

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

May 2015

2015 NALC nominations announced

The NALC Nominating Committee has announced those nominated for positions to be elected at the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

The Convocation will elect the bishop, three members of the NALC Executive Council (two lay people and one pastor) and two members of the Court of Adjudication.

Bishop John Bradosky is currently the only candidate for bishop.

Here are the nominations submitted to date:

Bishop (4-year term)

+ The Rev. John Bradosky - Bradenton, Fla.

Executive Council - Lay Member (4-year term)

+ Rosemary Johnson - Conrath, Wis.

+ Brian E. Sutton - Statesville, N.C.

Executive Council - Lay Member (2-year term)

+ John Elling - Holcombe, Wis.

+ Stephen Lord - Colorado Springs, Colo.

Executive Council - Ordained Minister (4-year term)

+ The Rev. Tom Hux - Salem, Ore.

+ The Rev. Paul Reiff - Sturgeon Lake, Minn.

+ The Rev. Eric Waters - Powell, Ohio

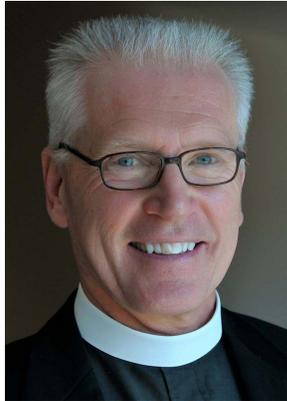
Court of Adjudication (4-year term)

(Two persons to be elected)

+ Carolyn Nestingen - Roseville, Minn.

+ The Rev. Marty Ramey - Dallas, N.C.

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John Bradosky
Bishop



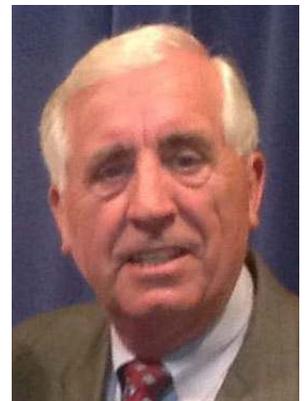
John Elling
Executive Council



Rosemary Johnson
Executive Council



Stephen Lord
Executive Council



Brian Sutton
Executive Council



Tom Hux
Executive Council



Eric Waters
Executive Council

Photo not available for Paul Reiff Executive Council

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Biographical information on the nominees is available as an online supplement to the May *NALC News* available at thenalc.org/newsletter.

Additional nominations are still possible for all positions.

Nominations for Bishop may be made by any Convocation delegate or by NALC congregations or the NALC Executive Council until the first ballot takes place at the Convocation.

For Executive Council and Court of Adjudication, three or more delegates representing at least three congregations may together submit additional nominations. Such nominations must be submitted to the Nominating Committee no later than June 28 (45 days prior to the Convocation).



Carolyn Nestingen
Court of Adjudication



Marty Ramey
Court of Adjudication



Nebraska congregation builds on the Bible

Members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Gothenburg, Neb., celebrated their first worship service in their new building on Sunday, May 10.

The NALC congregation is literally built on the Bible. The congregation was founded in 2011 as members stood firm on their commitment to God's Word.

Members also buried a Bible in the entrance slab near the building's front doors. Inside the Bible is this commemoration: "The Bible in this foundation is placed as an eternal reminder that all who enter should hear nothing else than the Word of God, and all who leave this place should do nothing else than live by it," Pastor Jeff Cottingham explained.

NALC Convocation is Aug. 12-14

Martyrdom and faithful witness will provide a common theme for the 2015 NALC Convocation and the theological conference and women's gathering that precede it.

The "Lutheran Week" events will be held Aug. 11-14 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

"Martyr: Life-giving Witness" is the theme for the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14.

The Convocation will focus on the reality of Christians suffering for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel today, and the fact that this testimony serves as a "life-giving witness," causing others to have their eyes opened, turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

The Convocation will begin at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 12, with special Mission Intensive sessions including speakers to highlight the NALC's commitment to its Mission-Driven core value and to equip congregations for mission.

Mission Districts will meet on Wednesday evening as a part of the Mission-Driven focus.

Convocation business sessions on Aug. 13-14 will include speakers on the theme as well as church business including voting on proposed constitutional

MARTYR LIFE-GIVING WITNESS ACTS 26:16-18

amendments and election of bishop and members of the Executive Council and Court of Adjudication. There will also be reports and updates about the life and ministry of the NALC and the North American Lutheran Seminary, as well as displays featuring NALC missions and ministries. Workshops on a variety of topics will be offered on Friday.

The Convocation is expected to conclude by 5 p.m. Friday.

The \$225 Convocation registration fee includes six meals: dinner on Wednesday and Thursday; and breakfast and lunch on Thursday and Friday.

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering will take place Aug. 11-12 under the theme, "A Gathering of Witnesses." The women will meet 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday and 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday. Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$75 registration fee.

"Martyrdom and the Sufferings of the Righteous" is the theme for the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology Aug. 11-12. The theological conference begins at 1 p.m. Tuesday and concludes with lunch on Wednesday. Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$150 registration fee.

A special room rate has been negotiated at the hotel. The rate is good for reservations made by July 21. Reservations may be made through a link on the NALC website or by calling 888-421-1442.

You may register online for the Convocation and other Lutheran week events at www.thenalc.org.



The Hyatt Regency Dallas-Fort Worth Airport will host the 2015 NALC Convocation Aug. 12-14.

‘Martyrdom and the Suffering of the Righteous’ is theme of lectures

“Martyrdom and the Sufferings of the Righteous” is the theme for the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology Aug. 11-12 at the Hyatt Regency in the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. The annual theological conference is held prior to the NALC Convocation.

Speakers for the conference and their topics include:



Michael DeJonge



Lensa Gudina



Paul Hinlicky

+ “A Martyr for What Cause?”

Reconsidering ‘Bonhoeffer and the Jews’” - Dr. Michael DeJonge, Associate Professor in Religious Studies at the University of Southern Florida, earned his Ph.D. in Religion from Emory University. He is the author of *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* and co-editor of *The Bonhoeffer Reader*.

+ **The Persecution of the Christians in Ethiopia** - Lensa Gudina, Managing Director of the Gudina Tumsa Foundation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She is the daughter of the late Rev. Gudina Tumsa. Tumsa was a theologian and General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. He was abducted and killed by communist Derg soldiers in 1979. Between 1975 and 1987, the Derg executed and imprisoned tens of thousands of its opponents. Pastor Tumsa has been called the “Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Africa.”

+ **“Theology of the Martyrs”** - Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky, Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College, holds a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary. The author of more than seventy articles and many books, he taught theology for six years at Jan Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He is the former editor of *Lutheran Forum* and *Pro Ecclesia* theological journals.

+ **Martyrdom and the New Testament** - Dr. Judy Stack-Nelson holds a Ph.D. in New Testament from Princeton Theological Seminary. She has taught at a number of colleges in Minnesota including St. Olaf College and Augsburg College and has also taught online courses for those preparing for ministry through St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and Fuller Seminary.



Judy Stack-Nelson



Hans Wiersma

+ **The Martyrs of the Reformation** - Dr. Hans Wiersma, associate professor of religion at Augsburg College. He is a graduate of the University of California and has M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from Luther Seminary.

One additional speaker has yet to be confirmed.

The theological conference begins at 1 p.m. Tuesday and concludes with lunch on Wednesday. Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast and lunch are included in the \$150 registration fee.

For more information or to register go to www.thenalc.org.

In Preparation for Pentecost: The Primacy of Prayer

Dear Disciples of Jesus in the North American Lutheran Church:

As we prepare for Pentecost it is well to consider the way the first disciples prepared to receive the Holy Spirit.

Several years ago George Barna did a survey of people who attended worship for the first time, asking them what part of worship had the greatest impact or influence on them. The answer may surprise you! Barna's survey showed that the most influential part of worship for first-time visitors was authentic prayer! Christians praying together has impact and power not only for those praying but also for those observing. Perhaps it was for good reason that Paul says we are to pray unceasingly.

