

Girl's vision for Water Missions inspires congregational support

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

For the last several years it has been the practice of St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio, to have a special Lenten appeal, usually led by someone from the youth program.

Past Lenten appeals have raised funds to buy livestock through World Vision and to provide beds for people in need through Bed Brigade, a local organization in Columbus, Ohio.

Sarah Wittenberg, a confirmation student, asked the youth ministers and pastors of St. John's if this year's Lenten appeal could be for Water Missions International, a non-profit Christian group that provides sustainable safe water and sanitation solutions for people in developing countries and disaster areas.

Sarah's grandmother had been a delegate to the 2013 NALC Convocation in Pittsburgh, Pa., and had heard a presentation from the organization. She gathered some information and gave it to her granddaughter.

When her granddaughter came to the pastoral leadership of the church, their immediate response was, "Yes! Great! Go for it!"

At the time Pastors Don Allman and Scott Ness were figuring out their mid-week Lenten services. They decided to frame their entire Lenten series around water. Each week one of them preached on one of the water passages in the Bible, such as Jesus' calming of the storm, meeting the woman at the well, and turning water into wine. They talked



Sarah Wittenberg's vision for mission inspired members of St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio, to raise \$10,000 to support Water Missions International.

about what Jesus had to say about water, what Jesus did with water, and what water means to our faith.

Water bottles were distributed to everyone who came to worship on Ash Wednesday and the first Sunday in Lent. Special labels were put on these bottles, urging people to remember their baptisms as they drank the water, and then, when the bottle was empty, to put coins, dollar bills, or a check into the bottle, and return it the next time they came to worship.

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According to Pastor Scott Ness, “People responded in incredible ways.” Gifts to the appeal totaled \$10,000, which Pastor Ness described as “an actual shock.” He further commented, “Sarah never publicly stated her goal. Later she told us that her dream was \$5,000. The amount that came in was double that.”

Pastor Ness said that part of the uniqueness of the appeal is that it really empowered a young person. “We supported her from the pulpit and during announcements, but it was her show. It is a fun thing for us when we can empower our youth to do ministry and when the youth are an example of what it means to follow Jesus.”



Youth from St. John's Lutheran Church label bottles of water for their Lenten fund-raising emphasis.

St. John's has weekly worship services in two separate spaces — the sanctuary and a gymnasium — with a combined weekend worship attendance of around 400. Five-gallon water jugs were set up in each worship space as a constant reminder. Several times during the ensuing weeks these jugs were emptied after being filled with donations, and then were set out again for refilling.

The appeal was promoted through Holy Week, and gifts came in through June. As the donation period came to a close, someone heard that the response

was \$900 short of an even \$10,000. So he wrote a check for \$900, bringing the total to \$10,000.

According to Pastor Ness, some of the youth, seeing what Sarah and youth before her had done, are thinking about what they can do next year during Lent. “Sarah's example, and the response, are generating a spirit of generosity. It is so exciting to watch.”

The delegates from St. John's to the 2014 NALC Convocation in Charleston, S.C., presented a check for \$10,000 to representatives from Water Missions International. Sarah and her grandmother came to Charleston on vacation and were there for the presentation. Water Missions headquarters is in Charleston.

A local newspaper ran an article in their Faith and Family section about Sarah and what she had done, giving further exposure to her good work.

St. John's is located in Grove City, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus. It was one of the first congregations to join the North American Lutheran Church. If you would like to know more about this appeal, contact Pastor Scott Ness at sness@stjohnsgc.org.



Members of St. John's Lutheran Church present a check to Water Missions International.

To learn more about Water Missions International go to www.watermissions.org.

Canadian youth gather for Impact

Over 60 youth from across Alberta and a couple from England and Russia, plus their leaders, descended on the Goldeye Retreat Centre in Nordegg, Alberta, for the first Impact Canada Youth Event Aug. 24-27. The event was sponsored by the Canada Mission District of the NALC.

“Yours: Glory, Power, Majesty and Praise” taken from 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 was the theme for the event. Each attribute was the focus for a day’s study.



Participants in the Impact Canada youth event pose for a group photo.



NALC Bishop John Bradosky speaks at the Impact Canada youth event.

Local leaders took turns presenting each day, with guest speakers, Pastor Leif Camp from Russia addressing the youth on Monday night and NALC Bishop John Bradosky speaking to them on Tuesday night.

Although it was a quick trip for Bishop Bradosky (arriving Monday night and leaving Tuesday night), the youth were thrilled to have him just spend time with them and participate in activities including archery, the high ropes static course with giant swing, gym games, and the lake.

Joel and Aimée Pakan of Tangled Blue led worship throughout the retreat and provided the more musical campers a chance to jam with them. Staff from Wilderness Ranch Camp and Mulhurst Lutheran Camp (summer camps in Alberta) took charge of campfire and evening worship on Monday and Tuesday, respectively.

The retreat concluded with a Communion service led by Maggie Theiss and presided over by Pastor Kevin Ree, which drew the various themes of the week together, and

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Bishop Bradosky joined the youth in experiencing the high ropes course.



Tangled Blue leads singing at Impact Canada.

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then the youth received individual blessings from leaders before hitting the road.

Despite a few initial hiccups that often come with planning and organizing an event for the first time, the Impact Canada Youth Event was an unqualified success and the Youth Ministry Committee of the Canada Mission District is already working on details for next year's gathering.

Impact Canada Youth Event



Mission trip connects congregations

St. Paul's in Latrobe, Pa. and Nile in Rochester, N.Y.

Members of St. Paul Lutheran Church of Latrobe, Pa., recently returned from a mission trip. The trip was a visit to the Nile — that is, Nile Lutheran Church in Rochester, N.Y.

Nile and St. Paul entered into a mission partnership in 2013. That mission partnership has entailed prayer, visits to each congregation, worship and learning.

“It is difficult to write in words our experience with Pastor NTahombaye Nestory and the members of Nile Lutheran Church. As we came together in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they immersed us in their culture and the faith we share in common,” writes Treanna Smith, a member of St. Paul. She and her husband, Lew, were among seven members who made this trip. “They welcomed us with open arms, generosity, and love.”

There were several key components to this visit. The first was worship. For this visit Pastor Nestory received permission for worship, Bible study and teaching to be held at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Rochester.

“The vicar and congregation were exceedingly generous in sharing their building for our visit,” said Pastor Mark Werner of St. Paul. “By making their building available, we were able to worship, teach Sunday school, do Bible Study and catechism classes, and share meals together.”

