Lutheran Church say they are very proud and happy to be a part of the NALC and will do all they can to support the NALC's work and ministry. They intend to pray weekly for the faithful leadership of Bishop Bradosky and the other leaders, pastors, and congregations of the NALC.

For more information on Our Savior Lutheran Church visit their website: www.oslcri.org.

Washington mudslide

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needed to heal and keep vigil. We were charged to be the heart, mind, arms and transport-feet of God as needs arose.

I did not make any request for funds from our NALC Disaster Response resources. Money was not an issue. In fact, when compared to other types of tragedies such as tornadoes in Moore, Okla., or certainly a Hurricane Sandy, the numbers impacted pale in comparison. And donations of everything from food to clothing to gas cards to instant

sheltering miraculously appeared from all over our region and beyond. Perhaps later on, as long-term needs for counseling, housing, transportation and such emerge, I may make a request.

But truth be told, more practical and pragmatic than a check, the donation of a recent retired parish pastor who has served as a community police and fire chaplain for a number of years was your church's contribution.

I only asked, as I did when I was confirmed on Palm Sunday 1965, that God would help and guide me. He did that and more. He put me in the company of godly souls who sought to help others in an "ungodly" miry pit and bog. It was a full-time calling for over a month and continues even now as needed. Thank you for the privilege.

+ + +

Wish to Support Recovery Efforts in Arlington-Oso-Darrington? The nearest NALC congregation is Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Everett. Pastor Gib Botten and congregation are hosting a spaghetti dinner with all donations being directed toward Snohomish County Habitat for Humanity projects.

A local bank (which forgave several mortgages of affected families, by the way) has donated property in Darrington for a "future build" there as well as planned and anticipated projects in the nearby Marysville and Arlington areas.

Gifts can be sent to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 9320 Meadow Way; Everett, WA 98208. On your check, simply designate "Landslide Relief."

If you or your congregation have a relationship with your local Thrivent chapter, your gift might be amplified through their "Thrivent Builds" program supporting Habitat for Humanity projects here and around the world. And maybe you'd like to come on out in person to pound some nails or paint some boards as we work together to set others' feet "upon the Rock."

Pastor Jack Richards, a "retired" NALC pastor, lives in Everett, Wash. He serves as Dean for the NALC Northwest Mission District.

The Word and the Spirit

Antidote to Decline in the Church

When we have a love for the Word of God, and gladly hear, talk, write, and think of Christ, we are to know that this inclination toward Christ is the gift and work of the Holy Ghost. Where you come across contempt for the Word of God, there is the devil. We meet with such contempt for the Word of God mostly among the common people. They act as though the Word of God does not concern them. Wherever you find a love for the Word, thank God for the Holy Spirit who infuses this love into the hearts of men. We never come by this love naturally, neither can it be enforced by laws. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther's Commentary on
St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 4:6

I write this *Ministry Matters* article as I'm sitting in the "ecumenical guests" section of the Lutheran Church–Canada Convention, in Vancouver, British Columbia. And it's Pentecost Sunday — a bit odd sitting in a church convention on this third great festival day of the Church year — not standing in the pulpit as it seems I should be. And yet, it gives me reason — an opportunity to reflect — on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, and the often lamented reality of Lutheranism in North America today.

And what is our reality? There are several realities I might mention, but the one I hear most often these days is the reality that all denominations in our North American context share — that of decline.

We wish we were immune from such decline — decline in worship attendance, decline in offerings and, yes, decline in faithfulness. We wish that was something only experienced in liberal Protestant bodies, as if they deserved decline. They had brought it on themselves, after all. But that's not the case.

I commend to you the book Bishop John has been referencing lately, *The Great Evangelical Recession: Six Factors That Will Crash the American Church ... and How to Prepare* by John S. Dickerson. In this book, Dickerson confirms that this decline is



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

happening even among Evangelicals. Even so-called Mega-Churches are experiencing decline.

Many Lutherans look at the huge non-denominational campus down the street and wonder why they seem to be booming, while many of our congregations are in a death-spiral. Well, if they're honest, they're experiencing "recession" — decline — as well. And what is the cause of such decline?