As Barna interviewed these first time visitors, they told him that people praying together was a witness to these important beliefs: God exists; God hears; God responds; and God acts with power.

Most of what we do at worship is prayer. Our songs are prayers. We are not the focus of our hymns. Our praise and adoration is focused on Christ. The invocation is prayer. The confession is prayer. Our liturgy is prayer set to music. The Prayer of the Day is obviously prayer. We pray for wisdom and insight as we hear His Word read, and we pray that God will speak through the sermon. We pray in the prayers of the church for individuals in need, for our community, the world, and our church leaders. We pray for generosity and appropriate use of our gifts for the ministry of the church. We pray before we share the meal, during the meal, and after we have consumed it. We close with a prayer called a benediction.

Just about everything we do in worship is a form of prayer! Jesus reminds us that the places where we worship are to be houses of prayer.

In the Gospel of John, Chapters 16 and 17, Jesus is praying for His disciples. Jesus rejoices over their faith and obedience. They belong to God through



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Jesus. He prays for their unity and their protection from evil. He reminds them that because they have God's Word they can expect persecution. He prays that they will remain holy, sanctified by clinging to the Word that bears witness to the salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Jesus consistently modeled and taught His disciples the importance of prayer as it relates to faith. I am convinced that no spiritual growth can happen without prayer. No ministry can be effective without prayer. Christian community depends on prayer. No relationship with Jesus can grow deeper without prayer. The disciples realized how important prayer was for Jesus, and they asked Him to teach them how to pray. From His instruction we received the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer connects us with the gracious power of Jesus. Prayer brings insight. Prayer opens hearts to grace. Prayer opens our soul to faith, and prayer transforms our will from selfishness to loving obedience. Prayer brings God's grace, in healing, forgiveness, faith, hope and new life. This is the power available to us through prayer.

In the beginning of the book of Acts, we see yet another example of the primacy of prayer among the disciples in the days following Jesus' Ascension into heaven. Luke's Gospel ends with the command of Jesus to wait until they were clothed with power from on high.

How did they prepare to receive this promise?

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They gathered together for 10 days and prayed.

“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). What is astounding is that while they gathered for prayer they grew. By the time they got to Pentecost the group of disciples had grown from the original 11 to a group of about 120 — exponential growth through 10 days of prayer.

They positioned themselves to receive the promise. Prayer made them patient, persistent, and kept them positive while they waited.

Prayer guided them in placing the right people in the right positions of leadership: Matthias became the leader to take the place of Judas.

Prayer was not a passive activity to fill the time of waiting, but it was and still is the greatest action of all. Ten days of prayer made their hearts obedient and confident about the truth of the Gospel. Ten days of prayer brought them peace in the presence of Jesus and created a unity that pulled them away from their own will, uniting them in the mission of Jesus. Ten days of prayer gave them inner peace and prepared them for boldness in their witness. Ten days of prayer revealed the heart of Jesus’ redemptive love for the world and prepared them to become combustible material, disciples ready to be set on fire on the Day of Pentecost.

Prayer is one of the distinguishing attributes of the New Testament Church. In Acts Chapter 1, they were praying. In Chapter 2, they were still praying, and the Church grew from 120 to 3,000. In Chapter 3, they were praying for others, and daily the Lord added to their number those who are being saved. In Acts 4:30-31, the Church prayed that signs and wonders might be done in the name of Jesus and God responded by shaking the place where they were assembled. *“And when they had prayed ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s power.”* It was prayer that prepared and equipped them for Pentecost.

According to Martin Luther, prayer or confession (which is a form of prayer) was not to be considered a sacrament only because it is missing an earthly element to make it a tangible Means of Grace. It was

commanded by Christ and modeled by Christ. To prayer, Jesus attaches a promise: *“Whatever you ask in my name ...”*

Luther’s barber asked him, “Dr. Luther how should we pray the Scriptures?” Luther sent his barber an eight-page response he titled, “A Simple Way to Pray: for a Good Friend.” In his response Luther not only recommended prayer as a daily routine but he said, “It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last of the evening. Guard yourself against such false and deceitful thoughts that keep whispering, “Wait a while. In an hour or so I will pray. I must first finish this or that. Thinking such thoughts we get away from prayer into other things that will hold us and involve us until the day of prayer comes to naught.”

In his essay, Luther tells his barber that the Scriptures are not meant to be read but to be prayed. In that way the Scriptures — the Word of God — become the resource of our devotion. He suggested that his barber take several verses of Scripture and pray about them in four distinct ways. We now call this the TRIP method for praying the Word:

T — Thanks — What does this Scripture remind me to be thankful for?

R — Repent — How does this Scripture remind me of my sin that I need to confess and turn away from?

I — Intercession — For what circumstance or person does this Scripture remind me to pray?

P — Plan — Through this passage, what is Jesus asking me to do and what will I begin to do right now as a result of His will for my life?

While there is not sufficient space in our newsletter to reflect on all four of these areas, the first area, “Thanks,” deserves a few more lines of reflection.

In his heyday, it was said that every word that Rudyard Kipling wrote was worth 25 shillings.

Hearing this, a group of college students got together and wrote him a letter. “We understand that every word you write is worth twenty-five shillings. Enclosed is 25 shillings, send us your best word.” A couple of days later, these college students

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received a telegram from Mr. Kipling. The telegram consisted of one word. That one word, his best word, was: "Thanks!"

Thanks may very well be the best word there is in the English or any other language. Gratitude and thankfulness are the most precious gifts we can have and offer to God and to one another.

Luther observed that sense of thankfulness in Paul's life. Paul wrote these words to the Thessalonians and to us: *"Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).*

Paul allowed every circumstance to teach him more about Christ and His will. He understood that every encounter can either make us bitter or better. Paul saw every problem as an opportunity to advance God's kingdom and His righteousness. Paul thanked God for everything as it directed him back to Jesus' priorities. Paul thanked God in every situation because he knew that God could use it to bring greater maturity, wisdom and usefulness. Every hardship could become a catalyst for developing a more mature faith, character, wisdom and holiness. Paul thanked God for every trial because He knew it would result in a greater witness. Paul sang songs of thanksgiving and praise to God in prison and found joy. The overflowing joy expressed in Paul's songs led others to Jesus and allowed the prisoners to go free.

When we are truly thankful, we are a great blessing to others as well. Paul rejoiced in the Lord. His thankfulness was not conditioned by any circumstance. He gave great praise to God because of His wonderful attributes, His works and His words. Paul knew that all eternity would not be enough time to thank God for who He is — the Great I Am, the Alpha and Omega, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords!

I believe that in Hebrew the word for "to thank" has the same root or stem as the Hebrew word for "to know!" It is a word for intimacy with God. It is the word for thanking, praising and confessing to God. What a profound connection! The more intimately we know Jesus the more thankful our hearts and lives will become. That is why Paul, Luther and a host of others could say, "In every situation, rejoice, give thanks and pray!"

Communication is the key to growing closer, more intimate in our relationships. Prayer from our end and the Word from God's side are the keys to growing closer and more intimate in our spiritual relationship and connection with Jesus — a connection He has already fully established a connection whose depths we explore for a lifetime and forever. In the Great Commission, Jesus reminds us that he is always with us. He is present both listening and speaking to us.

The question that begs to be asked is, how is your prayer life? In our life together in congregations across the NALC we must ask, how is our prayer life? Are our worship spaces a house of prayer? We can make them bigger or more beautiful, but what are we doing to make them, more than anything else, houses of prayer? I once had a prayer team that took turns praying in the chapel for our worship while we were worshiping. How are our intercessions for others? Are they not simply a topic for prayer on Sunday but petitions offered daily? How are we motivating our people from our houses of prayer to living prayer-filled lives?

Wherever we are, there are opportunities to ask people how we can pray for them, asking God to bless them. The waitress or waiter, the barista at the coffee shop, the clerk at the grocery checkout are all in need of prayer. We touch the lives of so many people and with each interaction we have the opportunity to pray, strengthening our witness by demonstrating that we do not just believe in God, but that we believe God — that we are certain He will do all He has promised to do!