Susan McKeever, whose mother attends St. Paul and also participated in the trip, taught English as a



Treanna Smith of St. Paul Lutheran Church teaches children from Nile Lutheran Church in Rochester, N.Y., the story of David and Goliath.

second language for some of the adults at Nile. Lay members from St. Paul taught the stories of David and Goliath and Daniel and the Lion's Den. The 10 children who participated each day were enthralled with these stories of faith.

A major component of the trip were the visits to homes of the Nile members. “They treated us royally and welcomed our presence,” said Treanna Smith. “Each family provided mini-meals as we went from home to home. In many ways, we have become a second family to them.”

During the visit the group rejoiced with Pastor Nestory's daughter, Grace, as she passed her citizenship test. One by one, members of the church have become or are in the process of becoming citizens. There are still family members

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that remain in the Sudan and are in great need of prayer.

They also visited the newest member of the congregation, both at the hospital and at home. Akezamutima (meaning one who makes a happy heart) was born the day the St. Paul members arrived. Gabriel and Esperance's second child has made Ricky a very happy older brother.

Worship is a particular challenge for the Nile Lutheran Church as they are currently meeting in an office building. After joining the NALC in 2011, they were evicted from the ELCA congregation that was hosting them. They found a temporary home at an Assembly of God church until that congregation started a Sunday evening service. This meant that Nile was on the hunt again for another worship site.

Nile Lutheran Church is currently in the process of purchasing a building in downtown Rochester, near their current site of worship. Prayers are needed for this to happen as there are still variances for



Pastor Mark Werner and Pastor NTahombaye Nestory with children.

occupancy and parking to be worked out with the city of Rochester. Once they are able to take ownership of the building they will be doing some much needed remodeling to make it suitable for a church setting.

Finances are a big challenge. When the variances are granted they will still need to raise or receive donations of \$25,000 to 30,000.

The Nile congregation are people of deep faith and trust. They are committed to being in the city.

Pastor Nestory and several members of the Nile congregation provide transportation on a weekly basis so many of the members can attend worship. Additionally, Pastor Nestory serves as the main translator for families, particularly as parents meet with school teachers.

"We were humbled, learned so much from, and could not help but fall in love with our South Sudanese brothers and sisters, young and old, at Nile. There were many tears our last day as we said goodbye. Their love, kindness, faith, generosity, and joy are forever engraved upon our hearts," said Pastor Werner.



Pastor Mark Werner leads an intergenerational Bible study.

De Soto, Ill., mission congregation to dedicate new sanctuary

Christ the King Lutheran Church is a mission congregation of the NALC Great Rivers Mission District, located in De Soto (Jackson County) in southern Illinois.

When a first vote to leave their previous church body failed in October 2010, members met, prayed, discerned, and planned. On Dec. 7, 2010, 25 former members of congregations in De Soto, Ill., and First Lutheran, Murphysboro, Ill., met in Virgil Stone's living room.



The new sanctuary of Christ the King Lutheran Church in De Soto, Ill.

A commitment to tithe 10 percent of all congregational receipts to missions outside the congregation was agreed upon before the first offering was received.

The new congregation, Christ the King Lutheran Church, had its first worship service on Dec. 12, 2010, in "The Stone House." Worship, learning, and fellowship have been blessed by space in The Stone House and rented space in De Soto Village Hall. God has blessed their faithful "Yes."

Blessed with faithful local stewardship, Christ the King has been financially self-supporting from the beginning. Grace-full mission gifts helped them purchase and prepare five acres of land in 2012. Building plans were approved in January 2013.

Groundbreaking for their 40 x 90-foot building took place in August 2013, and on July 20, 2014, the congregation moved into its first "house" at 67 Crane Road in De Soto, Ill.

A Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication will take place in the new "house" at 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 15. Refreshments and fellowship will follow. All are cordially invited to attend this celebration.

During their three-and-one-half years of life together, the congregation has been richly blessed

by God's grace in so many ways. Faithful stewardship of time, talent, and treasure by members has enabled Christ the King to be self-supporting from the beginning. Mission gifts from other congregations and individuals have moved them forward more quickly than they could have imagined.

Community Vacation Bible School in 2011, 2012, and 2013 averaged over 30 students and 10-15 adult teachers and helpers. Meals were served each day.

The Children's Book Ministry has given away and exchanged Bible Story books since 2012. Christ the King members' "Helping Hands" have weeded, cleared, cleaned, and mowed needy neighbor's yards. God is making footprints of grace in Jackson County, Ill.

Prayer support and prayerful financial support continue to bless the congregation to grow and strengthen its ministry. They are lifting Jesus up amid significant rural poverty in Jackson County. It is through Him that they utter their "Amen!" to God for his glory.

Visit www.christthekinglc.net to learn more about Christ the King Lutheran Church.

Women of NALC Annual Gathering

“Wonderful,” “very inspiring,” “excellent,” “such a blessing,” “so encouraging,” were some of the comments about the speakers at the 2014 Annual Gathering of the Women of the NALC.

The day focused on Ephesians 2:10.

Pastor Trina Petersen from A New Thing Christian Church in Lithonia, Ga., presented the Bible study, “Created to Do Good Works.”

Afternoon keynote speaker, Pastor Heidi Punt of Christ United Lutheran Church in Granite Falls, N.C., spoke about how God’s grace — not good works — has made us acceptable to God and that, through reading the Word and prayer, we can find the purposes for which God created us.

Each attendee received a copy of “Bridges on the Journey - A Woman’s Journey of Discipleship,” a gift from Margaret Fitzwater of The Navigators. The study is designed to help establish our relationship with Jesus Christ. The Navigators is a Christian ministry working with NALC leadership for Christ-centered life coaching that helps individuals grow spiritually as they navigate through life.

The business portion of the meeting included approving last year’s minutes and adoption of the 2015 Budget. New members to The Women’s Council were elected: Sherrie Palan (second term), Beverly Bruns, Linda Hood, and Pam Charas. Outgoing members are Karen Hansen, Lynn Coughenour and Darlene Deck.

There were roundtable discussions on how to share God’s love through our works during a “Shining our Lights” time. These opportunities were then shared with the whole gathering. The women laughed during the day as they played *Good Works Bingo* and *Pass that Gift*.

Participants heard reports from the Carolinas Mission District and the Mid-Northeast Mission District.