One factor is surely the antagonism in our culture against Christianity, the increasing secularism and the governmental and legal "push-back" against those who take their Christian faith seriously. These are several of the reasons for the decline of Christianity in North America.

We have to face the fact, however, that these external forces are not the real reason for the decline in Lutheranism in general, or in the NALC. The decline is due to a lack of knowledge and commitment to God's Holy Word, which then stifles the work of the Holy Spirit among us!

As I sat this morning (It was Pentecost Sunday, remember?) with brothers and sisters of the Lutheran Church–Canada, hearing the Pentecost lessons read and preached, I couldn't help but consider the several congregations in the last few months which have expressed concern about their decline, the several pastors who feel responsible for such decline, and the council leaders who blame the pastor for decline in worship attendance and so also offerings.

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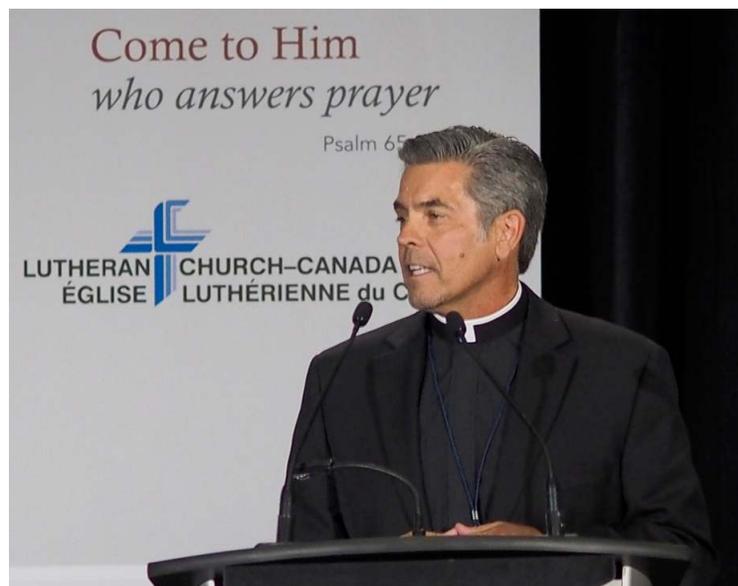
Our Lutheran family members in LCC are wrestling with the same concerns. And, as I have had time to chat with their leaders, it's clear we agree on the systemic problem in Lutheranism today. While liberal Lutheranism is guilty of twisting and re-interpreting Scripture to suit its own purposes, Biblical Lutheranism is often guilty of being ignorant of Scripture, as the majority of Lutherans — even in what we might consider “Biblically conservative” congregations — are Biblically illiterate.

So, here's the thing: every Lutheran congregation and church body will be in decline without a firm commitment to the Word of God — a hunger and thirst for the Word of God. Individuals who are continually feasting on the Word, immersing themselves in the Word, receiving the Word written, read and preached, providing fertile ground for the work of the Holy Spirit, whose primary work is through the Word!

Martin Luther did not exclude the possibility that the Holy Spirit could be present apart from the Word, but he always asserted that the Spirit of God works primarily through the Word, revealing Christ, convicting and convincing the believer through both Law and Gospel of the good news that “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17 — Do I need to cite it?)

Lutherans do not believe that the Holy Spirit comes into a person apart from the external Word of God. The Word and Spirit come to us from the outside — from God, speaking words of death and life to the heart of the believer. The Word of God testifies to Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world. And the Holy Spirit works through that Word to create, sustain and encourage faith — in the believer and in the Church.

This is why we are correct in saying that the work of the Holy Spirit is indeed hindered, slowed, impeded when believers are ignorant of God's Word, or indifferent to it. The Body of Christ was created by the Spirit, working through the Word. The Gospel was spread in the early Church by the Spirit, working through the Word. The Reformation was ignited by the Spirit, working through the Word.



Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, speaks at the Convention of the Lutheran Church–Canada.

