

NALC News

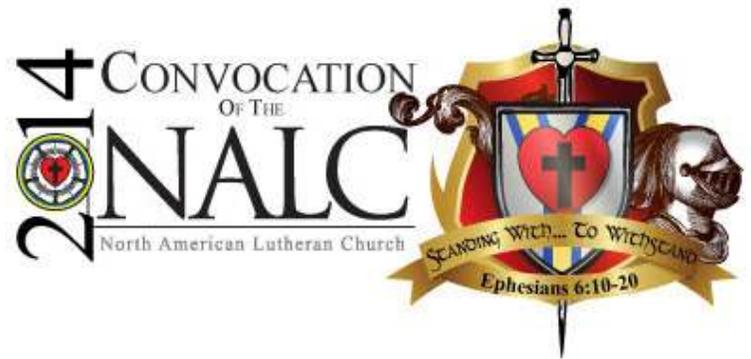
North American Lutheran Church

March 2014

‘Standing With ... To Withstand’ is theme of 2014 Convocation

“Standing With ... To Withstand” will be the theme of the 2014 Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church. The theme is based on Ephesians 6:10-20 which describes the whole armor of God. The 2014 NALC Convocation will be held July 24-25 on the campus of The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

The Convocation will be preceded by three events: The Theological Conference sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE July 22-23; the Lutheran CORE Convocation July 21-22; and the Women of the NALC Gathering on July 23.



The NALC Convocation will begin at 9 a.m. on Thursday, July 24, and conclude at 5 p.m. Friday.

Nominations sought for NALC positions

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

All NALC congregations and pastors received detailed information and nominating forms by email. The information and forms are also available at <http://thenalc.org/2014-convocation>.

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

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

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

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

The Nominating Committee has set a deadline of April 12 for nominations to be received. Completed nomination forms should be sent to Pastor Michael Tamorria, chair; NALC Nominations Committee; 9716 State Route 49; Rockford, OH 45882-9739 or to nominations@thenalc.org.

For more information, contact Pastor Tamorria at nominations@thenalc.org or at 419-942-2591.

Representatives of Lutheran World Federation and the North American Lutheran Church meet in Columbus

As an integral part of the North American Lutheran Church's process of applying for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation, representatives of the Lutheran World Federation visited NALC staff in the NALC's international offices in Columbus, Ohio.

On March 10, 2014, the Rev. Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, and Dr. Carlos Bock, Director for the Department for Mission and Development in the LWF, met with Bishop John Bradosky of NALC; the Rev. Paull Spring, Bishop Emeritus of the NALC; the Rev. Mark Chavez, General Secretary of NALC; and the Rev. Dr. David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, to discuss the NALC membership application.

The NALC resolution to apply for full membership in LWF was approved at the August 2012 NALC Convocation. After the ratification of the resolution, a formal application was submitted to the LWF in March 2013.

As a part of the process, the LWF Council received the NALC membership application at its meeting in 2013. The meeting which took place in Columbus between the representatives of NALC and LWF is a



Participants in the meeting between NALC and LWF leaders were, from left, Pastor David Wendel; Bishop Paull Spring; the Rev. Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations; Dr. Carlos Bock, Director for the LWF Department for Mission and Development; Bishop John Bradosky; and Pastor Mark Chavez.



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customary step in the application process which includes dialogue and visit with the applicant church.

The LWF Council will receive a report of the process at its meeting in 2014.

NALC Preaching Conference

February 18-20

Lake Mary, Florida



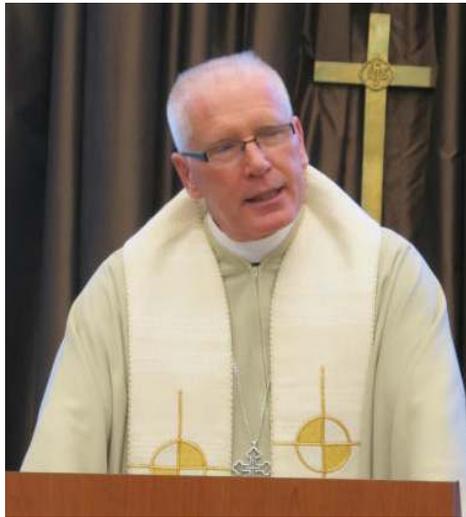
The Rev. Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin



The Rev. Mark Chavez



Bishop John Bradosky



The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen



The Rev. Tim Lundeen



Participants in the NALC Preaching Conference pose for a group photo.