Mary Woodward Bates, NALC Disaster Services Coordinator, talked about how individual women’s groups can help this ministry. She introduced

Pastor David McGettigan, chair of the NALC Disaster Task Force, for a report.

Jessie Phillips, task force member, talked about the “Luci Lights” program. Luci Lights are solar powered lanterns that can benefit two NALC mission partners: NALC Disaster Response (can provide a source of light in disasters) and the Malawi Orphan Care Project (can provide feedings for orphans from the sales profits).

Opportunities to serve the WNALC, other than being on The Women’s Council, were discussed: serving on one of the committees or on an Advisory Board. Women were asked to prayerfully consider sharing their gifts from God in service to the WNALC in some form.

Peggy Hoppes gave a final devotional, “The Proverbs 31 Woman,” an excerpt from a new Bible study by Sola Publishing that she has authored.

The offering from this gathering of \$924 was designated as a gift to the North American Lutheran Seminary. Prayers throughout the day were offered by seminarians Tonya Brittain, Nicole Collins and Dawn Rister.

Check out the website, www.WNALC.org, for contact information on the new Women’s Council, the 2015 budget, and other information for congregational women’s ministries.

The 2014-2015 Women’s Council met for a brief meeting after the Gathering and elected officers for the year. Women’s Council members are: Brenda Boor (Chair), Jessie Phillips (Vice Chair), Jeanne Wallace (Treasurer), Sherrie Palan (Secretary), Kay Weaver, Beverly Bruns, Pam Charas and Linda Hood.

The Women’s Council plans to meet Oct. 10-12 for a vision planning and team-building conference in Wimberley, Texas.

You may send questions, suggestions or inspirations for WNALC ministry to Brenda Boor, chair, at brenniboor@icloud.com.

Christian Faith and Same Sex Attraction

Finding Paths to Ministry

How can our churches speak the Good News of Jesus Christ to our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer neighbors? And how can their faith and discipleship be nurtured so that they, in turn, can use their gifts and exercise their ministries in our churches?



Wesley Hill



Wesley Hill



Eve Tushnet



Mark Yarhouse

“Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction” is a conference designed to explore these questions. The conference will be held Oct. 10-11 at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa.

“The historic Biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality affirms that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, requiring fidelity and chastity, while the chaste single state is equally honored and celebrated. Such teaching requires sacrifice and discipline on the part of gay Christians (as it does for all Christians), but it also affirms the blessings and opportunities that gay people bring to the life of faith,” conference organizers explain.

“‘Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction’ will provide a forum in which to examine these questions for the sake of Christian witness in our world today.”

The conference will feature three major presentations and a variety of break-out sessions on various themes.

The major presentations include:

+ **“Understanding Sexual Identity”** by Dr. Mark Yarhouse, Hughes Endowed Chair and Professor of Psychology at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va., and director of the school’s Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity. Dr. Yarhouse has spent several years promoting dialogue between people who view the topic of sexual identity differently. He has published over 60 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and is author or

co-author of several books, including *Sexual Identity Synthesis*; and *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends*.

+ **“Beyond the Culture Wars: Listening to LGBTQ People in the Parish Today”** by Melinda Selmys, a Catholic writer, blogger, and speaker. She is the author of *Sexual Authenticity: An Intimate Reflection on Homosexuality and Catholicism* and *Sexual Authenticity: More Reflections*.

+ **“Spiritual Friendship: Celibacy as a Call to Love”** by Dr. Wesley Hill, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity School for Ministry. He is the author of *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* and two forthcoming books, *Paul and the Trinity* and *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*. He is a regular columnist for *Christianity Today*.

Also leading workshops and participating in a panel discussion is Eve Tushnet who lives in Washington, D.C., where she was raised somewhere between atheism and Reform Judaism. She co-founded her high school’s gay-straight alliance and entered the Catholic Church in 1998, during her sophomore year at Yale University. She is a freelance writer and a recovering alcoholic. Tushnet blogs regularly at *The American Conservative* and *Patheos*. Her work has been published by the *Atlantic*, *Weekly Standard*, *Commonweal*, and *First Things*.

More information on the conference is available at www.tsm.edu.

Reformation Conference at NALS North Carolina House of Studies

The Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer and the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen will be the featured speakers at the annual Reformation Conference hosted by the North American Lutheran Seminary House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.

The Oct. 30 conference will feature two afternoon lectures at the seminary, followed by a dinner and worship service at Ascension Lutheran Church in Charlotte.

The featured lectures will be: “What Holds When Everything Shifts” by Dr. Nestingen and “Church and Culture Today: Challenges and Opportunities” by Dr. Lehenbauer.

Dr. Lehenbauer is the executive director of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations. He will offer reflections on significant challenges and opportunities for the church in North America today as it responds to and intersects with contemporary cultural trends and realities. Drawing on St. Peter’s depiction of Christians as “resident aliens” (and insights from the classic work of the same name by contemporary American theologian Stanley Hauerwas), he will highlight some Christ-centered theological themes that offer hope, guidance and encouragement to Christians as we seek to share and embody the Gospel of Christ in an increasingly post-church society.

Dr. Nestingen is Professor Emeritus of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., an adjunct professor for the North American Lutheran Seminary, and a member of the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine for Lutheran CORE and the NALC. He will offer an exegetical treatment of 1 Peter, particularly the notion of exile. Peter is addressing a people of diaspora who have suffered the double loss of their homeland and their religious community. Their normal sources of strength and stability are broken and gone. Such dislocation is pervasive in our public life. St. Peter gives us some



James Nestingen



Joel Lehenbauer

clues and provides some insight into what it means to be a faithful disciple of Christ Jesus in a hostile context.

The conference will also feature a panel discussion with Dr. Nestingen, Dr. Lehenbauer, NALC Bishop John Bradosky and the Rev. Dr. John Denniger, LCMS Southeastern District President.

The annual *Ecclesia Plantanda* Lecture Series is sponsored by the Michael C.D. McDaniel Center for Theology in the Department of Lutheran Studies at Gordon-Conwell. The center is named for Bishop Michael McDaniel, a former professor and bishop in North Carolina.

“The Michael C.D. McDaniel Center for Theology is proud to honor his commitment to orthodoxy by hosting what we hope will be an ongoing inter-Lutheran dialogue in our *Ecclesia Plantanda* lecture series. We come together as confessional Lutherans to do theology for the sake of the church — in Bishop McDaniel’s words, in order to ‘enhance our common witness to Christ,’” the conference brochure explains.