Prayer is one of the most formidable weapons in the arsenal of our faith. Let us renew our commitment to use it daily. When we come together and worship it is an equally powerful public witness. Regardless of our circumstances, prayer brings us hope, prepares us for God's involvement, and unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is no better way to prepare for Pentecost than to follow the example of those first followers of Jesus. Gather together and pray!

With you in prayer, preparing for Pentecost,

Bishop John Bradosky



Steve Bell, a Christian singer-songwriter and guitarist from Winnipeg, Manitoba.



The Rev. Dr. Frank Senn, a retired pastor from Evanston, Ill., is a well-known liturgical scholar.

Worship Wars Peace Talks

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

April 14-17 - Canmore, Alberta



The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Reflections on ‘Worship Wars Peace Talks’ and Unity in the NALC

Once again, Bishop Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez and I were blessed to be able to participate in the annual Canadian Rockies Theological Conference, April 14-17 in Canmore, Alberta.

Pastor Phil Gagnon and Pastor Karl Johnsen have a long history of providing inspiring, enlightening, challenging conferences that deal with current topics in church life, never hesitating to choose topics that address what might be seen as difficult issues in the Body of Christ as a whole and Lutheranism in particular.

It's an added blessing that the NALC Canada Mission District meeting followed the conference, giving us a “two-fer” while in Canada!

This year's conference topic was “Worship Wars Peace Talks.” In the last generation or so, “worship wars” have been perceived in the church between those who support so-called “traditional” worship versus those who prefer what is termed “contemporary” worship. Often this has more to do with music, but battle lines have been drawn over any number of issues related to this supposed conflict.

The aim of the conference was to bring together two Lutheran liturgical theologians, Dr. Frank Senn and Dr. Amy Schifrin, and a bright Canadian light, Steve Bell, who is well known in Canada for his music that, while new, incorporates Biblical and liturgical themes that most orthodox, Confessional Lutherans appreciate, although considered part of the “contemporary” genre of Christian music.

In reality, all music in the church today is “contemporary,” as it's being used “now” and sometimes has been in use long enough to have become a tradition in some places, as Dr. Senn pointed out.

The question asked, of course, is whether there is a need for this ongoing conflict (read: “war”) or can there be peace in the Church and the local congregation with regard to worship?



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

The refreshing and reassuring answer is: “Yes!” We can leave this conflict behind and celebrate what the conference speakers agreed is “convergence” in our worship life — especially in Lutheranism today.

Although some might have been thinking the three conference speakers would never agree, the opposite was the case, and the closing Service of Holy Communion reflected that, with a convergence in the aspects of worship that utilized the traditional Biblical liturgical texts set to some music that was older and some that was newer, but all converged to offer prayer, praise and thanksgiving that was faithful and, we hope, God-pleasing.

Present at this conference were congregational music directors who play keyboards each Sunday and those who play only the organ. We sang great Lutheran hymns accompanied by piano and at other times accompanied by guitar. We also sang a Kyrie/Intercessory Prayer set to newer music by Steve Bell.

And, yes, there were pastors at this conference who wore black clerical shirts every day, and those who wore T-Shirts. And we all were gathered together around the mystical incarnate presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as we were Biblical, Confessional Lutherans concerned for right belief and right praise!

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This is really my point in this edition of “Ministry Matters.” When Biblical, confessional Christianity is at stake, we can stand together and those previous conflicts in Lutheranism fade into the background.

Often, there was distance and difference between those who worshiped using “traditional” and “contemporary” forms. There has been tension between those pastors who wear black clerical shirts and those who wear casual clothing. There has been a perceived conflict between those termed Lutheran “pietists” and those called “evangelical catholics” in Lutheranism.

In our former Lutheran bodies, it seemed we were fractured and divided into “camps” — sometimes around externals and sometimes around agendas. And I contend we planted our banners on separate hills because we had the luxury of arguing about such things.

But when the truth of Holy Scripture is at stake; when the Bible as God’s Word is questioned; when the very name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is being diminished; when Jesus is not confessed as the only Way, Truth and Life, we no longer have the luxury of dividing into separate little groups.

Discipleship Moments

“Discipleship Moment” videos from Bishop John Bradosky and other executive staff members are being published regularly to the NALC’s website.

These short videos can be used before worship on Sunday mornings, as an introduction to Sunday school or Bible study times, or for personal use.

Reflections on what the word *discipleship* really means, the vision for the NALC, and what it means to be “Mission-Driven” are just a few of the many topics you will hear about.

Personal stories from local congregations, international missions and personal ministry experiences will also be featured.

Visit the NALC’s website to access these resources: www.thenalc.org/discipleship-moment.

Indeed, as we have taken a stand on the truth of God’s Word (“Our conscience is captive to the Word of God!”), there has been convergence and unity!

In the NALC, it matters little whether one is a black-clerical-shirt pastor or a casual-clothing clergy-person. It matters not at all which political party you support. It matters little where you have “planted your flag” in Lutheranism in the past.

I have come to believe that NALC at its best appreciates and values the wide range of Lutheranism that’s been with us from the time of Luther on! And we are stronger and blessed because of this continuum that exists in Lutheranism! We are stronger and blessed when we are in conflict with each other, but united to do battle with sin, death and the devil who is attacking Christians not figuratively, but literally around the world and in North America.

So let us always be appreciative of one another in the NALC, valuing each other as we stand side by side, firm in our faith. Let us move beyond our former battlelines and tired old tensions to be one church — not a “big tent,” but the Body of Christ which is one, holy, catholic (holding to right, true teaching that is universal) and apostolic! For this NALC, I give thanks!

NALC Convocation to consider amendments

The 2015 NALC Convocation will consider several amendments to the NALC Constitution when it meets Aug. 12-14.

The proposed constitutional amendments are all related to the change in relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

They specifically deal with removing references to Lutheran CORE in constitutional language about the Commission on Theology and Doctrine. The commission had been a joint commission for the NALC and Lutheran CORE.

The text of the amendments is available online at <http://thenalc.org/2015-convocation>.

NALC Mission Festival is Nov. 5-7

“Mission Possible” is the theme of the NALC’s 2015 Mission Festival Nov. 5-7 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio, with the main theme focusing on the relationship between discipleship and mission.

Keynote speakers for the festival include Bishop John Bradosky; Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, and Pastor Henry Graf.

Pastor Graf is the pastor of Promise Ministries in Fort Wayne, Ind. He is the coauthor of *More Than a Story*. He is passionate about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Following his most recent book tour, his congregation has been gracious in sharing his time with the larger body of Christ, including Youth Encounter events across the country, connections with the Danish Lutheran Church and, most recently, taking the stage at TEDx Fort Wayne.



Pastor Henry Graf

As the training ground for NALC pastors, leaders, and volunteers, Pastor Graf will help explore the relationship between discipleship and mission.

In a recent conversation, he shared: “Jesus left His disciples with these marching orders ‘Make Disciples,’ yet, somewhere along the way we lost the plot. It became about us growing the Church, which is what God said was His job. Is it even possible to make first century disciples in the 21st century? If so, what is getting in the way?”

The Mission Festival brings together Mission-Driven leaders for inspirational and motivating speakers, nuts and bolts practical training for discipleship and mission, and breakout sessions led by experts in their fields — grounded in Bible study, worship and prayer.

The NALC’s annual Mission Festival is a training resource for Mission Districts and congregations.



This event is designed and planned to maximize the training of our missional leaders.

Early-bird registration opens June 1 at \$75 per person. Regular registration begins Sept. 1 at \$100 per person. A registration link will be posted on the NALC website when registration opens.

Visit www.thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015 for links to the festival schedules and discounted hotel accommodations. For questions or for more information, please contact Jenny Brockman at 614-777-5709 or jbrockman@thenalc.org.

In 2016, the Mission Festival will move to the week that the NALC Convocation and theological conference are held.

China Service Ventures seeks Executive Director

China Service Ventures is currently accepting applications for a full-time Executive Director. CSV’s mission is to share the love of Jesus with the rural poor — work that was begun by Lutheran missionaries over 100 years ago.

China Service Ventures, an NALC mission partner, is based in St Paul, Minn. Its overseas mission work is centered in Henan, China.