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:



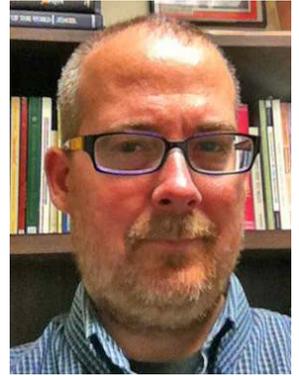
Robert Benne



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.

**The Biblical Canon and True Teaching
in the Church**

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

**What Is Theological Exegesis?
Practical Resources**

for Preaching the Gospel Today
Dr. R. David Nelson
Lutheran theologian and Acquisitions Editor
Baker Academic and Brazos Press

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. David S. Yeago
Professor of Systematic Theology
North American Lutheran Sem. House of Studies
Gordon-Conwell Theo. Seminary - Charlotte, N.C.



Canadian Mission District

Members of the congregations of the NALC Canadian Mission District gathered Feb. 28-March 1 at St. Albert Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Alberta. There are now 21 NALC congregations in Canada.

Delegates to the Convocation elected officers and adopted a budget and a constitution for the Mission District.

Pastor Phillip Gagnon (left) of St. Albert Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Alberta, is Dean of the Mission District.

Pastor Karl Johnsen (below right) of Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in Edmonton, Alberta, led Morning Prayer and explained the work of the NALC Canada Section which legally enables the NALC's work in Canada.



Repentance and Discipleship

Dear Followers of Christ Jesus,

As we begin this Lenten journey, the Scripture texts remind us of the importance of confession and repentance. It is important for us to be honest, transparent, and deeply troubled by our sin and its effect on our lives and those around us. Martin Luther uses the illustration of a mirror when referring to the nature of the Law in the Word of God and its impact in our life. It forces us to see the reality of sin at work in us to the very core of our being, our nature that is sinful and unclean.

What applies to us as individuals also applies to our life together in our congregations and to our shared ministry as the North American Lutheran Church.

The issue that often prevents us from looking too deeply or lingering at that “mirror” for very long is not the Gospel of God’s forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation. We accept and marvel at the truth and wonder of this great grace in spite of being unworthy and undeserving of all Christ has accomplished for us. We take full advantage of what some have called, “the gospel of sin management.” We sin, we ask for forgiveness trusting in the grace of Jesus, and the cycle is repeated endlessly. The category in this process, mentioned frequently by Jesus, but seldom contemplated by His followers today, is *repentance*.

Repentance begins with sorrow and remorse for our sin, but it includes much more. Turning away from the direction we were moving — following ourselves or our culture, leading us away from Christ — and turning back to Jesus is much more involved. This component of repentance relies on His grace to bring transformation and change to our lives, inviting us to both think and act differently. Repentance moves us from disobedience to a life of faith, obediently following Jesus. Through repentance the power of His grace transforms our worldview and our behaviors.

The state of the church in North America is something for which we all bear responsibility and culpability. John Dickerson, in his book *The Great Evangelical Recession*, describes our current



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

situation and how we reached this point. In addition to your study of the Scriptures during this season of Lent, I encourage you to read this book. I commend it to you because the parallels between evangelicals and mainline denominations are nearly identical.

While many refuse to acknowledge what is occurring — as happened during the financial recession of several years ago — others refuse to believe that it will have any impact on us. Some are content to believe that if we just continue to do what we have always done the church will soon begin to grow without any necessity on our part to change — to truly repent.

The reality is that the church’s numbers are in decline, donations are drying up. Political agendas are dividing the church from within, and our culture is not only becoming increasingly antagonistic but hostile towards those who take seriously their faith in Jesus Christ and are bold enough to share it.

To make matters worse, trends that used to take decades to develop are now occurring at an ever accelerating pace. “Whether in ministry or in industry, those who observe and embrace this new rapid speed of change become survivors and innovators. Those who ignore the change and the speed of it become its victims,” Dickerson said.

Not only is the church failing to keep pace with population growth, but we have been content to prop up our view of the church by overestimating our size. That is true for mainline denominations as well as evangelicals. We believe that we will attract

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more people to the faith by attesting to our success with grossly inflated statistics. The few mega churches that are growing are not reaching unreached people with the Gospel but welcoming those from other denominations who are self-destructing.

Dickerson reminds us that the fastest growing subcultures in North America are those who express a militant antagonism toward Christians who take seriously the Word of God. For some time leaders within various church bodies have used statistics to talk about their size and voting strength, spending more time playing political games than reaching others with the Gospel and often elevating political positions to the same level as spiritual and theological orthodoxy. The effect has been anything but endearing to those around us. In fact, many in North America have a higher opinion of Muslims than Christians who truly believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Perhaps you have heard others say that we may lose our young people for a period of time, but they will return. It was the case for many years that for every five that left the church four eventually returned. Today, the inverse of those figures is reality. For every five that leave the church only one returns. Dickerson's description of the reality of the church in our culture is staggering but backed by honest statistical analysis and specific anecdotal evidence.