For details on the conference, please download the conference brochure at www.thenalc.org.



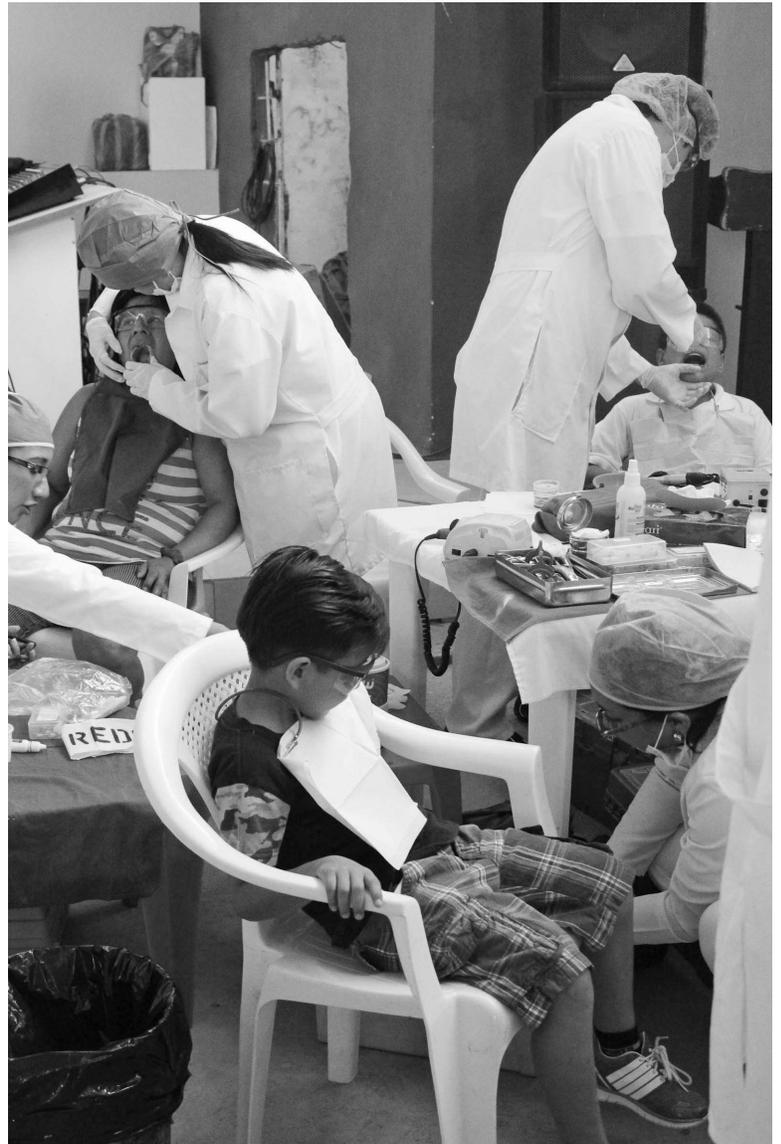
Pastor Didi Panzo, an NALC missionary in Ecuador, was a key leader in organizing a Day of Christian Service in six different communities. The Aug. 30 event provided free assistance with medical, dental, psychological, legal and spiritual needs. Paz y Esperanza (Peace and Hope), the organization Pastor Panzo serves, joined with 19 other Christian agencies to form a Christian network called REDI (Red Evangelica Diaconal Interinstitucional) to make more visible the work that Evangelical organizations are doing for the good of the community.

Ecuador





Day of Christian Service



Bishop's Report to the Convocation

Following is the text of Bishop John Bradosky's oral report to the 2014 NALC Convocation.

I count it an honor and privilege to serve as your Bishop and am grateful for the trust you have placed in me, thankful for this opportunity. I have continued to learn from our pastors, lay leaders, Deans, staff, former bishops and especially Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring. His encouragement, experience and generous sharing of his time and expertise have been a precious gift to me and to you.

Gifted individuals who are willing to offer their wisdom and sound advice surround me. The challenges and opportunities we face require a consultative and collegial style for effectiveness. In spite of such support, I am certain that I have made many mistakes throughout this past year, and I ask for your forgiveness, understanding and patience. I continue to trust in Christ, rely on Christ, follow Christ, and, in all I say and do, attempt to honor Christ.

My written report is included in your Convocation materials. The written report focuses on the past year. My hope in these few moments is to focus our attention on the future. The past has been difficult. The future is filled with hope and tremendous possibilities, but none of it is easy.

Over these past several years I have listened to the stories of our pastors and congregational leaders. They have shared their painful and grief-filled journeys. For some the loss was intense but immediate. For others it was as if they were a part of a long hospice experience. For all of us death is a part of life, an enemy, but a defeated enemy, through Christ. Yet, the experience of grief can overwhelm us. It drains us of energy and strength. It can consume our life. Grief can destroy relationships and undermine our sense of community, isolating us from one another. It can take away our sense of purpose and direction for living.

I see two clear paths for coping with the process of grieving. Our grief will either turn us in on ourselves and become destructive or it will be redeemed by Christ, drawing us closer to Him and to one another, filling us with compassionate love for others.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

I am certain there are many of you here today who have experienced the kind of grief that makes your hopes seem hopeless, your priorities irrelevant, your sense of purpose pointless, your dreams a nightmare, your future consumed with surviving the next minute, and all the things you thought you could count on in this life have vanished. God seemed distant and uncaring. Times when the truth doesn't reach us.

Kristi and I experienced that kind of grief at the death of our six-year old son, Joshua. It all happened in a moment when the emergency room doctor walked into the small family conference room and said "I'm sorry, we tried, but there was nothing we could do." It was all gone, my son and this life I had loved. The grief, the pain, the loss overwhelmed us.

Following our son's death my grief was all consuming and my depression so deep I could barely get out of bed. On one occasion I remember lying on my bed praying in my anger, "Lord, I am not moving from this bed until you show me what it is you want me to do. What is the meaning of life in such a hostile world? What is the purpose?" A few minutes later our four-year-old daughter, Jessica, came into the room and said, "Daddy, I want you to play with me." I said, "Not now, Jessie, Daddy's praying." I continued to pray, "Lord, if you want me to get out of bed, you had better show me what you want me to do because I'm not moving until then."