The full job posting can be found online at www.chinaserviceventures.org.

The Spirit is moving in Slovakia

By Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

Greetings to you from our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus! We just completed a powerful conference in the eastern European nation of Slovakia. People are hungry for the Gospel. This nation came out of communism in 1989 and was separated from the Czech Republic in 1993.

Right now EVS, a Slovakian mission organization, is working hard to awaken Slovaks for mission. Eastern Europe was under radical atheism and militant communism for many decades. Millions have never heard of Jesus.

There are a few remnants in the land. We need to connect with them and share our time, talent and treasure with them for the sake of spreading the Gospel of Jesus.

The first conference included three days of speaking in a town called Piestany, with another evangelism conference in Bratislava, the capital city



Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, speaks at EVS conference in Slovakia.

of Slovakia. It was thrilling to proclaim Jesus in a major communist conference hall. Leaders came from Poland, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Serbia and other nations in the region.

God is alive and no one can stop the advancement of the Gospel. We rejoice and move on with our unwavering faith in Jesus.



These dynamic worship leaders and program moderators led the conference in Bratislava.

The stories of the Spirit blowing through the nation of Slovakia from our dear brothers and sisters in Christ bring encouragement, hope and joy. Some of those stories are included in the online Discipleship Moments on the NALC website. Please take a moment to listen to their stories which are available at: thenalc.org/discipleship-moment.

The relationship between EVS Slovakia and the NALC is growing every day. We share the same vision for mission. Please keep praying for Europe. It is a continent very hungry for the Gospel of Jesus. May these pictures tell the amazing story of what God is doing.



Pastor Gemechis Buba speaks from high pulpit of a church in Bratislava.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, poses near border between Slovakia and Austria. During Communist rule, Slovaks could not cross the border. “Now we have crossed the border without any problem many times. Times change. The only thing that never changes is the holy Word of God and our Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forevermore,” Pastor Buba said.

Mission Driven in Slovakia



This former Communist hall was filled with people who came to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



Pastor Gemechis Buba poses with Slavo, the national leader of the EVS mission organization in Slovakia.

Support Nepal earthquake relief

Powerful earthquake kills thousands of people, destroys 300,000 homes

An extremely powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on April 25 creating large scale damage. Another powerful quake hit Nepal May 12.

Lutheran World Relief and Water Missions International are among the relief organizations responding to the earthquakes.

The epicenter of the first earthquake was located approximately 50 miles northwest of the Nepali capital Kathmandu in Lamjung District, where LWR currently has active projects. The earthquake has caused a number of landslides and avalanches.



The earthquake that struck Nepal April 25 caused considerable damage, destroying nearly 300,000 homes and killing more than 8,000 people. (Photo by Hilmi Hacalo lu, from Wikimedia Commons)

The disaster has resulted in more than 8,000 dead and nearly 16,000 injured. It is estimated that nearly 300,000 homes were destroyed and about that many more were damaged. In areas where LWR is working 75 percent of homes were destroyed.

Lutheran World Relief's emergency response funding is now more than \$1 million. LWR is working in the rural areas of the quake epicenter, where it already has active projects.

Lutheran World Relief will distribute more than 9,240 quilts, 1,000 personal care kits and 100 water filtration units in hard-hit areas of Kathmandu. The items, pre-positioned in a United Nations depot in Dubai, are part of a comprehensive relief effort by the organization that will likely include cash transfers, shelter support and rehabilitation and other critical needs.

The quilts were sewn by members of Lutheran congregations. The personal care kits, also donated by church members, contain essentials for personal hygiene like soap, towels, toothbrushes, combs, and other needed items. The water filtration units can supply clean, safe drinking water to more than 1,000 people living in the disaster zone.

A \$300,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will support the shipment and distribution of these supplies, as well as cash transfers and vouchers to ensure that those who have lost their livelihoods are able to meet their basic needs during this difficult period. These efforts will initially focus on Kathmandu, Gorkha and Lamjung districts and may expand to other areas.

LWR has sent additional staff to Nepal and immediately began assessing needs and raising funds for a comprehensive relief effort. In the immediate hours following the quake, LWR established a relief fund to support recovery efforts and worked quickly to confirm the safety and security of local staff and partners, and the many communities in which they are currently working.

Additional assessments of needs and damages are underway. LWR is working in close coordination with the Nepali District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC), the local government agency responsible for disaster response, the U.N., the Nepali Red Cross, and other NGOs.

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According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the most affected areas are Gorkha, Lamjung and Sindhupalchok as well as Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur Districts. It is reported to be the most powerful earthquake to hit Nepal in 81 years.

LWR has had a presence in Nepal since 2009, and works with local partners on agriculture, food security, climate change adaptation, emergency response and disaster risk reduction projects. LWR's work focuses on areas of western Nepal, including a current program based in Lamjung district, near the epicenter of the earthquake.

Lutheran World Relief is coordinating with Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance to plan a response to the earthquake. ACT, a global coalition of churches and faith-based aid agencies, issued an initial alert to members within hours of the quake and is coordinating closely with all local members to insure a complementary and effective response.

To give to the LWR relief fund, please visit lwr.org/nepalearthquake, call 1-800-597-5972, or mail a check to Lutheran World Relief, PO Box 17061, Baltimore, MD 21297-1061 (please note "Nepal Earthquake Fund" on your check).

Water Missions International

Water Missions International is currently responding to meet the urgent need for safe water in Nepal as a result of the massive earthquake and aftershocks impacting the region.

According to the Nepal WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) cluster, over 4.2 million people suffer from inadequate food and water supplies, and the threat of cholera grows each day as a result of unsanitary living conditions.



This house in a poor rural area of Gorkha, Nepal, had five families living in it before the earthquake. They all escaped and are now living in the tents at the end of the photo. (Water Missions International photo)

Water Missions International staff is working in collaboration with partners to respond to the urgent need for safe water as a result of the devastation. Water treatment equipment — including 12 “Living Water Treatment Systems” and 31 chlorination devices — is being sent to Nepal. Each “Living Water Treatment System” is capable of treating approximately 40,000 liters of water per day. The water treatment systems being installed by Water Missions will provide up to 370,000 people with safe water every day.

Because Water Missions has partners and staff located around the world, they are able to rapidly respond to this disaster. Three staff members from Water Missions are in Nepal to aid in relief efforts. They are currently working in rural communities, testing water sources and designing solutions to meet growing needs.

Water Missions is working with partners to provide safe water to people who are suffering. Donate now and 100 percent of your gift will go directly to providing safe water for the people of Nepal. On the donation page please select “Nepal Earthquake” as the designated fund. You may donate online at watermissions.org, by calling 866-280-7107, or by sending a check to: Water Missions International; P.O. Box 31258; Charleston, SC 29417.

Faith Leaders Reaffirm Commitment to Marriage and Religious Liberty

A few days before the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the rights of states to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman, more than 30 religious leaders representing diverse faith communities throughout the United States have reaffirmed their shared commitment to marriage and religious freedom.

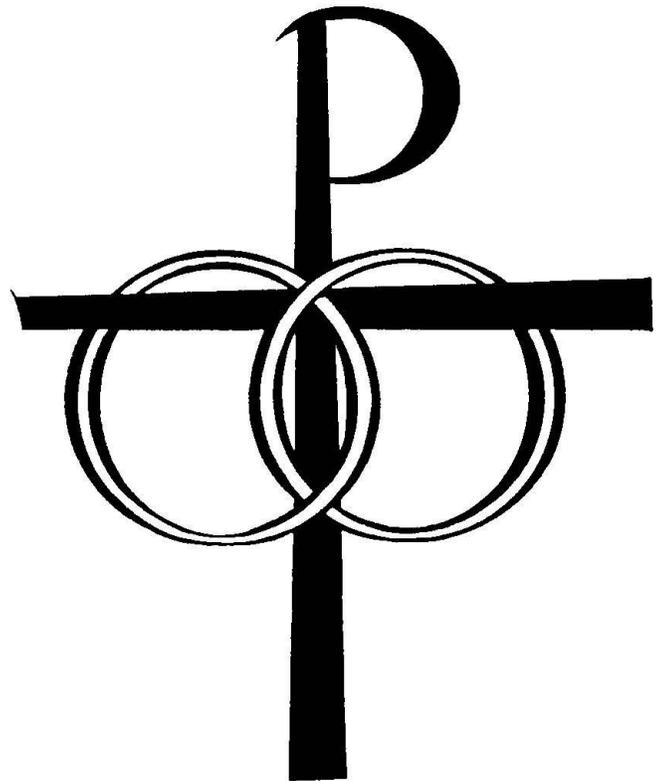
An open letter entitled “The Defense of Marriage and the Right of Religious Freedom: Reaffirming a Shared Witness” was issued to all in positions of public service on April 23.