Far more important is what he describes as solutions for recovery. He writes, "Change is risky. Action is risky. But failing to act is even riskier. Simply being aware of these trends will not change the future of our ministries. Changing the course of our ministries will be difficult. It will be misunderstood. It will be demanding. But times of crisis require leaders to lead."

If I were to summarize his solutions in a word, that word would be *discipleship*. It will mean acknowledging our weakness and depending completely on the strength of Christ. It will mean not changing or abandoning our faith but proclaiming it by living it. It will not mean changing our view regarding the authority or interpretation of the Scripture but learning how to share its truth in ways

that truly reflect the love of the Father, the compelling grace of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

"The body is bleeding out because its leaders, its servants, and its people have forgotten how to make disciples as Jesus described and modeled. This is real people, dealing with real life together — and pointing each other to Jesus. What we are failing at is real ministry. Not commercial or mass-marketed events, but real ministry in real lives — the way Paul, Peter, and John did it — the way Jesus taught it. We have somehow lost it on a large scale." We must begin to reach and engage people with authentic, relational discipleship. This is not a quick fix. Disciples cannot be mass-produced; they must be cultivated one relationship at a time.

There will be many who will argue against this simple but demanding discipleship with a multitude of excuses. Some will say it is too simple. Others will say it is too difficult. Some will even contend it is not Lutheran! I would agree with Dickerson, "How heated and passionate we become when defending our complacency, our apathy toward Christ's discipleship mandate."

The journey of Lent begins with confession, but it is also a season of repentance. This repentance must not be just sentiment or feeling of regret, but action in the direction of all that it means to follow Jesus. I believe we who are part of the North American Lutheran Church are heading in the right direction. It is not an easy journey but it is life-giving. There is only one place the abundant life is found, in Christ, in being His disciple and discipling others.

It is always good to be with you following Christ Jesus, especially this season of Lent,

Bishop John Bradosky

Bishop to host tour of Holy Land

NALC Bishop John Bradosky will host a trip to Israel and Jordan Nov. 13-22, 2014.

For more information contact Pam Charas at mcharas@earthlink.net or 937-434-0993.



Marchers pass the U.S. Supreme Court building. The march commemorates the Court's 1973 ruling which legalized abortion in the United States. It is estimated that 56 million lives have been lost because of abortion since the 1973 ruling.



Members of the North American Lutheran Church were among tens of thousands of people who braved the bitter cold temperatures to take part in the 41st annual March for Life January 22 in Washington, D.C. Pictured here, from left, Pastor James Lehmann, Pastor David Wendel, Pastor Mark Chavez, Pastor Rebeca Heber, Bishop John Bradosky, and James Hansen.

March for Life

January 22, 2014 - Washington, D.C.



Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod take part in March for Life. (LCMS photo by Erik M. Lunsford)



Rindal Lutheran Church

Viking, Minnesota

The original Rindal Church, located in rural Viking, Minn., closed its doors with the congregation's last formal worship service in 1975. A Cemetery Board was established to maintain the church, its grounds, and cemetery. It had become a serene landmark to the area residents, bringing warm memories of days past.

But this is just where our story begins.

On March 13, 2011, a group of individuals began meeting in homes, with dreams of forming a new Lutheran Church. It didn't take long before we began to outgrow the homes we were meeting in, and we received an invitation to utilize the old country church. We quickly began the clean-up and renovation efforts needed to bring life back to this old country church.

From the beginning we were blessed with the ministerial guidance and services of Pastor Ollie Urdahl. And by mid-2011 we had established our Sunday School and Sunday worship services.



In October 2011 we approved our affiliation with the North American Lutheran Church with 65 charter members. We have continued to grow in numbers, strength and faith. But one thing is certain, Rindal Lutheran Church is resurrected!

We have an average of 46 people for worship each Sunday, and have a very active Sunday School program with over 20 kids. We may soon outgrow the current building, but we trust the Lord will lead us as He has in the past.

We'd like to extend a warm welcome to our NALC brothers and sisters. If you find yourself in our area, please worship with us, and find out for yourself the life and breath that God has given to the Old Country Rindal Church!



Preaching and Praying the Lenten Psalter

Preparing for the Sunday Sermon

Martin Luther once said that the Old Testament is veiled, that is, in darkness or confusion apart from a Christological reading, for apart from the revelation of God in Christ Jesus neither law nor promises can be appropriately understood (*Luther's Works* 1:217).