The North American Lutheran Church exists because the Spirit has been working through the Word.

The Spirit is now calling us to be reformed and renewed in the Word. The Spirit is clearly working to stir up in us and in our church a deep and abiding hunger and thirst for the Word. We are called to not only talk about the Word of God, but to read the Bible and study the Bible; to chew on it and taste it and digest it, so that we in the NALC grow in our knowledge of Holy Scripture.

And we do this not as a work — not so that we can boast of our superior Bible memorization — but that the Holy Spirit's work in us might have free reign to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify us through the Word and in the Church. We do it so that the NALC in all of its parts — in every pastor's life and household, in every congregation, in every individual and family — will experience, not decline, but growth. We do it so that we will experience growth and enlivening that leads to excitement and energy for mission and ministry.

To accept decline as a necessary reality of Lutheranism in our day and age is to deny the truth of God's Word and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We have not received a spirit of timidity and fear, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control.

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DVD study on Lutheran teaching featuring Jim Nestingen is available

A DVD study led by the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, a popular Lutheran theologian, is now available from the NALC offices.

This 12-part DVD on Lutheran theology as explained in the Lutheran Confessions and Martin Luther's Small Catechism is an excellent resource for adult studies.

The DVD series, with individual sessions of 35-60 minutes each, was produced by St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and funded, in part, by a grant from the North American Lutheran Church.

Dr. Nestingen, an NALC pastor, taught church history and the Lutheran Confessions at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., for many years.

The session titles are:

1. The Lutheran Confessions
2. Justification
3. Law and Gospel
4. Ten Words
5. God the Father
6. Who is Jesus?
7. Redeemed
8. Holy Spirit
9. Lord's Prayer
10. Baptism
11. Confession and Absolution
12. Communion



James Nestingen

The DVDs may be ordered by contacting the NALC Administrative Office at nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org or 888-551-7254. The set is \$100 (plus postage).

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It is not enough to say that we are a Bible-believing Church and then leave the Scriptures collecting dust on a shelf. The first step in deep knowledge of Holy Scripture is simply regular attendance in Sunday worship, where three sections of the Bible and a psalm are read each week! Over the course of the three-year lectionary you will hear most of the Bible read in worship. Then, dust off your Bible and read! Read a verse a day if that's all you can do. Read a paragraph at a time and highlight a "golden nugget" that speaks to you at that moment. Attend a Bible study, or begin a Bible study, or read the Bible to your children or grandchildren. It matters not at all how you read and hear God's Word, but that somehow the seed of God's Word is planted in your life, that the Holy Spirit will nourish and flourish it!

Decline in our congregations and in the NALC is not acceptable nor need it be inevitable. The antidote to decline in the Church is the Word of God and the Holy Spirit! Let us open our Bibles and be open to the work of the Holy Spirit through God's Word! Let our continual prayer be, "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" and "Come, Holy Spirit, Come!"

Bishop Bradosky to host Holy Land tour

NALC Bishop John Bradosky will host a pilgrimage to the Holy Land Nov. 13-22.

The pilgrimage to Israel includes a flight from Columbus, Ohio, daily breakfast and dinner, sailing on the Sea of Galilee, Communion at the Garden Tomb, Jerusalem's Via Delarosa, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and more.

There is an optional two-day extension trip to Petra, Jordan, Nov. 22-24.

The tour is scheduled to leave from Columbus, Ohio; however, departure from other cities can be requested pending airline confirmation.

To request a flyer and trip itinerary, contact Pam Charas at 937-434-0993 or mcharas@earthlink.net or Jerusalem Tours at 888-373-8687 or visit their website at: www.jerusalem tours.com.

Boot Camp for ‘the Singing Church’

By Caryn Lawler

It was a privilege and a joy to be in attendance in Buffalo, N.Y., two weeks ago at a presentation by the Rev. John Bell of the Iona Community off the coast of Scotland.