NALC Bishop John Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary, and Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, were among the signers.

Signing on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church were Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB); Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco, chairman of the USCCB Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage; Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty; and Bishop Richard J. Malone of Buffalo, N.Y., chairman of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

“We hope this letter serves as an encouragement to all of us, especially those dedicated to public service, to continue to promote both marriage and religious freedom as integral to a healthy and free society,” said Archbishop Kurtz. “Marriage as the union of one man and one woman provides the best context for the birth and rearing of children and should be specially protected by law. The law, when it upholds the unique meaning of marriage, is simply recognizing an objective reality, not constructing one: children always have a mother and a father and deserve to be loved and raised by both of them. Society should work to strengthen the unique bond between husband and wife, knowing that strong marriages build stronger communities.”

The religious leaders stressed the need for civility and mutual respect, writing, “Government should protect the



rights of those with differing views of marriage to express their beliefs and convictions without fear of intimidation, marginalization or unwarranted charges that their values imply hostility, animosity, or hatred of others.”

The leaders close with a statement of their duty and love towards all: “In this and in all that we do, we are motivated by our duty to love God and neighbor. This love extends to all those who disagree with us on this issue. The well-being of men, women, and the children they conceive compels us to stand for marriage as between one man and one woman.”

The letter and two previous open letters — “The Protection of Marriage: A Shared Commitment,” issued December 6, 2010, and “Marriage and Religious Freedom: Fundamental Goods That Stand or Fall Together,” issued January 12, 2012 — are available at thenalc.org/statements-and-letters.

The Defense of Marriage and the Right of Religious Freedom: Reaffirming a Shared Witness

An Open Letter from Religious Leaders to All in Positions of Public Service

Released April 23, 2015

Dear Friends:

At this significant time in our nation's history with the institution of marriage before the United States Supreme Court, we reaffirm our commitment to promote and defend marriage — the union of one man and one woman. As religious leaders from various faith communities, we acknowledge that marriage is the foundation of the family where children are raised by a mother and a father together. Our commitment to marriage has been expressed on previous occasions, including the Letter of Shared Commitment and Letter on Marriage and Religious Liberty. This commitment is inseparable from affirming the equal dignity of all people and the necessity of protecting their basic rights.

The state has a compelling interest in maintaining marriage as it has been understood across faiths and cultures for millennia because it has a compelling interest in the well-being of children. Every child has a mother and a father, and every child deserves the opportunity, whenever possible, to be raised by his or her own married mother and father in a stable, loving home. Marriage as the union of a man and a woman is the only institution that encourages and safeguards the connection between children and their mother and father. Although this connection cannot always be realized and sustained — and many single parents, for example, are heroic in their efforts to raise their children — it is in the best interests of the state to encourage and uphold the family founded on marriage and to afford the union of husband and wife unique legal protection and reinforcement.

The redefinition of legal marriage to include any other type of relationship has serious consequences, especially for religious freedom. It changes every law involving marital status, requiring that other such relationships be treated as if they were the same as the marital relationship of a man and a woman. No person or community, including religious organizations and individuals of faith, should be forced to accept this redefinition. For many people, accepting a redefinition of marriage would be to act against their conscience and to deny their religious beliefs and moral convictions. Government should protect the rights of those with differing views of marriage to express their beliefs and convictions without fear of intimidation, marginalization or unwarranted charges that their values imply hostility, animosity, or hatred of others.

In this and in all that we do, we are motivated by our duty to love God and neighbor. This love extends to all those who disagree with us on this issue. The well-being of men, women, and the children they conceive compels us to stand for marriage as the union of one man and one woman. We call for the preservation of the unique meaning of marriage in the law, and for renewed respect for religious freedom and for the conscience rights of all in accord with the common good.

Sincerely Yours:

NALC Bishop Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, General Secretary, and Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, were among the 35 signers. The complete list of signers is available online at www.thenalc.org.

Reflections at the U.S. Supreme Court

By Pastor Dennis R. Di Mauro

On Tuesday, April 28, I had the opportunity to be present at the U.S. Supreme Court for the oral arguments of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the famous gay marriage case.

Arriving at the court at 6:30 a.m., I took my place in the public line available to non-lawyers who want to get a short glimpse (only three minutes) of the oral arguments from the back of the courtroom.

The case concerns the late John Arthur, a terminally ill man who suffered with ALS, and who sought to have his 2013 Maryland same-sex marriage to James Obergefell recognized by the state of Ohio prior to his death.

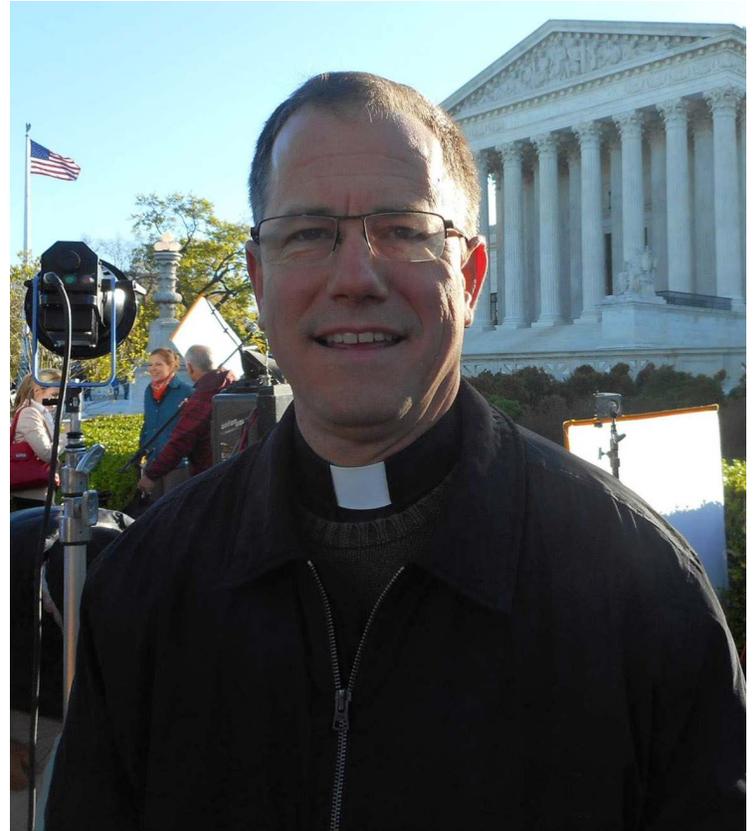
The case will determine whether the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires a state to marry two people of the same sex and also whether it requires a state to recognize gay marriages performed in other states.

The first gentleman I met in the line told me that he really didn't care how the case was decided. He was simply in town for a vacation which he had planned months earlier, and he had always wanted to see a Supreme Court case. Later, I learned that he was a Pentecostal minister from New York, and we had a wonderful discussion about our shared vocation of starting mission churches.

Behind me were two Texas women (one a public school teacher) who had recently been married in California, since gay marriage was still illegal in their home state. In front of me were two Asian American gay men who were students at Columbia University.

As we waited for our short glimpse of the proceedings, we were approached by a number of self-proclaimed "evangelists" holding signs that said, "Like Sodom You Parade Sin" and "Homo Sex Is a Threat to National Security." These "Christians" screamed hate-filled rhetoric from the loudspeakers the entire time I was there, and two of them, seeing my clerical collar, accused me of being a pederast.