Indeed, we cannot make any sense of the New Testament apart from the Old. Any reading done in such a way is destructive of the Canon of Scripture, for it leads to false and faulty interpretations.

How could we understand what St. Paul is saying to us about Abraham or Adam if we did not listen to the LORD God as He speaks to us through the Old Testament? What would be missing from the Sermon on the Mount, if we had no point of reference for Jesus' words, "You have heard it said of old, but I say to you..." If we didn't believe that God took a handful of dust and formed a man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, would we know that Jesus breathing peace to His disciples who were so frightened that they shut themselves in behind locked doors, is just as spectacular as the creation of the first man?

As we approach the Psalms that are appointed for us in the Sundays in Lent, it is helpful to remember that throughout the Gospels we hear our Lord praying the Psalms just as he learned to as a child, for the Psalter was the hymn book, the prayer book of ancient Israel. If someone were to read the Passion narrative and did not know that Psalm 31 ("Into thy hands I commend my Spirit,") was the evening prayer of faithful Jews, how much would be lost for them in understanding that the Psalter is prayed in the dying breath of Jesus of Nazareth?

While the Old Testament looks for the Savior to come, in the witness of the New Testament we meet Him who is, who was, and who is to come. As we hold the Canon of Scripture in its unity what becomes clear is that the Holy Spirit speaks in every age as "the author who warns, writes, teaches, comforts, and brings to remembrance,"



From the Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin

and whose work gives us "access to the [divine] mystery."¹

It is within this sense of the unity of Scripture coming from the breath of God that we can use Scripture to interpret Scripture, which was a foundation of scriptural interpretation for Luther. When we hear the texts prayed and proclaimed on Sundays: the Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel, there is a vocative juxtapositioning of one text alongside another which becomes an occasion for the breaking in of the splendor of God's mercy upon our present darkness.

The Psalms are given to us to pray, not as some sort of timeless truths, but within the particularities of God's saving actions on our behalf. The Psalms invite us into a posture of prayer, an embodied trust, so that the unity of prayer and proclamation that fills the Psalter begins to fill our hearts as well.

The Psalms for each Sunday have been chosen to be a commentary or reflection on the appointed Old Testament reading for the day, and the Old Testament reading has been chosen to help open up the appointed Gospel text. The Psalm then, sometimes with subtlety, and sometimes with a brilliant incisiveness, will guide us to the Gospel itself, enriching our preaching, so that those who hear will be drawn to the One from whom the words of Psalter flow. The Psalter, as it were, is giving us a Christological nudge.

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¹ Christine Helmer, "Luther's Trinitarian Hermeneutic and the Old Testament," *Modern Theology*, Vol. 18, no.1, 55.

The Psalms for the five Sundays in Lent, Year A, are Psalms 32, 121, 95, 23, and 130, and taking Luther's gift of Scripture interpreting Scripture to heart, I invite you to start memorizing a Psalm each week. (Given that some of the favorite Psalms of the Christian community are included this Lent this task may not be too difficult.) Along with this discipline of memorization, we can take yet another word of instruction from Luther with us. He heard the Psalter as a meditation on the First Commandment,² and he also understood the Psalter to be, "so permeated by the Lord's Prayer and the Lord's Prayer by the Psalter that one can understand very well one from the other and that they happily harmonize" (*Luther's Works* 35:258).

Taking hold of these exegetical gifts that he has bequeathed to us, we may discover that each Psalm teaches us both what the LORD God commands and how He intends to fulfill that command in our lives. As we pray for what God has commanded, He will open our lives anew in His resurrecting love.

So, each week, take one of the five Psalms appointed for the Lenten Sundays. Work with a section at a time before you pray it altogether, and in the process of memorizing each verse, try the following practice. With the grammar of an unconditional promise, and the change in voice (first, second, or third person) when appropriate, preface each line with the First Commandment, and listen to the conversation.

Here is a model using the text of Psalm 32 that can be expanded:

Because I am the LORD thy God and thou shall have no other gods before me, therefore I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go.

Because I am the LORD thy God, therefore my steadfast love will surround those who love the LORD.

Because He is our God, and we shall have no gods before Him, many are the pangs of the wicked.

Because we shall have no other gods before this God, O LORD God, let us be glad in the LORD and rejoice.

Just as we pray for thy kingdom to come, thy will to be done, so we pray, *Thou art a hiding place for me, thou preservest me from trouble; thou dost encompass me with deliverance.*

Once we have memorized the Psalm there is nothing to stop us from conversing with the other nine commandments as well, for this path of obedience is a great gift. It becomes a way in which we can meditate on the law day and night (Psalm 1:2).