Again, Jessica returned to my room with the same request, "Daddy, I want you to play with me, and I want you to play with me right now." This time she grabbed my hand and pulled my arm. It just so

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happened that because of the way I was laying in the bed when she pulled my arm, I fell out of the bed onto the floor, flat on my face. This was the first redemptive moment in my grief. There was no doubt Jesus was answering my prayer by placing before me my daughter who needed me to invest in her life. What I was mourning was my inability to invest any more of myself in my son. The Lord said, "Don't you see this life in front of you needs you to invest in her?" And I did.

The redemptive love of Christ in the midst of my grief taught me that the only things with eternal significance in this life are relationships with Christ through faith and those He has given us to love and care for in Christian community. Everything else, Jesus said, is dust and rust. Through the grief Jesus began to direct my life to the pursuit of discipleship.

The Lord placed a man in my life who began to disciple me by helping me to focus on Jesus — the Jesus revealed in His Word. His name was S. James Kocsis. He was the first person to comfort us in the emergency room. Everyone wants to give you books and devotional material when you are grieving, but I told Jim I wanted to hear from Jesus. He told me Jesus was willing if I was ready. I said, "If he is willing why don't I hear from Him?" Jim asked me how much time I spent in the Word. I said, "A lot, after all I am a pastor in the Church." He said, "Well, I would like you to take a little time evaluating how much time you spend in the Word. I want you to keep track of everything you read including the Bible." The next day he showed up with a logbook, and said he would be back in touch in two weeks. I followed his directions and at the end of a week I concluded it must have just been a bad week. I wanted to rip out that log but I knew he would know, so I left in the truth it revealed. I spent more time reading the newspaper than I did reading the Word. The real shock was that the second week was not much different.

Jim helped me to change the way I read the Scriptures. Instead of reading them as though I was the authority, I read them as though I was seated at the feet of Jesus along with the other disciples listening intently to his every word. Jim showed up every other week to hold me accountable and to pray with me. There were times when I tried to hide

from him in my own office and he would sit and wait until I was ready to talk. I preached his funeral and confessed that were it not for his love and willingness to invest himself in my life I would not have made it through my grief.

In the course of our time together not only did I hear from Jesus but His Word began to transform my worldview. I went back and found things in Luther regarding the truth and wonder of the Word that I had not noticed before.

"The Bible alone is to be trusted because it is through itself most certain, most easily accessible, comprehensible, interpreting itself, proving, judging all the words of all." All leaders must subordinate themselves to its witness. "The pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven — these should not be masters, judges, arbiters but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture." Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word you will truly be my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (*John 8:31-32*).

This journey into discipleship began 28 years ago. I have never been less focused nor could I be more focused on this singular command by Jesus, this singular mission of His Church, and this singular commitment of my life of following Jesus, being and making disciples.

We are embarking on a strategy of leading an entire denomination of congregations to become disciple-making congregations. This requires a major cultural shift in the life of all of our congregations and a major change in values that is time consuming and anything but easy. However, nothing could be more important to the mission of the Church nor more essential in the redemptive process of renewal and reformation in the Church in North America or the rest of the world.

I know some are suggesting that moving in this direction will increase our grief and involve us in more change. You are correct, and there is no way around it, only a way through it that is redemptive. Some want to lick their wounds and be content to stay where they are, but I believe the Lord has more in mind for us. Transformation in the direction of discipleship is not life-destroying but life-giving.

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During our time together you are going to hear from both pastors and lay-leaders who are advancing this strategic initiative, growing stronger in Christ and even more focused on the true mission of the Church, the Great Commission.

I would also call your attention to our Scriptural text for this Convocation: "Putting on the full armor of God." The ministry of our congregations is to equip the saints for ministry, to help them put on the full armor of God in Christ Jesus. This is to put on Christ. That is the heart of discipleship. Putting on armor is a way of preparing for battle. It is not passive but active. It is not a matter of hiding but engaging. It is not a matter of retreating but advancing. It is not a matter of playing it safe but risking.

For those who fear losing our Lutheran identity, there is nothing in this strategy that even hints at compromising our theology or our heritage. In fact, in our work with CDM (The Navigators' Church Discipleship Ministry) our staff was welcomed at their national conference. I offered two keynote addresses. One of the most popular workshops was the one we offered on Lutheranism 101. We provided the worship for Sunday morning right out of *Lutheran Book of Worship Setting Two* with Communion.

We have been blessed by this partnership, and we are a blessing to them. My challenge to you is to give up this concept or value that all we need is a defensive strategy in order to remain authentically Lutheran. Instead of trying to protect our Lutheran identity and heritage, we need to use it fully by sharing it with a world that desperately needs to know Jesus Christ and join us as His faithful disciples.

The image that comes to mind when I hear these concerns is this one: Imagine two people pushing on the Rock of Gibraltar, each with a toothpick in their mouth. One is pushing with the toothpick from one end and the other with the toothpick pushing from the other end of the rock. Each thinks the other is trying to destroy it while they are trying to defend it. Both efforts are equally fruitless.

The Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are immovable. Nothing can destroy them. They



Bishop John Bradosky at 2014 NALC Convocation.

are eternal and will outlast all of creation. The mission before us is living it, as disciples of Jesus, proclaiming it in word and deed and leading others into that same life-giving relationship with Jesus. Discipleship is about living our faith boldly and sharing it broadly, until the whole world knows.

We have important work to do within our individual congregations so that they become centers for nurturing and training disciples. Discipleship requires community. God designed us from the very beginning of creation for community with Christ and one another. God gave us the gift of marriage and family and His Body, the Church. Yet people live in isolation in our culture, searching and longing for community.

Think of all the social media sites. Think of all the internet sites for dating and connecting people. My youngest daughter, Jordan, reminded me that in spite of all her friends on Facebook, they really don't know her and she doesn't know them. She longs for those whom she can call on and be with in person, meeting face-to-face. We need to take advantage of the opportunity to meet the needs of our culture with Christian community — disciple-making community which is the nature of community in Christ.

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Some of you know by now that our son Jacob and his wife, Melissa, received the tragic news that their baby, Reagan Elizabeth, is not viable outside of the womb. The special ultrasound confirmed that she has a rare and life-threatening defect called Pentalogy of Cantrell. This little life that has been growing and kicking, whose heart is beating strong, has no rib cage or sternum, no diaphragm or abdominal wall. Many of her internal organs are free-floating. A one-in-6 million occurrence, a 60-70 percent chance she will die in utero and no chance for survival beyond the womb.