Pastor Bell is a passionate advocate for strong congregational singing and has contributed much to the repertoire of choral music that promotes it. His sessions assumed that everyone present was a singer (no matter whether good, bad or indifferent) and had the capacity (and, perhaps, the obligation) to add his or her voice to the singing community assembled that day.

One of the many memorable remarks he made stated his conviction that there was a lost 11th Commandment from Sinai: “Thou shalt sing!” “The only reason we aren’t familiar with it is that Moses ran out of space on the tablets,” he said.

Lutherans might not elevate Christian song to quite that status, but there can be no doubt that our reputation as “the singing Church” points to one of the glories of our heritage. A famed quote from Martin Luther himself places music next to theology and gives it the highest praise.

Luther recognized the ability music has to move and cheer us. Singing allows us to praise God united as one and is a powerful servant to help God’s Word sneak into our hearts and memory.

How many times have you found yourself on any given Thursday humming something that you eventually recognize as the melody of the Hymn of the Day from the previous Sunday’s liturgy?

It seems, however, that in these days we are being called upon to hide this treasure of Christian hymnody and song under a very large bushel basket. Such a claim is made under the rubric of hospitality, assuming that worship must include only texts and music that are immediately accessible to every guest. How are we to treasure our heritage as “the singing Church” when we are faced with a society that places no value on personal music-making? We are encouraged to be music

consumers, plugged into electronic devices that massage our brains into thinking that music is a spectator sport. It is not — and especially not in the context of Christian worship.

In a beautiful little book from 1989 that has gone out of print called, *How Can I Keep from Singing?* from Liturgy Training Publications, Gabe Huck wrote:

“Musical liturgy is a redundancy. Saying “musical liturgy” is like saying “multicolored rainbow.” It is liturgy’s nature to be sung. Our song is something without which there would be no liturgy. ... When we come expecting to do and not to watch, we will need our music, our song. Song becomes an extra, only nice or only pretty, when we come for inspiration, entertainment, obligation or education. But if we come to do, then song is central to the whole undertaking, for the task to be done can’t be done except in song. That’s not in the cultural grain. We go against that grain when ... we try to make of liturgy a deed where there is no star and no audience, no spectator, and no spectacle. Is it any wonder that this does not come easily? We found it easier to let music be cute or catchy or impressive. That was enough to bring gratitude from the departing congregation. We all sense how truly radical (going for the roots) it will be to buckle down for the long haul and say: Face it, this isn’t about making people feel good or holy or even kind. This is basic training in living like a baptized person, life and death stuff.”

In worship it is our joy to encounter the living God, and it is our job is to sing His praise, to be fed and nourished by Him, and to be equipped to go out into the world to defend the hope that is in us. That requires effort, certainly from the pastor and worship planners and leaders, but most especially from *us*. It requires faithful, consistent attendance and whole-hearted participation in this boot camp for the baptized, this rehearsal for death and new life. We have our marching orders, so get to work! And sing!!!

Caryn Lawler is pastoral musician at Church of the Apostles, Lutheran, an NALC congregation in North Tonawanda, N.Y. She has served as a Lutheran parish musician since 1982.

Sundouloi Ministries Inc. (SMI Haiti)

A newly 'Recognized Ministry' of the NALC

Since 1996, Sundouloi Ministries Inc. (SMI Haiti) has provided assistance in practical ways to those in great need in the land of Haiti.

By partnering with congregations, SMI Haiti is making a difference in the daily lives of Haitians living in the Archaie area north of Port Au Prince and at the Bon Repos orphanage in Port Au Prince.

The name, *Sundouloi*, comes from Greek and means "fellow servant." It emphasizes SMI's desire to join with others to fulfill the Great Commission and to love and care for God's people in Haiti.

SMI's vision is for the Haitian people to be self-sustaining; having opportunities to be educated in order that they may provide for their families, advance their communities, and make an impact in their country.

When congregations partner with SMI Haiti, they work together to share and show God's love to the Haitian people. Ministry efforts are highly relational.



Children served by Sundouloi Ministries Inc. (SMI Haiti)

Working with SMI Haiti over the past three years, Living Water Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Springboro, Ohio, has formed strong relationships with local Haitian pastors and their respective churches.