Exegesis in this manner, which has a primary component of memorization coupled with Scriptural conversation, does not preclude textual and formal studies by any means, but is intended to be used in concert with such study.

Memorization will help us to use our studies within a hermeneutic of trust, because a memorized text, whether spoken or sung, becomes tacit knowledge. When we have memorized a Biblical text so well that we know it in our bones, when it fills our waking and our sleeping, there is a sense that the text and its Author are reading us. Through the text, now written on our hearts, God is setting the direction for our daily lives.

By praying the text in this way, we are not only acknowledging the divine authority of the Biblical text, but we are truly brought into an act of submission to the LORD God, who has given us His Holy Word. As we engage in such disciplined prayerful preparation, we as preachers will be brought to life at the same time as we are calling the assembly to faithfulness and obedience. Let us give thanks to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who gives us life through his word, leading us in the way everlasting.

The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin is Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary and Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa. You may reach her at aschiffrin@tsm.edu.

² "Preface to Large Catechism," *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 361.

The Great Commission, Mission and Zion Brentwood Youth

By Donna Evans

Ask most teenagers, “What’s the Great Commission?” and you’ll most likely get a “no clue” along with a scowling, skeptical stare. But ask them if they want to travel great distances and spend a week away from home and you’ll get, “I am so there!”

Thus is the experience when introducing mission work with youth at Zion Lutheran Church Brentwood in Pittsburgh, Pa.

As many youth are in the process of developing their faith or just beginning to think about it, Zion has found mission trips to be a significant tool in discipleship formation. It is one of the ways we respond to the Great Commission among area youth.



Zion Lutheran Church Brentwood Youth from Pittsburgh, Pa., gathered for this group photo while on a mission trip to Columbia, S.C., in 2013.

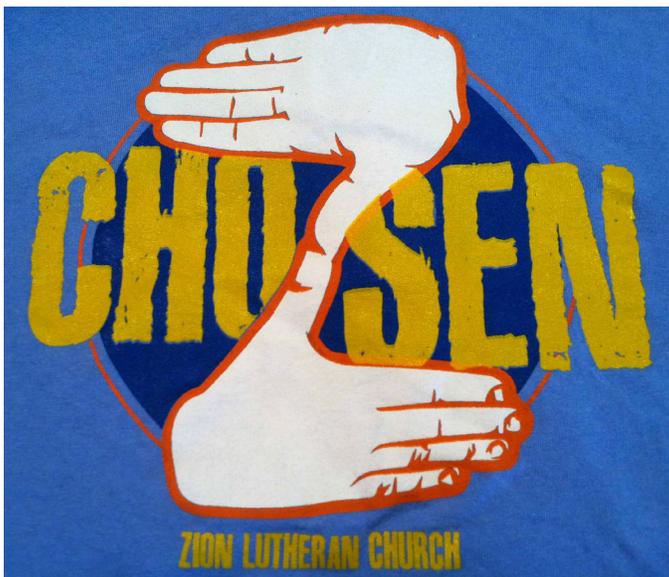
In past years, about 25 youth have traveled to places like Charleston, S.C.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Manassas, Va. Several of Zion’s teens take a friend along, introducing many to Christ and an experience like they’ve never had before.

On the trips, participants are asked to help at farms, nursing homes, charity distribution centers, day camps for under privileged children and such. They are kept very busy.

These trips also provide strong faith-building programs that include praise and worship, various programs and skits along with meaningful devotional time.

Youth have the opportunity to see their faith in action. And while these teens are serving the needy, they also find that the needy are serving them. Relationships built on the trips are reciprocal.

Most importantly, the trips remove the youth from their comfort zones and allow them to discover a lot about themselves and others. This year the group is headed



T-shirts with this “Z-Logo” are worn by youth from Zion Lutheran Church at most youth events.

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to Union Beach, N.J., to help with the continuing Super Storm Sandy relief efforts. There will be more physically demanding work required of our youth — demolitions, remodeling, and landscaping.

In addition to the yearly mission trips, confirmation-age students also attend a yearly weekend retreat. Some weekends are spent in the nearby mountains, but we also take advantage of Youth Encounter events. This January 20 of our youth attended a local Youth Encounter event with nearly 400 others of their age.

Parents encourage their kids to attend mission trips so that they have opportunities to serve others and step out of their focus on self. While that undoubtedly happens, the opportunities they have to verbalize their faith, ask serious questions, bond with their fellow travelers, gain confidence away from their parents, and take time to think about their relationship with the Lord is what seems to stay with them the longest.