The crowd at the Court was overwhelmingly *for* the legalization of gay marriage. Pro-Gay marriage



Pastor Dennis Di Mauro outside of the United States Supreme Court building.

groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the ACLU handed out signs that said, "I Do" and "=", and many sported gay marriage T-shirts with slogans such as "Love Can't Wait."

From my vantage point it appeared that everyone in the line accepted a sign, except the Pentecostal minister and myself.

A young teenage boy and his younger sister held signs that said, "Have 2 Moms – Life Is Good," and the transvestite group, "the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence," who dress like Catholic nuns while wearing white face paint and Mardi Gras beads, were also present. Upon overhearing a conversation I was having about my treatment at the hands of the "evangelists," one "sister" quipped, "Oh, so *you're* a pervert? Well, so am I."

The atmosphere among gay-rights supporters was festive. It was the celebration of a long-awaited victory.

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The Christian presence was sparse, and those clerics who were present were overwhelmingly *for* gay marriage. The Rev. Michael Wilker, pastor of the nearby Lutheran Church of the Reformation (ELCA) led a procession of pro-gay marriage clerics from his parish.

As for Christians *against* gay unions, I caught a glimpse of a small group from Concerned Women of America and the Family Research Council (FRC). The president of the FRC, Tony Perkins, did make a statement in front of the Supreme Court. However, due to the noise of the other protesters, few could hear it.

Only two traditional marriage supporters spoke to me during my entire six hours at the Court. Both were from NOM, the National Organization for Marriage, an organization which held the March for Marriage the previous Saturday. That event, which my wife Coco and I attended, hosted over 10,000 traditional marriage supporters at the U.S. Capitol — the vast majority being either African-American or Hispanic.

Wearing my clericals did have one advantage: it made me easily identifiable to the hundred or so journalists who covered the event. I was interviewed by Catholic News Service, D.C. Channel 4, CSPAN, and the Brazilian paper *O Estado Sao Paulo*.

The CNS article can be found here:
<http://ncronline.org/news/politics/advocates-either-side-same-sex-marriage-case-make-presence-felt>.
The CSPAN interview can be found at this link at minute 14:13:
<http://www.c-span.org/video/?325597-5/washington-journal-viewer-calls>.

I was able to witness to the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all four interviews.

When I finally reached the courtroom, the trial was almost over, and I heard only the last minute of the closing arguments. When I walked out the front doors and down the Supreme Court's marble front steps, many gay marriage supporters peppered me with questions. "What happened inside?" "What did they say?" "Will the Court guarantee gay marriage in all 50 states?" However, my short visit to the courtroom left me ill-equipped to provide an educated guess as to the verdict.

But my day at the Supreme Court did provide some answers. It gave me a window into the future we face. As Christians who defend the integrity of the Bible and its morality, we will often feel alone. The vast majority of the populace will oppose us.

A third of our Christian brothers, like my ELCA colleague, will also oppose us. Perhaps another third, like the Pentecostal pastor I met, will remain indifferent. A third will agree with us, but almost no one in that category will be willing to stand in the gap.

Our opponents, however, will think that we are all just like the hate-filled "evangelists" with their loudspeakers.

We will feel just like I did on the Supreme Court steps that day — all alone. But maybe we shouldn't worry. After all, St. Paul told us there would be days just like this. Despite the opposition, I believe that if we speak the truth *in love*, we will be heard.

And while my day at the Supreme Court was a lonely one, it was also filled with many amazing opportunities for witness. Besides my four interviews, I was able to have a cordial discussion about the Bible and its proscriptions against the homosexual lifestyle with one of the Columbia University students. We even prayed together that the court's judgments would be in line with God's will.

But what struck me most was a comment made by one of the Texas women behind me. After my interview with CSPAN, I walked back in line, and she looked at me and said, "good job." And while my message was in complete opposition to her own beliefs and lifestyle, because I expressed my views in Christian gentleness and love she was willing to accept it and even praise me for it.

The message is clear. We need to leave the four walls of our churches and search for opportunities to engage those souls who will never darken our church doors because when we start to share Jesus's love and His Gospel of salvation and forgiveness, God's morality found in his holy Word might just start to make sense as well.

The Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Di Mauro is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va., and teaches for St. Paul Lutheran Seminary.

International Lutheran Center in Wittenberg, Germany, dedicated

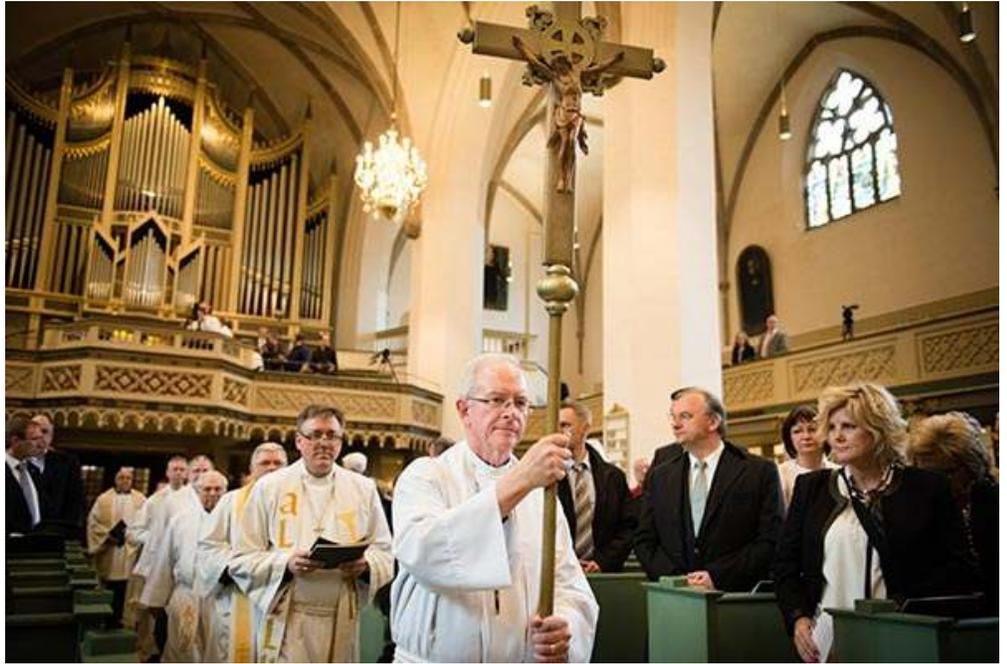
By Roger Drinnon
LCMS Communications

Nearly 450 people — including local residents, representatives of the Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod (LCMS) and international church partners from around the world — took part in the dedication service for the International Lutheran Center at die Alte Latein Schule (the Old Latin School) in Wittenberg, Germany, May 3.

The service, conducted jointly with leaders from both the LCMS and the Selbständige Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche (SELK), began at Wittenberg's historic St. Mary's Church, where Martin Luther preached more than 2,000 times. The liturgy alternated between German and English, with the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, LCMS President, preaching in both German and English.

"We are very excited to take part in the dedication ceremony of the International Lutheran Center," said the Rev. Dr. Armin Wenz, an SELK pastor from Halle who periodically is a guest professor at the SELK seminary. "For us Confessional Lutherans in Germany, this is a great day — we have a center and a meeting place in the capital of world Lutheranism where Luther and Melancthon studied, and we are very thankful to all our brothers and sisters, especially those in the [LCMS], who made this day possible."

During the service, Harrison delivered a sermon with the sting of the Law and then in full measure preached the pure Gospel, paralleling Luther's last sermon given at St. Mary's centuries ago. With a focus on Matthew, Chapter 11, Harrison echoed Luther's emphasis on having childlike faith in God.



The Rev. David L. Mahsman, LCMS missionary and managing director of the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg, serves as crucifer for the Festival Dedication Service at the Town and Parish Church of St. Mary's before the dedication of the International Lutheran Center at the Old Latin School May 3 in Wittenberg, Germany. (LCMS photo by Erik M. Lunsford)

After the St. Mary's service, the worshipers processed from St. Mary's to the doors of the Old Latin School, after which local government officials — including the governor of Saxony-Anhalt and a representative of the Lord Mayor of Wittenberg — acknowledged the significance of the school and Wittenberg's Lutheran heritage.