During Living Water's most recent trip to Haiti in February, NALC Bishop John Bradosky was invited to provide instruction and encouragement on the subject of Discipleship. Many local Haitian pastors attended the workshops and plans are being made for a return trip in February 2015.

In 2010, SMI began a school in the remote village of Guitton, an area with no school and once greatly influenced by the voodoo culture. The school now educates 200 students from kindergarten through sixth grade.

Funding is provided by congregations in the form of student sponsorships. An annual sponsorship for one student is \$300 and includes lunch on a regular basis along with shoes and a uniform.



Members of Living Water Lutheran Church in Springboro, Ohio, pose during a mission trip to Haiti. They worked with Sundouloi Ministries Inc. (SMI Haiti).

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In 2012 SMI began working with an orphanage in Port au Prince led by a local pastor. SMI now provides ongoing support for the pastor, his family, and more than 60 children at the orphanage.

Pastor Felix said that the orphans will never “age-out” of the children’s home. “I’m with these kids until the very end,” he said.

Women in SMI’s prenatal and early childhood education program participate in monthly classes taught by a Haitian nurse for six months before and after birth. Classes provide information on child development, maternal health, nutrition, childbirth, breastfeeding, and infant care. Prenatal doctor visits, baby checkups, and a “welcome baby” gift and care package are included in the program.

The developing country of Haiti desperately needs access to clean water. With support from congregations, SMI Haiti is able to provide life-saving water that protects people from disease, and even death. This effort is critical, as people have no other way to reach this life-saving water on their own.

Since 2007 SMI has hosted annual conferences for hundreds of women who come for three days of teaching and fellowship. Women have the opportunity to worship together, receive Communion, study the Word of God, receive health and hygiene instruction, and enjoy their Sisters in Christ.

For the past several years SMI has provided the opportunity for Haitian youth to join with American youth for several days of worship, teaching, fellowship and sports activities. As proposed facilities are available, the program will expand and be open to additional American and Haitian youth.

Medical and dental clinics provide the opportunity for medical and support personnel from North America to minister to the physical needs of the Haitian people, most of whom do not have access to health care or medical facilities.

Living Water Lutheran Church has partnered with SMI Haiti since 2011. SMI Haiti has hosted 45 people from Living Water over the course of three different one-week mission trips. Living Water



Working with the children of Haiti is one of the joys of mission trips with SMI Haiti.

Lutheran Church greatly values the relational ministry emphasis of SMI Haiti and has witnessed significant, positive changes in the lives of those impacted by SMI Haiti.

The most notable changes include the establishment of new, vibrant churches in the villages of Nanwoch and Guitton, critical improvements made to the Bon Repos Orphanage, and reaching new people for Christ in nearby villages including Kamitan.

If you are interested in establishing or growing your global mission ministry, you may meet representatives from SMI Haiti at the 2014 NALC Convocation in Charleston, S.C. Additionally, you may learn more about SMI Haiti through their website: www.smihaiti.org.

You are also welcome to obtain more information by contacting Living Water Lutheran Church at www.livingwaterlutheran.us.

An Ascension Day Sermon

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary, preached this sermon to the NALC Carolinas Mission District Convocation.

Then He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

— Luke 24:44-53

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

For 40 days and 40 nights the devil tempted Him, and on the last day the devil promised to give Him all the bread that this world would ever need. Then he promised Him all the glory of the kingdoms of this world. He told Jesus, "You worship me, and it will all be yours." And then, at last, the devil took Him to the highest point of the Temple and dared Him to trust that the promises of His Father were true.

We hear the story of the temptation of Jesus on the first Sunday of Lent every year, and we are given 40 days, to find that our strength rests in His. We are given 40 days to return to God so that we will trust Him in the face of all that the devil does in this world. We are given 40 days to empty ourselves of pride and malice, of jealousy and anger, of aggression and deceit. *Return to the Lord your God*



From the Seminary

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

for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. The only way we can do this is in Him through whom God has subjected every kingdom, in Him who is seated at the right hand of the heavenly places, in Him who is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. As Jesus answers every temptation of the devil with the word that came through Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, we see the shape that He intends for our lives, as we come to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The name of Jesus is above every name in this age and in the ages to come; and with the name of Jesus on our lips He fills us, His body, with His risen life.