The trips help to develop strength, community and support for our youth to live their lives for Christ. Our goal is to enable them to see that a week-long, summer trip to another state isn't what is needed to serve Christ. They can do it in their own backyard!

Just as the church isn't a building we visit one day a week, but rather the Body of Christ — mission work isn't done one week a year, but rather continually in our daily lives.



This image of joined hands was created by youth from Zion Lutheran Church Brentwood in Pittsburgh, Pa., after they participated in a Youth Encounter event.

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

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

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



Confession and Mission

On This Rock I Will Build My Church

By Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus made a powerful confessional and missional statement, “On this rock I will build My Church.”

There are three important parts to this powerful declaration:

On this rock - Confession.

I will build - Builder.

My Church - Owner.

Peter answered the king of all questions posed to the 12 disciples in Caesarea Philippi, Who is Jesus? The answer we give to that question determines our identity. Peter unknowingly received a powerful revelation with the help of God’s grace. That confession — that answer Peter gave — didn’t come from flesh or blood. It is not something that comes from inside of us. It is not something that comes from our intellectual maturity. It is neither the product of our emotions nor our reason.

The true person and identity of Christ is what God reveals to us through his saving grace. The person of Jesus was revealed to Peter, and he confessed it in the presence of all of the apostles and in the presence of Jesus. Right away Jesus responded by saying, “This truth is not revealed to you by flesh and blood but by my Father from above.” That means it was not a rationalized philosophical human truth nor was it a religious traditional truth. It was a pure revelation given to human beings by God’s pure grace. It was a revelation that led to the great confession.

That great confession was what Peter declared in Matthew 16:16, “You are Christ, the Son of the Living God!” That is the heartbeat of the Christian confession. Whoever believes in Jesus as the anointed Messiah who came and died for our

redemption and who believes and confesses that Jesus is the Son of the living God shall be saved. There is no salvation apart from that truth.

Based on this confession Jesus mentions the word *church* for the first time. “On this rock I will build my church.” That rock is Christ Jesus. He is the rock on which the church is built. He is the cornerstone and the foundation that is laid beneath the church.

The church of Jesus Christ is built and owned by Jesus himself. He said, “I will build,” which states in clear terms that he is the builder of the church. He also says “my church,” which tells us that he owns the church.

In simple terms the apostolic church is built, by Him, through Him and for Him. It is all about Jesus and not about us. Then one may ask one critical question, “What is our role in the mission of the church? What is that we are called to do?” The answer is simple: We are called and sent to make disciples of all nations.

Making disciples is our mission. Discipleship is done in the context of relationship.

Relationship with God - *Love the Lord your God.*

Relationship with Neighbor - *You shall love your neighbor. ...*

Relationship with Self - *... as yourself.*

In the Great Commandment, love is given as the key driver of Christian relationships. According to the Great Commandment given by Jesus there are three objects of this love. The first is God, next is our neighbor and finally ourselves. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is the basis for all human relationships. Relationship with God is the basis of our redemption. Based on that redemption we are sent into the world to connect with people and share the saving gospel of Jesus.

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Based on this we are traveling throughout North America offering regional discipleship and mission conferences.

Our goal is to train at least six people from every congregation and equip them to be congregational agents of transformation. In each conference we offer four major presentations:

- 1. Biblical foundations of Discipleship and House Churches**
- 2. Planting House Churches — Processes and Best Practices.**
- 3. Missional Hospitality — starting the congregational mission cycle, inviting, hosting and sending.**
- 4. Be fruitful and multiply — congregational growth and multiplication.**

Based on these four topics we aim to challenge, inspire, equip and encourage every ordained and lay disciple of Jesus throughout our church. What we are proposing is simple. There are many who are filled with fear when looking into their neighborhoods and into the trends of the times. They are overwhelmed by their circumstances just like the women who were going to the tomb of Jesus. “Who will roll away the stone for us?”

The cry of the 21st century church is, “Who will roll away the stones of unbelief, skepticism, revisionism, atheism and many of the other ‘isms’?” I have good news for you. The stone is rolled away. Have no fear and be of good courage. Jesus has gone ahead of you into the world. Our task and our mission is one — and only one — confessing our faith boldly as we live and move in and through this world. Based on our bold, zealous, joyful and open confession, He who is the builder and the owner of the church will build His own church. Now let us gather in our congregations, in our house churches and in our regional conferences and confess Jesus as our Lord and our Savior.



Participants in the West Coast Regional House Church Ministry Conference Feb. 21-22 at St. Timothy Lutheran Church in San Jose, Calif.

NALC Network Update

The NALC Network is continuing to grow and is nearly ready for an official launch. There are several different aspects of this network.

