

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

November 2015

NALC Mission District Deans meet

Deans representing the Mission Districts of the North American Lutheran Church met Nov. 4-5 in Columbus, Ohio.

A central part of the annual Deans meeting is reporting on what is happening in each Mission District.

Many Deans reported that congregations in their area are expressing interest in joining the NALC including some Spanish-speaking congregations in Texas.



NALC Mission District Deans meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

Bishop John Bradosky told those in attendance about the significance of the role of Dean in making connections between NALC staff and congregations throughout North America.

Bishop Bradosky also explained the implications of changes in marriage law regarding the use of church buildings. "The time is gone when the church can get involved with other ministries without getting directly involved in them," he said.

The NALC legal team will be providing templates of policies for use by congregations. "The key is being vigilant. Policies must be consistently enforced," he said. "It calls us to be more mission-minded in all we do."

Bishop Bradosky also encouraged support for the First Amendment Defense Act which is pending before the U.S. Congress.

Bishop Bradosky highlighted the next steps in the NALC's Life-to-Life Discipleship emphasis. The NALC will be providing more of the leadership for the emphasis rather than relying on other groups.

Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, provided an inspirational message on mission. Jenny Brockman of the Missions Office reported on information received from congregations during the missions emphasis at the 2015 Convocation. Some of the needs expressed by congregations will be addressed during the missions emphasis at the 2016 Convocation.

The Deans discussed the 2015 Convocation resolution regarding a study of the election process for bishop. They offered their perspectives on the election process and recommended members for a committee that will do the study.

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Pastor Henry Graf of Promise Ministries in Fort Wayne, Ind., delivered three major addresses at the Mission Festival.



About 200 people attended the 2015 NALC Mission Festival.

2015 NALC Mission Festival



Jenny Brockman of the NALC Missions Office serves as coordinator for the Mission Festival.



A wide variety of workshops were offered.



A panel answered questions about best practices in mission.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, spoke at the Mission Festival.



Bishop John Bradosky presided at Communion and preached for the opening and closing celebrations.



Interactive prayer stations were a part of worship for the opening celebration.



Pastor David Keener, left, and Kevin Reynolds of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga., led music.



Musicians from Upper Arlington Lutheran Church led music at the opening and closing worship services.

2016 NALC Pastors Conference

'The Lord, His Church and Ministry - Feb. 2-4 in Orlando

"The Lord, His Church, and Ministry" is the theme of the 2016 NALC Pastors Conference Feb. 2-4 in Orlando, Fla.

Featured speaker is Dr. David Yeago of the North American Lutheran Seminary. Dr. Yeago will present two lectures on the theme.



David Yeago



James Nestingen



Amy Schifrin

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin and the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen will offer reflections on preaching the Lectionary Scripture readings for Lent and Easter. They will also lead preaching workshops. Pastors are welcome to bring a sermon to preach for the workshop.

Registration is \$75 (through Nov. 30). To register or for more information go to thenalc.org.

All NALC pastors are encouraged to attend the annual pastors conference.



NALC Deans pose for a group picture while meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

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Gary Pecuch updated the Deans on the NALC's partnership with FaithWebbing.com and the many resources available to NALC congregations on the website. Access to the website is free to NALC congregations because of the partnership.

Pastor Mark Chavez asked Deans to encourage congregations to complete their annual reports. He reported that the NALC website will be adding a directory of clergy in response to requests for it.

The Deans' Strategic Planning Subcommittee was discussed, and new members were appointed to it.

Mission Impossible - Paul and Ananias

Changing Focus - Changing Direction - Changing Behavior

Following is the first of two sermons preached by Bishop John Bradosky at the 2015 NALC Mission Festival Nov. 5-7 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio. The sermons are based on Acts 9:1-22 — the story of the conversion of St. Paul. The second sermon will be printed in the December NALC News.

In this first “Mission Impossible” sermon I am focusing on Paul, and in the second I will focus on Ananias.

Discipleship demands nothing less than a change of focus, direction and behavior.

It is the nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to produce transformation and conversion. Any person who encounters Christ should expect nothing less. It may not always be as dramatic as Paul’s experience, but it always happens to those who by faith follow Jesus.