At a reception that followed, donors, church partners and other contributors were recognized for bringing the restoration of the Old Latin School to fruition. The Rev. David L. and Lois Mahsman received special recognition from the SELK and the LCMS for facilitating the Old Latin School project while working with other missionaries and international partners to spread the Gospel. David Mahsman is an LCMS missionary and managing director of the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg, a German nonprofit corporation

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established by the LCMS, Concordia Publishing House and the SELK for joint ministry in Wittenberg.

Also during the reception, SELK Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt thanked the LCMS for helping Germans remember their history and thereby helping them rediscover the Gospel, as Luther once rediscovered it.

“The Old Latin School helps us to recover our heritage, and we are so thankful for this,” Voigt said.

“It’s quite spectacular to bring Lutheran church leaders from around the world to celebrate Lutheranism where it all began,” said the Rev. Randall Golter, who serves in the LCMS Office of the President as special assistant to the president. In this capacity, he is responsible for leading the Synod in coordinating and planning for the 2017 Reformation-anniversary celebration. “God is working His mission among the nations, around the world,” Golter said.

To see photos from the dedication, visit lcms.org/photo/wittenberg-dedication. Live-stream and archived video of the dedication service has been viewed on every continent except Antarctica, with nearly 13,000 views as of May 5. Archived videos of the event remain available at livestream.com/thelcms/wittenberg.

The day of festivities ended with a sacred-music concert in St. Mary’s, where singers and instrumentalists performed both sacred and secular music from Luther’s day. The concert’s printed program celebrated his love of music by stating: “That Luther appreciated music ... is illustrated by the following quote: ‘Here cannot be a bad courage, where fellows are singing well. Here is no wrath, strife, hatred nor envy; all heartache must yield. Avarice, worry and what else is hard goes forth with all the sadness. The devil’s work is destroyed by the music.’”



A crowd gathers for the dedication of The International Lutheran Center at the Old Latin School on Sunday, May 3, in Wittenberg, Germany. (LCMS photo by Erik M. Lunsford)

Reprinted, with permission, from "Reporter Online" (reporter.lcms.org), the electronic version of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's national newspaper.

Nestingen and Wendel represent NALC at dedication

Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, represented the North American Lutheran Church at the dedication of the International Lutheran Center in Wittenberg.

Also present from the NALC was the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, a retired professor from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., and current faculty for the North American Lutheran Seminary. Prof. Nestingen presented a paper on “Reformation Decline in America” at the International Conference on Confessional Leadership in the 21st Century held in conjunction with the dedication.

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“Celebrating the Reformation Rightly: Remembrance, Repentance and Rejoicing” was the theme of the 2015 conference which looks forward to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

The conference was sponsored by the LCMS for its partner churches, members of International Lutheran Council, and other church bodies and individuals for the purpose of “furthering and nurturing confessional Lutheran theology at home and abroad.” About 120 theologians and church leaders participated.

“This Conference on Confessional Leadership is significant if for no other reason than to bring together Confessional Lutheran leaders from around the world, from every continent,” Pastor Wendel said.

“We were able to sit together, learn together, share together, and, most of all, worship together in the place where the Holy Spirit, through Martin Luther, lit the fire that would renew the Church. We also were able to see how the Holy Spirit is keeping that fire of Reformation going with the growth of Christianity in the Global South.

“That reinforced for all of us, then, the need to continue the work of reformation and renewal around the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Western Europe, Scandinavia and North America. Although many different Lutheran bodies were present representing different structures, practices and understandings around the world, we rejoiced at the unity we have in our Lord Jesus Christ and His grace shared with us through Word and Sacrament,” Pastor Wendel said.

“The high point of the week was certainly the dedication of the newly renovated Old Latin School as the International Lutheran Center. Just across the plaza from the Wittenberg Town Church where Luther preached thousands of sermons, it is a



Prof. James Nestingen and Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, pose at Torgeau while at the Conference on Confessional Leadership in Germany. They were NALC representatives to the conference.

visible reminder of the life and work of both Martin and his colleague, lay theologian and professor Philipp Melanchthon.

“Construction on the school was completed in 1567 to implement the educational reforms developed by Melanchthon to facilitate education of children and youth in Wittenberg. Although it was the city school, it was built to be a specifically Lutheran school. It is now intended to be an educational and outreach center, dedicated to ‘the service of Christ and the Gospel’ (a quote from the dedication program).

“I believe we can all give thanks to the work of the LCMS, Concordia Publishing House and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK) for their partnership in making this center available to the Church and the world, especially as we prepare to observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation,” Pastor Wendel said.



Breaking ground in Kings Mountain, N.C.

Advent Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Kings Mountain, N.C. held a groundbreaking service on their church property on Sunday, March 29.

Honored guests attending the service included Pastor Carl Haynes, Dean of the NALC Carolinas Missions District; the Rev. Dr. Mary Havens, Director of the North American Lutheran Seminary Lutheran House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C.; Pastor Scott Whitney of East Gold Street Wesleyan

Church in Kings Mountain; and several seminarians from the Lutheran House of Studies in Charlotte.

Advent Lutheran Church family and friends celebrate this new chapter, and ask for God's blessings and your continued prayers as they continue to do God's will in their community.

Advent Lutheran Church is currently meeting in the Family Life Center at East Gold Street Wesleyan Church in Kings Mountain.

Disaster Response Servant Event is July 12-17

NALC Disaster Response is sponsoring a servant event July 12-17 at the HARP Mission in Caldwell, Ohio. The theme of the event is "We Are His Hands."

Participating church groups and individuals will provide home maintenance, repair, wheelchair ramps and other help for families in crisis, the disabled, widowed, elderly, seniors, and veterans.

They will also learn how to repair and rebuild homes and families destroyed by disasters and experience a mock disaster led by the NALC Disaster Coordinator, Mary Bates.

Daily devotions and recreation will be coordinated by Upper Arlington Lutheran Church.

Organizers are trying to find churches and/or individuals willing to sponsor materials for wheelchair ramps and home repairs for those who cannot afford them. Please contact organizers if you are willing to assist with this.

Additional servant events may be scheduled if this week does not work for congregations and there is interest in an alternative date.

Cost is \$150 per person. Registration and medical release forms will be emailed upon request.

For more information, contact Tammy Schultheisz at 740-509-1132 or Mary Bates batesm55@gmail.com.

Seminary forms and prepares pastoral candidates for a vocation of proclamation

Dear Friends in Christ,

He is Risen! is the cry of those who come to the empty tomb. *He is Risen, indeed!*

We celebrate the Festival of the Resurrection in April and May — 50 days, seven Sundays of unbridled joy. We give thanks for what God has done for us in raising Jesus from the dead. We give thanks for the word spoken by the Risen Christ to Mary Magdalene, “Go, tell my brothers.” We give thanks for the faithful witness told by the apostles. We give thanks for all who, through the many centuries, have passed the account of the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord unto us. *Alleluia! Christ is Risen, indeed!*

As a seminary of the church we are forming and preparing pastoral candidates for a vocation of proclamation. As St. Paul writes, “Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:12-14).

At the center of the Christian faith is the belief that the One who was crucified on Friday has conquered death and now lives and rules for all eternity. St. Paul, along with the other writers of the New Testament, wrote such words down so that they would be spoken aloud in the gathered assembly. They wrote the words down with the power of God still in them, and it is our calling as the church to proclaim these words of Holy Scripture so that their power may again be released in this generation. In these holy words lies the power of God to heal, to forgive, and to set free. Through these words God gives us hope: hope that death will not be the last word, but life eternal.

The North American Lutheran Seminary is seeking candidates with such a passion to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. Do you recognize someone in your



From the Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin

President

North American Lutheran Seminary

congregation whom God might be calling to such pastoral ministry? Someone whose life is already being shaped by God’s mercy and goodness in such a way, that through the disciplines of prayer, study, and service, God would call them to preach His Word week after week in His holy assembly?