The first is the opportunity for web design. For those congregations who already have web design and technical support, we will eventually be able to link the NALC’s Network directly to your website and vice versa.

The second aspect of the NALC Network is the community site. This is designed to help network members of NALC congregations, church professionals, and friends of the NALC. It will provide a place to network and resource with regard to mission, discipleship, tech support, house churches, disaster relief, worship ideas, theological discussions, prayer networking, building relationships, and much more!

Stay tuned for more information regarding the official launch. If you have questions in the interim, contact Todd Harrison at todd@nalcnetwork.com.

Congregational Reports

Congregations should have received a request by e-mail to complete annual reports for 2013. The reports may be completed online using the link provided in the e-mail and available on the NALC website (under the resources tab). If you have any questions, contact the NALC Administrative office at nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org or 888-551-7254.

The Pastor-Parish Relationship

Pastors and congregations continue to ask me to write more about how to foster and develop positive pastor/parish relationships. I thought I had written about that already in my *Ministry Matters* articles! What this tells me, however, is that this is a great need and that our congregational leaders and pastors often don't know what it takes to strengthen and support healthy relationships between pastor and people. So here are a few more points to remember.

The first thing to bear in mind is that the relationship between pastor and congregation is more akin to a marriage than an employer-employee relationship. This means the relationship is covenantal and requires work — lots of work — to maintain it in a healthy and mutually-supportive manner.

If the pastor-parish relationship is similar to a marriage, then we need to keep in mind that when there are issues, conflicts, and difficulties, it is critically important to seek help for the “marriage” as early as possible. One of the realities in marital counseling is that most couples seek assistance too late. Often, both realize there are problems, but they make an appointment with a counselor as a last ditch effort before separating. Most marriages can be saved, if only the couple will ask for help before there is a crisis.

In the pastor-parish relationship, many issues can be resolved by simple communication and conversation. When it seems outside assistance might be helpful, don't wait until there are folks demanding the pastor's resignation. Contact the bishop's office and ask for help. We are here to support and strengthen our congregations and pastors.

Second, it is important for congregational leaders to *be aware of and beware of triangulation.* Each year when new council members were elected in parishes I served, we offered a council retreat. One of the most helpful insights I shared was information about triangulation. This happens when members of the congregation try to create a triangle between themselves, the council member, and, often, the



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

pastor. It happens when a congregation member approaches a council person or officer saying, “The pastor hurt my feelings, and I want you to tell him/her about it — but don't use my name.” This triangulates the council person, creating a no-win situation. How can the pastor help, when the complaint is anonymous? Now the council person is involved in what should be a personal, one-on-one conversation between the pastor and the offended person.

The general rules for congregations I have served are these: no triangulation; communications must be open and honest; no “secret communications” are allowed — family secrets are always destructive and create an unhealthy climate.

If a council person is approached with a complaint or criticism of the pastor by a member wanting to remain anonymous, the appropriate response is: “I will not communicate an anonymous message. However, I will go with you to speak with the pastor.” This eliminates triangulation and fosters direct, transparent communication. Now, a positive outcome is possible.

Finally, in the pastor-parish relationship — as with marriage and all relationships — the key is communicate, communicate, communicate!

Nothing positive ever arises from gossip, secrets, “confidential surveys of the congregation,” or shadow leadership which sees itself as really guiding the congregation, rather than the council.

Councils are bound to support and encourage the pastor, which means open and honest

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

2014 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 on Facebook or by contacting Pastor Phillip Gagnon at pastorphil@me.com.

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communication. We all know this is not always easy or comfortable, but our Lord provides a mandate for direct communication in St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 18. There, Jesus encourages us to address problems and conflicts, sins against one another with direct, one-to-one communication, not involving others unless absolutely necessary. In fact, disciplinary processes in the NALC are guided by the instruction of Jesus in Matthew 18. We would do well to heed our Lord’s words and seek to follow them, not only in the pastor-parish relationship, but in all relationships in home, family, church, and society!

So, to summarize: when conflict arises in the Body of Christ and outside help is needed, ask for assistance early; be aware of and beware of attempts to triangulate you; and communicate, communicate, communicate!

Lenten devotional book from Pastor Wendel

From Ashes to Easter: A Lenten Devotional Booklet for NALC Members and Friends by Pastor David Wendel, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, is available at www.thenalc.org.

Church of the Living God celebrates new location

Church of the Living God, an NALC mission congregation that serves Chinese people in Houston, Texas, celebrated the purchase of a building in Houston's China town.

The new building will enable them to expand their ministry.

Pastor Joshua Ong told the 2013 NALC Convocation about the exciting ministry of the congregation and their hopes for a building.