Unfortunately, it is not something we talk about in Lutheran conversations. How un-Lutheran to think that our focus, direction and behaviors are all without need of transformation. That would be to assume a sense of perfection that led to the Reformation in the first place. Luther’s understanding of the Church in need of unceasing reformation, transformation or conversion is what we must affirm.

Paul may not be the first terrorist to confront Christians in the Church, but they trained him. We see this in Acts Chapter 6 in the powerful preaching and witness of Stephen who is attacked because of his faith. We read his powerful message to the Sanhedrin in Chapter 7. He tells them: “You are a stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors. You always resist the Holy Spirit! You have persecuted the prophets and killed those who announced the coming of the Messiah. Now you have betrayed and murdered Christ. You received the law given by angels and failed to obey it!”



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Preaching like that will get you in trouble every time! They are furious with Stephen, but Stephen looks up to heaven and sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He tells them what he sees. That did it! They dragged him out and began to stone him. While they were stoning him he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” He asked for the forgiveness of those murdering him and then he breathed his last. Saul was right there taking it all in, holding the cloaks of those stoning Stephen and giving his approval.

Paul sees two very distinct models for faithful living. He sees in Stephen a fully committed life of faith in Christ, and he sees the model of religious terrorists who live in fear of losing their control and power.

Like many terrorists today, Paul was well educated. He was committed to living his life after the example of other religious zealots or terrorists. He was committed to preserving the institution, supporting the organization.

This was Paul’s commission. Taking his orders from the High Priest, he was to imprison and kill Christians — “anyone belonging to the Way.” Paul was a defender of a religion, but he was an enemy of God. He not only thought he was doing good but probably saw himself as a model for others to follow. Paul had power and was in control, and he was imitating exactly what he saw modeled in the lives of those who stoned Stephen. If he was not called by God to do this, he certainly had the documents that established the support of the religious establishment.

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What About us? What is your focus? What is the direction for your life and ministry? How do you spend your time and energy?

Those behaviors speak volumes about our commitments, priorities and values. Your values are what you do!

Institutional loyalty and agreement on agendas are what we left behind, but how have we been converted and transformed? What drives us? Could we also become institutional loyalists with just different letters behind our name? Do we spend most of our time and energy trying to preserve and protect our congregations, our buildings, our pensions, our security, and our dignity?

We could spend a lot of time attacking others and feeling justified and religious as though we were defending God. But what does any of that have to do with faithfulness to the mission Christ has given to His Church?

We are not here to follow the NALC — but to follow Christ! We are not here to be or become like the rest! All we have to do is look around and we can see that to become more like them is a death wish in the worst sense.

At some point in our lives, no matter how religious we are, it is still possible to find ourselves in hopeless circumstances, at cross purposes with Christ, resistant instead of obedient, engaged in self-preservation instead of self-sacrifice, embroiled in our own mission instead of His. Like Paul, we don't see the need for conversion or transformation. Thinking we have it all figured out is the easiest way to lose sight of Christ. Paul's experience with the risen Lord Jesus reminds us that there is hope for us and all those we seek to reach with the Gospel even though it may seem to be mission impossible.

Let us consider how Jesus called Paul and transformed his life.

First, on the road to Damascus, Paul is knocked down to the ground. This powerful and authoritative man is now knocked off his feet — in the humiliated position of lying flat on his back. The aggressor hunting down others is now the hunted, rendered

powerless. He is struck down and blinded by a bright light.

This man who had relied on his own wisdom and insight is now unable to see anything. He was in need of a new worldview.

As I teach about discipleship I remind our leaders that the goal of Christian education is to help people become blind to the secular worldview and accept the worldview that Jesus came to proclaim — the Kingdom of Heaven worldview, a Biblical worldview.

When people encounter Jesus Christ, they will never see the world the same way. My theory is that even after Paul received his sight again, he still could not see like he used to see. He is like Jacob at the Jabbock. From that point on Jacob always walked with a limp. I think Paul had trouble with his eyes from this point on. That is why he signed his name with large letters, and I also believe this was the thorn in the flesh that he asked Jesus to heal. You will remember that during that request Paul heard Jesus' words: "My grace is sufficient. My power is made perfect in weakness." Paul could never forget the costly grace of meeting Jesus.