Melissa wrote, "It is difficult to describe those first moments and days following that news. We have been more heartbroken and grief stricken than we could ever imagine. We were in no way prepared or expecting that news. We were given several options including termination of the pregnancy, but we both feel strongly that it is not our call to make the decision when Reagan will go to her eternal home. So, for now, we will enjoy her every kick, the sound of her heartbeat and the great joy and responsibility that comes in carrying a precious life. We do not know specifics on how long she may be with us, but each day we will savor this journey even as we continue to grieve. We take great comfort knowing one day she will be restored to full health in heaven and have the best care there. We will meet again and get to see our beautiful daughter in her perfect, heavenly home. We have been so blessed by the support and prayers of many. We could not ask for more caring, wise parents; wonderful family, an incredible church and amazing friends to hold us near and walk with us through this experience. We are able to continue living with hope and expectation solely because of Jesus and His promises."

They long for community to receive and to give, to be prayed for, and to encourage others even in the midst of their grief. Even the anticipation of the loss of that connection with their daughter causes grief and the only solution for dealing with it is to enhance that connection with Christ and one another. So Kristi and I went to be with them to help them talk about their experience, to hold them, cry with them, and pray with them, to remind them they are not alone. Gathering for worship together, the hymns opened another round of tears as the words touched the depths of our faith and the tragedy of

this experience. The Word read and proclaimed brought hope and promise. The prayers and fellowship brought peace and renewed connection.

We need communities that can nurture and train people to walk along side of people like Jacob and Melissa.

I can tell you that what I have learned in my time spent with Dennis Blevins, my personal coach and our staff coach, was very helpful in dealing with Jacob and Melissa. I have learned to ask more questions and give fewer answers, to rely on the Word, prayer and understanding their pain and struggle and to help them see clearly God's will for them and not my will.

Imagine a congregation of disciples trained and ready to walk along side of hurting people in your surrounding area, people who are ready to develop relationships, build trust, offer compassion and care, share their faith in word and deed, open the Scriptures, pray with others and help them to experience the loving presence of Jesus, His promises, His forgiveness, and new life in Him. That is what disciples are ready to do: invest themselves in the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ and His mission.

The internal mission of the Church is the same as the external mission of the Church: to make disciples. You can't make disciples unless you have a community committed to nurturing disciples.

This is why the work of CDM is so very important. Integrating disciple-making into the DNA of the local congregation is the best way to insure the healthy development of disciples and the effective mission of the Church in reaching out to others not only to do good but to do the greatest good, to lead those we reach to Christ and to make them effective disciples, capable of discipling others.

Dennis reminded me that the focus on discipleship has parallels in the game of golf. It requires a variety of clubs — woods, irons and a putter. The woods represent the large-group activities, worship, fellowship, events and celebrations. The irons are programs and small groups, but the putter is the club that is used most frequently, and this

represents life-to-life relationships. This is the place most of us live, next to a neighbor, co-worker, sports fan, family member, those with whom we share a hobby or interest, gym membership, etc. The problem is that we have lost our ability to putt! Image if every member of your congregation was ready to engage in life-to-life relationships and share their faith, ready to disciple all those we just named. That is the nature of our intention, what it means to create disciple-making congregations.

It all begins by applying it in your own life. Let me conclude with one more story. A month ago, Casey — a younger person I baptized, confirmed, married and baptized his two children — called me. We haven't seen each other except for a brief visit in several years. In tears he began talking about what a failure he has been in his marriage and as a father. As I listened and questioned him, he told me that his son, James, came to him after seeing advertisements about the movie Noah and said, "Dad, who is Noah?" After James left the room, Casey said he could not get his question out of his mind. "How could he know? He has not been in church for years. He's never been to Sunday School and does not have his own Bible. He has never seen me read my Bible, and I've never really talked about my faith with him." He went on and said, "Maybe this is what is wrong with our marriage. Tanya and I have grown apart and are not able to communicate effectively. We never pray together, never ask about God's will in any of our decisions. I feel lost and abandoned by God."

So we talked about how God can manifest His presence. It is not always a fun and joy-filled experience initially. I asked Casey many questions and our conversation went even deeper. And he asked, "John, what should I do?" And in the perfect form of my coach, I said, "Casey, God has been speaking to you through this experience. What do you think God is encouraging you to do?" As he talked about what he was going to do, I made a list. After he finished what became a rather long list, he picked five of the most important things he thought he could accomplish in the next two weeks. We clarified what he was going to do, and I promised him that in two weeks I would call him to check in on how he was doing. I prayed for him, and we ended the conversation.

Two weeks later I called and left a message and wondered if he would call back. The next day he called. He had completed four of the five items on his list. They have started a family Bible reading and discussion time. It is only once a week, but it is a start. They have found a new church home and both of their children are involved in youth group and Sunday School. He and Tanya have started praying together. They are all busy people, but they committed to be together for one family meal, conversation and time together each week. The next item on his list was to get a good Bible and start reading and studying it. Casey was able to select several more goals including one that I offered, to lead him through the book *Growing in Christ*. We have our next session together next week. I called him to check in and wished him a blessed Easter celebration, and he assured me this was going to be the best Easter ever for his family. Casey has a long way to go but he is already far beyond that first conversation. The transformation is under way, and I am continuing to invest myself in Casey's life. That is what coaching is all about.

Being coached is what makes me more effective in coaching others. So I believe that this is precisely what Jesus had in mind from the beginning. It is the nature of His Great Commission, our mission. Only those willing to be discipled can disciple others. That is how our faith in Jesus Christ is passed on and how faith is nurtured and grows to full maturity. Nothing is more important and nothing more exciting.

No, this is not the easiest path, but it is His path, His command, and His mission. It is hard but exciting, demanding but life-giving, challenging but faith-strengthening. Put on the full armor of God, put on Christ and follow Him into the most important battle of all, investing the love He has given you in the lives of those who do not know Him or have yet begun to follow Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: "The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus) ... out of the realm of the finite into the realm of infinite possibilities in Jesus (which is the one liberating reality)" (from *The Cost of Discipleship*).

So may it be! Amen.

Disaster Preparedness Training in Ohio

Disaster Preparedness Training, sponsored by the NALC's Ohio Mission District, will take place on Saturday, Oct. 18, at Grace Lutheran Church in Springfield, Ohio.

Cost is \$50 per person and covers both basic and specialized levels of training. Recognized credentials will be provided.

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.

To register for the disaster preparedness training session, download the flyer/registration form at www.thenalc.org.