Encourage them to explore the vocation of pastoral ministry. Have them visit our Seminary Center in Ambridge, Pa. or our House of Studies in Charlotte, N.C. Put them in touch with our NALS Faculty and/or Registrar so that we, too, may engage them in this important conversation of discernment. The generations to come need faithful pastors who will preach “in season and out” (2 Timothy 4:2) so that all people will come to know the saving love of the Risen Christ.

For He rises from the dead and that we might sing as in an eternal spring. He rises from the dead and we find hope where once we only knew loss. He rises from the dead and we are so filled with his love that we cannot stop ourselves from sharing it.

May Christ’s resurrection power fill you as you walk in his eternal love.

Dr. Amy C. Schifrin

President

North American Lutheran Seminary

Reprinted from the North American Seminary Newsletter.

Capitalizing on the Strengths of the Smaller Church

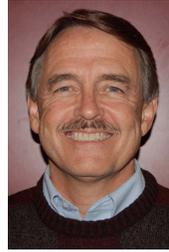
Apparently it all started with a published cartoon by Steve Moore back in 1999. The picture was of a group of would-be “runners” gathered at the starting line under a large banner. Written on the banner was “Annual Instant Gratification Zero-mile Fun Run.” The caption for this cartoon was an official standing at the starting line announcing, “Runners to your mark. Get set, Go! ... OK, come get your T-shirts.”

This one cartoon was the original inspiration for Instant Gratification Runs. One of these events was held this last winter in Philadelphia. It was a 0.0 mile run, and was covered (tongue in cheek) by *New York Times* sports writer Jere Longman.

The title for the article was, “For the Slothful, a Race Is a One-Step Process.” Longman described the event. “Runners picked up their long-sleeve T-shirts, pinned on their bib numbers and gathered beneath a banner as rousing music played. Some wore sneakers in the sub-freezing chill; others wore boots or flip-flops. ... Runners took their marks, some fueled by something stronger than Gatorade. An air horn bleated, and they surged merrily forward to the *immediate* praise of “Congratulations! You have just finished.”

Various participants in this “race” were interviewed. One was quoted before the event as saying, “I’m going to push myself. I won’t hold back.” Another said, “This gives a chance to do the festivities without being exhausted. I usually don’t get to enjoy the free beer and dancing.” And another quote: “We wanted to prove that with no hard work, no perseverance and no discipline, anyone can be a winner.”

It occurred to me that the emergence of mega churches has, in many cases, generated an ecclesial version of an “instant gratification fun run.” Needless to say, this has little to do with the Book of Hebrews author’s admonition to “run with endurance the race God has set before us.”



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

Consider all the ways that participation in a mega church can have more to do with instant gratification than long-term discipleship.

1. Mega churches (typically defined as any congregation with over 1,000 in weekly attendance) draw many visitors, in part, because of the built-in anonymity that comes with a crowd. (In other words, to “see and not be seen.”) This being the case, visitors are more likely to approach their search for a church as a “shopping” experience. The bottom line becomes what this congregation has to offer in the fulfillment of their needs.
2. Mega churches, by appealing to a large mass audience, are less likely to raise the bar when it comes to disciple-making. The “minimum daily adult dose” of spirituality tends to be the norm because the average participant cannot be expected to be as committed to the congregation as might be the case in a smaller church.
3. Mega churches, by virtue of their sheer size, struggle to utilize the individual gifts of a significant percentage of their participants. As a result, these participants are less likely to discover the joy of using their personal gifts in service to the church and surrounding community.

I am not trying to criticize those who lead mega churches. It takes an incredible range of gifts and skills to effectively lead these ministries. And, like it

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or not, an increasing percentage of Americans who worship are doing so because they are worshiping at these very large congregations. And we'll never know what percentage of these worshipers, if there were no mega churches, would be unchurched.

Also, I have tremendous respect for the accomplishments of many mega church pastors, including Bill Hybels, Rick Warren and John Ortberg.

However, with the emergence of mega churches — most of them a part of the evangelical subculture — smaller Protestant congregations find themselves struggling to maintain viable ministries. Granted, the greatest external challenge in congregational outreach and growth is the rise of a more secular and less religious worldview — especially among younger generations. However, the increasing number of mega churches has, in my opinion, definitely added to the challenges facing pastors and lay leaders of smaller congregations.

So it's time to not only point out the built-in limitations inherent in the mega church ministry model, but celebrate the *strengths of the smaller church*. (Some of these are reflected in the mega church limitations already listed.)

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey indicates that smaller congregations score better than the biggest churches in at least four ways:

1. "Fostering spiritual growth." My guess is that this is in large part about gracious accountability when it comes to our faith lives. In a smaller church this accountability can be far more personal and in the context of significant friendships with fellow congregants.
2. Participants in smaller congregations are more likely to "share their faith." Apparently witnessing — whether in words or deeds — is more common among members of small churches.
3. Smaller churches are more likely to have "empowering leaders." Leadership is easier to share in a small church setting.
4. "Being places where most worshipers are actively involved." Not surprising, and probably self-evident.

In addition, I'd cite the advantages small churches have when it comes to developing a meaningful prayer ministry and experiencing a deeper level of congregational fellowship. And finally, one more advantage: Smaller congregations are often a far more effective ministry context for helping members grow in their stewardship. I share that not as a pastor obsessed with a congregation's "bottom line," but as one who has witnessed the spiritual growth when members are able to grow significantly in their financial giving.

So if you are part of a *small* church take a moment—as you (of course) continue to pursue the Great Commission—to thank God for your good fortune.

A tribute to Lyle Schaller

As one of my favorite contemporary Christian authors recently died, it's only appropriate that I honor him in this month's column. The Rev. Lyle E. Schaller passed away March 18 at the age of 91. Lyle, a Methodist pastor, was the author of 55 books, most of which focused on congregational leadership and outreach.

Lyle could be very blunt and even a little irreverent in his books. But he also had a sense of humor which was evident, not only in his writings, but on the T-shirts he wore to speaking engagements. These T-shirts would have witty captions emblazoned on them, including, "87 percent of Statistics Are Made Up on the Spur of the Moment;" "Question Authority" (on the front) and (on the back) "And When Authority Answers, Listen;" and my favorite, "If you want a taste of religion, bite a preacher."

Common themes in Lyle Schaller's books included the following:

1. He was unapologetic about the need for congregations to reach new people. Ministry was not limited, in his view, to the care and feeding of the congregational "flock."
2. Lyle believed congregational life should involve more than weekly worship and the gathering of standing committees. He advocated for multiple

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NALC youth win Ohio ‘God, Flag and Country’ speech competition

Two NALC youth won the Ohio State “God, Flag and Country” Speech Competition on May 2 in Medina, Ohio. Interestingly, both were cheered on by the pastors in their families.

Both girls received a \$2,000 Educational Scholarship from the State Aerie of the Eagles Club, and will go on to compete in Milwaukee, Wis., at the National Competition on July 11.

Pictured are Pastor John Jackson and his granddaughter, Caroline, (center) who won in the Age 10-11 group; and Pastor Amy Little and her daughter Anna, who was first for Ages 12-13.



Caroline’s speech centered around service to the military and their families by her grandfather who was a military chaplain overseas and at home. Anna’s speech was “The Importance of God’s Word in Freedom.”

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“entry points” for non-members from the surrounding community. This emphasis of his was similar to something I’ve referred to in more than one column: The ongoing need to create new groups and ministries for new people.

3. Schaller stressed the practical more than the theoretical. As a result, readers were exposed to a large number of very pragmatic suggestions in his books, at least some of which were applicable in just about any ministry context.

4. Schaller advocated for congregations to be intentional about reaching and discipling younger generations. He identified a great many examples of how older congregations, often unintentionally, excluded younger people.

5. Schaller frequently encouraged his readers to focus on and imagine *future* ministry challenges and opportunities. Consistent with this emphasis, he warned congregations not to assume that what “worked” in the past would necessarily “work” for the present or the future.

Given what a prolific author Lyle Schaller was, this is by no means a complete list of his major themes. But at least there is some consolation knowing that with 55 books to his credit, Pastor Schaller probably had the opportunity to share just about everything he had on his mind and heart.

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