The devil had promised Him that He could turn stones into bread and satisfy the hunger of the world. But the devil didn't know that Jesus would say, "*Take, eat, this is my body,*" and that through His body our deepest hungers would be fed. He becomes one of us, that through Him we might become partakers of His divine nature, in this age, and in the ages to come. "*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word the proceeds from the mouth of God.*" And so Jesus, not the devil, appears at the end of a new 40 days and says that everything written about Him in the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. He who is one with the Father from eternity calls us to a way of life that is in union with the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Risen from the dead, He opens our minds to understand the Scriptures so that all that God had promised from the very beginning would be received in joy and with obedience.

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He had been seen in Galilee and on the Emmaus road. He had invited Thomas to touch Him and He had eaten breakfast by the sea. And now, in His 40th day risen from the dead, He bids His disciples to call the whole world to repentance, so that the forgiveness of sins may be proclaimed in His name, the name that is above every name. His desire for the whole world to know the Father's love is to be our desire. For through His suffering and His death, His rising, and now His ascension, He teaches us that the Kingdom of Heaven is not just "up there" somewhere, but it is here, in the holy fellowship that is filled with His eternal life. This is the Kingdom that is greater than every other, for as our sins are forgiven around this table, we are partakers in His divine nature.

On Ascension Day and though the 10 days that follow, we celebrate the completion of His work of salvation for the sake of whole world. Every time we proclaim His dying and His rising, we are His witnesses. Every time we confess our sins and trust in His mercy, we are His witnesses. Every time we worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we receive the same promise that unmasked the devil's deceit. *"Worship the Lord your God," Jesus proclaims, "and serve only Him."*

And every time we hear and believe the promise of His Ascension, we understand that our own lives are now lived in kingdom time, eternal time, the time where God's glory has no end. All that we do and all that we are is to give God glory, for this is what we are made for. The church's ancient proper preface appointed for Ascension Day sings of how Jesus *who after His resurrection appeared openly to all his disciples and in their sight was taken up to heaven that He might make us partakers of his divine nature. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify [His] glorious name.*

It is just as 2 Peter proclaimed:

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Thus He has given us, through these things, His precious and very great promises, so

that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

(2 Peter 1:3-11)

Entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

Just before the disciples see Jesus ascend, they hear His word calling them to proclaim His name to all the world. There is no way to do that apart from trusting the promise that God is leading you and that God will provide all that you need to accomplish His purpose.

And if we are to be calling all the world to repentance, we will encounter every power of evil along the way — evil that is stronger than any one of us alone — and so He promises to clothe with power from on high. He who ascends higher than the pinnacle of the temple, He will send the Holy Spirit — the same Spirit who hovered above the waters of creation, the same Spirit, who filled the womb of Mary, the same Spirit who descended at our Lord's baptism in form like a dove, the very same Spirit who filled and who led Him for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness. He promises that this same Spirit will lead us every day of our lives. For when this Spirit comes like tongues aflame, He will burn all the way to our hearts, until we, too, are on fire with His love.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will send what His Father has promised, so that clothed with power from on high, your lives will forever be living witness to his eternal love. Amen.

Report from visit to Ethiopia

Pastor Marshall Hahn of Marion and Norway Lutheran Churches in St. Olaf, Iowa, provided this report of his recent trip to Ethiopia to the Iowa Mission District.

Pastor Challa Baro from the Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church in Minneapolis and I had a remarkable visit with our mission partners in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

Being in the company of Pastor Challa opened up many doors into the homes and lives of the people there. Pastor Challa had been an evangelist in the Mekane Yesus Church for several years before moving to the United States, and we were treated as honored guests everywhere we went.