The NALC Disaster Response Task Force disaster preparedness and response training is intended for those interested in learning how the North American Lutheran Church responds to domestic disasters and how participating congregations and individuals can form volunteer disaster teams.

Each Mission District assists in the formation of teams and the preparedness training. Three training sessions are held each year.

For more information on scheduling a training session in your area, contact Mary Woodward Bates, NALC Disaster Services Coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or batesm55@gmail.com.

Impact National Youth Event

Youth Encounter's 2015 Impact National Youth Event will be held June 25-28 at the Chicago Marriott Hotel in Oakbrook, Ill.

This four-day national youth event for high school students (completed grades 8-12) will proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord so lives may be transformed, help congregations to strengthen their youth ministry, and equip youth to live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

This will be accomplished through worship, workshops on life topics, and serving together while engaging in Christian fellowship. Youth will grow deeper in their faith and understanding of the love and plans that the Lord has for them.

Youth Encounter has been offering relational youth ministry resources to Christian communities for over 45 years. Learn more online at www.youthencounter.org.

2015 NALC Pastors Conference

"Jesus and the Bible: Authority in the Church" is the theme of the 2015 NALC Pastors Conference Feb. 10-12 at the DoubleTree Hotel at SeaWorld in Orlando, Fla.

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

Workshops include:

- + Preaching Lent and Easter - Cycle B by the Rev. Dr Jim Nestingen and the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin of the NALS.
- + The NALC Discipleship Emphasis and You!
- + Improving Worship in the NALC.
- + Re-igniting Mission Fervor in the NALC.

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

Liturgy means more Scripture

The Sunday Work of the People of God

I appreciated the chance to participate as a respondent in this year's theological conference in Charleston, S.C. Respondents were those who asked questions of the speakers after their presentation. Lynn Kickingbird and I were assigned to receive, assimilate and present audience questions to the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin after her presentation, "Knowing the Bible Through Worship and the Liturgy."

As I've had time to reflect on that experience, the questions and the discussion, I've wondered whether there is some misunderstanding about "liturgy" — in Lutheranism in general and the NALC as well today. It seems that some are unclear about what "liturgy" is — some confusing it with "ritual" — or at least understand "liturgy" to be rote, formalized patterns that might be contrary to or hinder "worship."

Perhaps it would be helpful for us to think for a few paragraphs in this Ministry Matters article about *worship* and *liturgy* to gain a better and deeper understanding of what liturgy is, and how it aids worship of our Triune God, as it has for nearly 2,000 years of Christian history.

My hope and intention is that a better understanding might reduce tensions and disagreements in congregations regarding these important aspects of our life together.

From the beginning of time, the Creator implanted in His human creation the need and desire for what historians and anthropologists might refer to as "ritual" — agreed upon patterns of movement (action) that give meaning to existence.

We in the Judeo-Christian tradition have also developed agreed-upon patterns that shape our weekly encounter with the Living God. For Christians (and for Jews before us) this encounter was not just a "one-way street," but a conversation with God and our fellow worshipers.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

As Christians, we believe that God is active in worship, not passive. Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus comes to us incarnate, "in the flesh" through the Means of Grace — Word and Sacrament.

We respond to the incarnate presence of Emmanuel — "God with us" — in our words and actions, but the first action is God's — calling us to worship in the first place, promising to be with us to the end of the age (*Matthew 28:20*) where two or three are gathered in His name (*Matthew 18:20*).

We respond by getting up on Sunday morning and coming to worship. Once there, the Living God speaks to us in the readings from Holy Scripture and through the sermon. We respond with hymns, prayers and offerings. God feeds us with the very body and blood of His Son, Jesus. We give thanks and praise for this wonderful gift. God sends us forth in peace. We go in peace to serve the Lord in our daily lives.

The word *worship* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, in modern English, "*worth-ship*." Worshipers come together to acknowledge the One who is worthy — God.

And yet, how does that happen in Christian worship? Because it is not one-sided — with us doing the worshiping and God simply receiving — there must be some form — the agreed upon actions and movements that allow worship to happen between God, me and others.

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Christian worship would be chaotic if all were speaking at the same time, or going in separate directions all at once. So there is always a pattern to Christian worship, whether one worships in a Quaker meetinghouse, a Lutheran sanctuary, or a non-denominational auditorium. There must be a pattern for ordered communication and encounter.

God meets us in our time of worship and is an active participant. He speaks through His Word, feeds us with His presence, and listens to our prayers, praise and thanksgiving. The pattern — the ritual — is back-and-forth. Christian worship is not passive, but active. You sing, pray, kneel, stand, come forward, take out your wallet, shake hands, participate fully in the “ritual” that gives meaning to our lives, and to our existence.

It sounds like work, doesn't it? In fact, we call it “the work of the people.” The Greek word is *leitourgia* — from which we get the word *liturgy*. The liturgy is the activity that we, the people of God, engage in, together with each other, and with God. It's what we do. It's who we are. We are a worshiping people.

We engage — faithfully and regularly — in actions and movements that give meaning to existence because through them God enters into “Holy Communion” with us, and we with each other. In and through this “Holy Encounter,” God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — comes to us fully, and so we grow more fully into the people God has created us to be. God does that for us through worship.

That's what worship is — and is for — the transformation of people and their lives through “Holy Communion” with God. And as people are transformed, communities are transformed, and ultimately, our world is transformed.

But from where does this agreed-upon pattern of words, movement, response (liturgy) for Christian worship come? Who “made it up” in the first place?

Granted, the basic form for Christian worship is Word and Sacrament — the Means of Grace through which God offers His love, mercy and forgiveness. To put that into a useable structure or form — rather than making something up — Christians used the words of Holy Scripture to set

the pattern, movement and words to be used in their worship.

I wish that all Lutherans would realize that every part of the Sunday service in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* comes directly from Scripture! Maybe the Biblical references could be included in the weekly bulletin!

What are those texts from the Bible? Here are most of the Scripture verses that make up our Lutheran liturgy:

Recalling the Great Commission (*Matthew 28*), our liturgy, the “work of the people of God” begins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In the *Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness*, we quote from 1 John 1:8-9, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The *Absolution* — or statement of forgiveness after the confession — comes from John 20:19-23 and John 1:12. “But to all who received Him, who believed in his name, He gave power to become children of God.” The pastor forgives because our Lord said, “If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven” (*John 20:19-23*).

The *Apostolic Greeting* is a direct quote from 2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

The words of the *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy) are the cry of blind Bartimaeus, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (*Mark 10:47*).