Gifts to support the congregation may be sent to their new address: 5855 Sovereign Drive, Unit D; Houston, TX 77036.



Preaching with Relevance

This month's column is specifically for those of you who have responsibilities as preachers. However, this column is also for any of us who consider ourselves called as teachers of and witnesses to the Gospel.

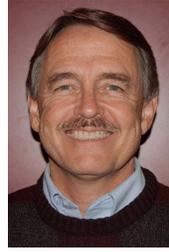
Billy Graham, in the first issue of *Preaching* magazine (1985), wrote an article about "certain things that are true in the hearts and minds of all people." This article was recently reprinted in the November-December 2013 issue of *Preaching*.

Graham wrote of five "psychological and spiritual factors he felt were common to people in virtually every culture." As I share these, consider whether you seek to address these needs when you preach, teach and/or witness.

1. "Life's needs are not totally met by social improvement or material affluence." Graham then quoted Luke 12:15: "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." This is a message that should not be limited to your annual stewardship campaign.

2. "There is an essential emptiness in every life without Christ." The best-known quote from Blaise Pascal was then cited by Graham: "There's a God-shaped vacuum in life that only God can fill." I thought of Matthew 11:29-30 where Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

3. "We can assume in our hearers a loneliness." This brought to mind one of my favorite Scripture texts, where Paul describes his ideal for the Body of Christ: "But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). This is a worthy goal for every community of faith.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

4. "We are speaking to people who have a sense of guilt. ... When we preach Christ we are speaking directly to the nagging, depressing problem of guilt." This reminded me of Romans 5:6-8: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

5. "There is the universal fear of death." This brings Hebrews 2:14-15 to mind: "Since (God's) children have flesh and blood, Christ too shared in their humanity so that by His death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." When it comes to "needs," it doesn't get much more basic than this.

I consider myself fortunate in that I still enjoy preaching and teaching after so many years. However, too often I have failed to speak to these five basic human needs. Perhaps part of it is my unhealthy need to always be appreciated and affirmed as a preacher. It reminds me of the cartoon where a preacher's wife is cautioning her husband before a sermon: "Trust me, dear, after 40 years of ministry, it's a bit too late for 'edgy'." It hasn't been 40 years yet, but it's definitely too late, in my case, for "edgy."

However, *relevant* is still a reasonable hope and goal for my preaching. And it's a reasonable hope and goal for all of us as we proclaim the Gospel. Fortunately, Scripture addresses all of these needs in meaningful and profound ways. We have only, with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to effectively communicate God's Word so that our listeners understand its relevance in their daily lives.

NALC Disaster Preparedness Training

The NALC Disaster Response Task Force is offering educational workshops to provide training to volunteers preparing their congregations to form volunteer disaster teams.

This disaster preparedness and response training is intended for those interested in learning how the North American Lutheran Church responds to domestic disasters and how congregations and individuals can be part of the team.

Each Mission District assists in the formation of teams and the preparedness training. There will be three training sessions each year.

The first session will be held Saturday, March 22, at Peace Lutheran Church in Rosenberg, Texas, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cost is \$50 per person and covers both basic and specialized levels of training. Recognized credentials will be provided by the South Texas Mission District.

Two levels of training are covered. Level One/Basic provides training in unskilled disaster response for

debris removal and basic information on FEMA regulations.

Level Two/Specialized offers training in case management, donations management, volunteer team coordination, spiritual and emotional care, and construction estimating. Following Level One training, participants will complete a strengths survey to see which area of specialization they should focus on.

Future training events are planned for the Ohio Mission District (May 2014) and the Carolinas Mission District (Autumn 2014). Three events will be offered each year. Further information will be posted as details are finalized.

For more information or to register for the disaster preparedness training visit www.thenalc.org where you can download the registration form.

You may also contact Mary Woodward, NALC Disaster Response Coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or mwoodward_1@msn.com.

NALC Contact Information

NALC Ministry Office
3500 Mill Run Drive
Hilliard, OH 43026-7770
614-777-5709
info@thenalc.org

Bishop
Bishop John Bradosky
jbradosky@thenalc.org

Missions
Pastor Gemechis Buba
gbuba@thenalc.org

Please send donations to the Administrative Office in New Brighton, Minn.

NALC Administrative Office
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202
888-551-7254 or 651-633-6004
nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org

General Secretary
Pastor Mark Chavez
mchavez@thenalc.org

Ministry & Ecumenism
Pastor David Wendel
dwendel@thenalc.org

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3500 Mill Run Drive
Hilliard, OH 43026-7770

Phone: 614-777-5709

www.thenalc.org

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

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