The hospitality and warmth of the people we met will be what I remember most about our trip. Six different times in the two weeks we were there, we were treated to dinner in people's homes — each time including the Ethiopian coffee ritual.

This coffee ritual involves roasting the coffee beans over a charcoal firepot and then wafting the aroma about the room. The beans are then ground and cooked over the same charcoal fire in the dining area, while the hosts visit with their guests. Finally it is served in tiny china cups. The whole procedure takes about an hour.



A woman pouring coffee as part of the Ethiopian coffee ritual.



Pastor Marshall Hahn and Pastor Challa Baro preach to the FOCUS (Fellowship of Oromo Christian University Students) group in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

We may think coffee is important in our Midwestern culture, but we barely hold a candle to the Ethiopian practice!

During our time in Addis Ababa, we stayed in the Bethel Synod Guest House, a modest but very comfortable lodging run by the Bethel Synod's Coordination Office of the EECMY. The Rev. Teferi Berkessa, director of the Coordination Office, had made many of the arrangements for our trip and was very accommodating. The only drawback was the unreliable electricity and poor internet connection at the guest house, problems which are apparently endemic to the city.

In the two weeks we were in Addis Ababa and Nekemte, we were asked to preach or speak at 10 different gatherings. I preached eight times in those

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Pastor Baro poses with the Rev. Belay Olam, President of the Mekane Yesus Seminary.

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two weeks — sometimes with a short message followed by a full sermon by Challa, sometimes with Challa translating for me, and, when I spoke to the university or seminary students, in English without the need of an interpreter.

I came to appreciate Peter’s admonition to “always be prepared to give an account of the hope that is in you!” (1 Peter 3:15).

Early on, as I witnessed the response Challa received from the churches and people we met, I came to the conclusion that this was the main purpose of our visit — to bring Challa to Ethiopia to speak with and visit the people there.

This was confirmed by Challa himself who told me after we had been there for a few days that he had been praying about the trip and asking God what His purpose was in sending us to Ethiopia? The answer he received was that he was sent to bring a message to the people there. The message he brought was a warning. It was a warning against the theological drift of the Western church which was

moving away from reliance on the authority of God’s Word. It was a warning against the liberal theology of the Western church that has been dividing the churches of the west and undermining their trust in the truth of the Gospel.

Everywhere he went, this was the message he preached. He said he had never done this before, preaching the same message again and again, but this is what he felt called to do. From what I could see, it was a message that was received quite positively everywhere we went.

In addition to preaching at several churches and visiting various ministries, we had an opportunity to meet with the Rev. Asefa Woyessa, president of the Central Synod of the EECMY, and his staff and with the Rev. Belay Olam, President of the Mekane Yesus Seminary.

At both meetings we were told of the many challenges facing the church, particularly since the EECMY has broken off relations with the ELCA and the Lutheran Church of Sweden due to their changes in teaching and practice regarding marriage and sexuality.

This has meant a loss of funding for many of the ministries of the church. In the Central Synod, it has meant the reduction or closure of two health clinics, an HIV/AIDS project, an eye clinic, a school for the

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The Rev. Asefa Woyessa, president of the EECMY’s Central Synod, and his staff pose with Pastor Hahn and Pastor Baro during their visit.

deaf, and various development projects in the synod. Some of these projects may be handed over to the government, but it is complicated by the fact that several of these ministries are located within the compounds of the local church.

I told them that we in the NALC wished to help as we can, but that our resources are limited. However, I promised that I would bring these needs to the attention of our churches. At both meetings, we were told of the commitment of the Mekane Yesus church to stand by the decisions they had made and their faith that God would provide the resources to do the work they are called to do.

One of the most encouraging parts of our visit was the time we spent with the FOCUS groups — the Fellowship of Oromo Christian University Students. We met with their board and also had an opportunity to worship with three different groups while we were there. There are over 200 FOCUS groups across the country, and they are some of the most active and enthusiastic members of the church.