The Hymns of Praise are either *Glory to God*, the song of the angels in Luke 2, or *This is the Feast*, the new song of the redeemed around the throne of God from Revelation 5:12-13; 19:5-9.

The *Salutation* comes from 2 Timothy 4:22.

The *Alleluia Verse* comes from John 6:68.

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The three Scripture readings come, of course, from Scripture!

We pray throughout, because St. Paul bids us, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all” (1 Timothy 2:1).

We share the peace, as our Lord said after His resurrection, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

The preface responses for the Lord’s Supper come from 2 Timothy 4:22; Colossians 3:1 and Psalm 136. The Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy”) comes from Isaiah 6:3 and Matthew 21:9.

The *Eucharistic Prayer* is used following the form of the prayer of blessing/thanksgiving for bread and wine at the Passover meal in Judaism, as Matthew, Mark and Luke say of the Last Supper, “and when he had given thanks.”

The *Words of Institution* of the Lord’s Supper are from Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

The *Lord’s Prayer* is from Matthew 6:9-13.

The *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) is from John 1:29, where John the Baptizer points to Jesus and proclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

The Post-Communion song, *Thank the Lord*, is a paraphrase from Psalm 105 and 1 Chronicles 16:8-10. The *Nunc Dimittis* is the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32) who can now depart this life because he has seen the birth of Jesus, even as we leave our time of worship having been in the incarnate presence of God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The final blessing most common to Lutherans, “The Lord bless you and keep you ...” is the blessing the Lord instructed Aaron to use when he blessed Israel (Numbers 6:24-26).

Using the Lutheran liturgy allows us to have as much Holy Scripture as possible in worship that is active and participatory — between our Incarnate God, ourselves and each other.



Because the liturgy is simply verses and texts from Holy Scripture, it may be used with any number of appropriate musical settings or styles. No need to argue about music in worship. The Scripture texts of the liturgy may be set to so-called “traditional” or “contemporary” music, and there are many musical settings to suit the needs of any congregation.

There is also great flexibility within the liturgical structure of the Lutheran service, with many options and choices — freedom which can be adapted week to week, church season to church season, festival to festival.

An NALC congregation is not required to use a particular form for worship, and there is great variety in our parishes, that is true! But our hope and desire is, “The more Scripture the better!”

One may not appreciate certain rituals, but all of human life employs symbol and agreed-upon patterns of word, action and movement. The liturgy simply provides a time-tested, Scripturally-grounded pattern that assists the people of God, the Church, in their proper work — that of worshiping our Triune God!

Norway and Western Europe: A Glimpse of Our Future?

Ministry magazine is a Seventh-day Adventist publication written primarily for pastors. In the September 2014 issue, the Rev. Dr. Jan Paulsen, the retired president of that church body, wrote of how contemporary Norwegian society might give us a glimpse of what we will eventually be facing in our own increasingly secular culture.

Dr. Paulsen wrote about a Norwegian relative whom he believes is representative of the majority view in Norway on the subject of religious faith:

“My wife, Kari, has an uncle in east Norway whom we sometimes visit, and he likes to talk to me about faith. Our conversations are amicable and wide ranging. He is unapologetic about his atheism, yet is not hostile to my views. Rather, his attitude is one of indulgent amusement, which is touched perhaps with pity that I should live my life beholden to a belief system that, to his mind, is little removed from the realm of fairy tales.

“This type of response confronts so many of us who pastor within postmodern and secular communities. It is not usually outright hostility that creates barriers to our witness, nor is it that interest in Christianity has been completely extinguished. It is simply that the notion of a faith that actively shapes life seems alien to the postmodern mind. The idea that there is an ultimate truth — a truth that makes demands on our thinking and behavior — seems absurd to someone steeped in a culture of relativism, which regards absolutes of morality or spirituality with deep suspicion.

“Much Seventh-day Adventist evangelism has specialized in persuasive and effective presentations of Biblically-based, propositional truth. But what are we to do when the people we want to reach are ambivalent about the very concept of truth? When they do not accept the Bible as authoritative in any sense?”

Both a profound and relatively succinct summary of the challenge we face as witnesses to the Gospel.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

Dr. Paulsen goes on to suggest the kinds of questions congregations should be asking themselves if they hope to connect — in a meaningful and effective way — with their surrounding communities.

Consider these questions and whether they should be discussed among leaders and members of your congregation.

First question: Does your congregation have an “extroverted” or “introverted mind-set?” Dr. Paulsen quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.” He then quotes Jesus’ prayer to the Father regarding His disciples: “As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

His second question is whether your congregation is doing the hard work of discerning the real needs of the unchurched in your local community. “Too often, we give people what we know they need and wonder why their response is less than enthusiastic.”

A third question from Dr. Paulsen is whether your congregation is “authentic” in the way it engages your surrounding community.

“A secular, postmodern man or woman can smell a sales pitch coming from miles away. Thus, when it comes to outreach in the secular world, it is absolutely essential that we first seek to build genuine relationships with people. Trust is difficult to create and easy to destroy.”

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And one final quote from Dr. Paulsen:

“We do not cheapen our core values or beliefs when we freely enfold people into the warmth of our fellowship, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey. Rather, we are reflecting Christ’s overwhelming concern and compassion for people over everything else.”

The more challenging our local mission field becomes, the less likely we are to discover a one-size-fits-all, guaranteed-to-succeed program strategy. Our best hope is an ongoing (often trial-and-error) effort to initiate ministries that help our members *develop relationships* with people who are not connected with any faith community.

What about your local mission field? What kind of ministry would, in an authentic way, address the very real needs of people and facilitate the building of relationships between your volunteers and those they serve? Would it be some kind of health

ministry? Or offering and hosting a weekly (free) community supper? Perhaps a ministry to the homeless or working poor? Might it be a ministry focusing on the children of your neighborhood, possibly a sports ministry, or a music and drama program? The answer will be unique to your local ministry context and depend, to a degree, on the ministry gifts and financial resources of your congregational members.

Maybe it’s time to have this discussion with your congregational leaders. And don’t just address this by adding the topic to your monthly Church Council agenda. Schedule a time and place to wrestle with these questions in depth. Perhaps a half-day (or full-day) event with plenty of time for reflection, discussion and prayer. And don’t limit participation to only those members who currently “hold office.”

Need specific ideas for this gathering? Email me.

Pastor Don Brandt serves Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Salem, Ore. You can contact him at donb@oursaviorssalem.org.

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