We were told that these students are some of their best witnesses for the Gospel, going into places that no one else will go — into Muslim villages and places where witchcraft is still practiced, often in the face of opposition and threats. But they are fearless in their witness to the Gospel. At Nekemte, we worshipped with the FOCUS group there, which numbers about 5,000 students out of a total student population of about 20,000. It was inspiring to worship among them and see their enthusiasm and



Church elders in Nekemte, Ethiopia, standing next to the health clinic their church sponsors. The clinic includes an HIV/AIDS project for orphaned children.

commitment. There, too, they have seen their funding cut off. But it has not dampened their spirit and their commitment.

We also visited with the Gudina Tumsa Foundation and traveled to two of their development project sites near Addis Ababa.

When we were at the seminary, I was invited to speak, and, at the conclusion of my sermon, I told them that I was reminded of Jesus' words to the church at Smyrna given to the seer John:

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” (Revelation 2:8-11)

Great poverty and many challenges face the church in Ethiopia, yet they are rich in many ways. It was a privilege to meet the people there, and I hope to be able to see them again.



Pastor Baro and Pastor Hahn pose with children in one of the school projects.

Counter-cultural in our identity and mission

I admit it: I watch too much television. I have my excuses, of course, feeble as they are. For one thing, I also read a great deal. Second, I have avoided becoming addicted to computer games. Third, I find television incredibly relaxing, especially after a stress-filled day. Fourth, many of the programs or movies I watch come under the category of documentaries.

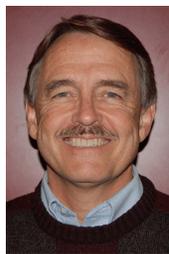
However, my favorite excuse is that television helps me track the most recent trends in not only the entertainment and news media industries, but in our broader secular culture as a whole.

Another way I monitor the trends in our secular culture is by spending 30 to 45 minutes each morning reading and digesting the *New York Times*. Sometimes this daily “ritual” can be painful. While I do have some left-of-center political views, the fact is that I would be hard pressed to find a major newspaper more “politically correct” than the *New York Times*. And this “P.C.” worldview can sometimes drive me to distraction.

Of all the regular editorial writers for the *New York Times*, only two can be considered moderate or conservative. All the rest would come under the heading of either liberal or far left. One of these two more moderate columnists is Ross Douthat, who self-identifies as a Roman Catholic. He even wrote an article for *Christianity Today* awhile back.

Douthat recently shared his insights regarding what he calls the “elite culture of America.” In his April 13 column he referred to an article written by a Harvard University student who suggested that universities should have a policy of “academic justice” in which these schools would no longer permit any faculty to produce work tainted by “racism, sexism, and heterosexism.” Douthat also mentioned the recent news story involving the Mozilla Corporation in California. Mozilla asked its CEO, Brendan Eich, to recant his past support for the view that “one man and one woman constitute a marriage.” Unwilling to do this, Eich resigned his position.

Douthat wrote that he wasn’t questioning either the Harvard student’s right to share her views, or Mozilla’s right to want a CEO “whose politics fit the



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

climate of Silicon Valley.” What he was protesting was the dishonesty of an American “elite culture” that prides itself on a “pretense of universality.”

In other words, according to Douthat, this “elite” subculture claims to be both tolerant and inclusive while at the same time denigrating those who embrace a different and more traditional worldview.

Douthat described the implications of this “pretense” for faith communities. He wrote, “with the pretense, increasingly, comes a dismissive attitude toward those institutions — mostly religious — that do acknowledge their own dogmas and commitments, and ask for the freedom to embody them and live them out.”

(An anecdote regarding Harvard University: A recent paper from Harvard Medical School states that the revelations experienced by people such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Paul can all be attributed to “primary or mood-disorder-associated psychotic disorders.”)

So as congregational pastors, teachers and lay leaders, how do we respond to those in our culture who more and more view religious people — especially Christians — as cultural (and/or political) adversaries? I have four suggestions:

First, we have to resist the temptation as congregations to withdraw from the wider culture into our own Christian “ghettos.” We need to be engaging the surrounding secular culture, not abandoning it.

Second, community service ministries are some of the most effective ways to engage our secular

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