Next, Paul hears Jesus speak in direct opposition to his intended purposes. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul wants to know who it is that is speaking. Jesus identifies Himself and tells Saul that he is not just persecuting people of the Way, he is persecuting Jesus.

This is the nature of the Church of Jesus Christ. When one part hurts the whole body hurts! Attack a follower of Jesus, you attack Christ Himself. Jesus takes the persecution of His believers personally.

Then Saul received the instruction to get up and go into the city where he would be told what he must do. It is only when he gets up that he realizes that he is blind and therefore must be led by others. This powerful, independent man is now powerless and dependent on others for his direction every step of the way. In the city he would receive instructions. Saul is so devastated and grief stricken by this experience that he cannot eat or drink anything for three days. The old Saul was dying.

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In fact, it was as though he was dead for three days — dead and buried.

The Scripture says that Saul is praying. Jesus is aware of his prayers. While he is not distracted by external vision, internally he sees a vision of a man who will place his hands on him and restore his sight. One of the very people he had planned on killing was to be his agent for healing. Saul is healed, filled with the Holy Spirit, and baptized. At once, it says in Verse 20, he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God!

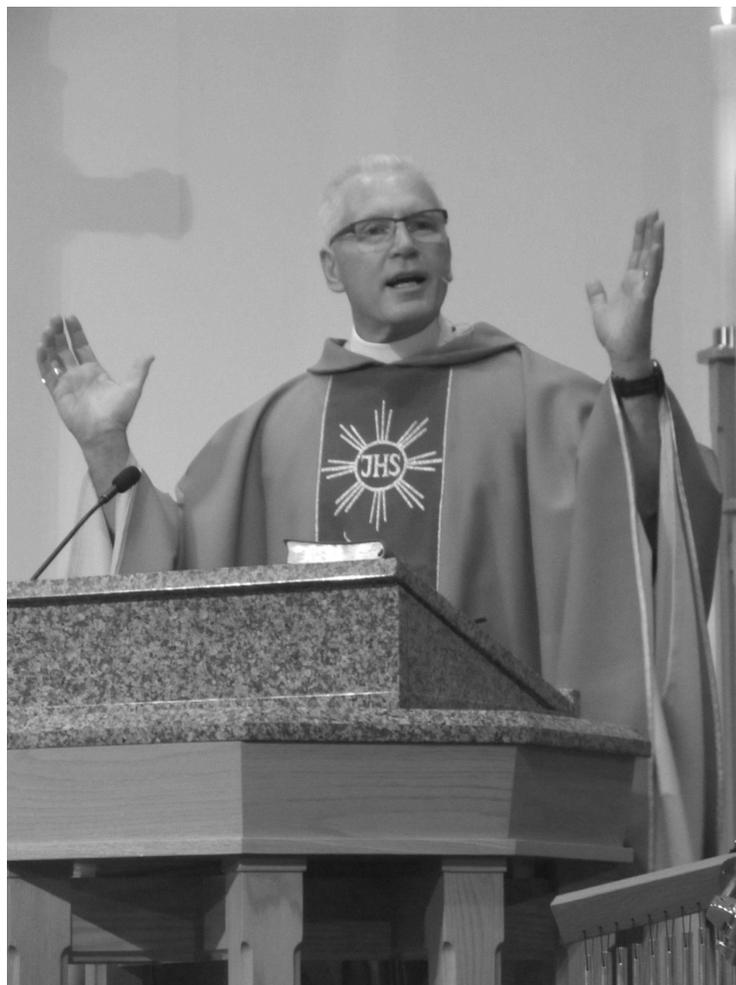
Conversion leads to not only a change in worldview and wisdom, but also to a change in behavior. Focus, direction and behaviors are all transformed. It happened to everyone who became a disciple of Jesus.

Saul's life would never be the same, and the price he would pay for this conversion was huge. Instantly, those who gave him orders to kill others now wanted to kill him. Those he was trying to kill are now defending and protecting his life. They get him to safety, but then he must be disciplined. His training would last no less time than those who were with Jesus initially — three years! Only then would he be an apostle — one who is equipped and sent out as Jesus sent out the first disciples. Paul had no idea what Jesus had in store for him. Had Jesus told him, I wonder if Paul would have accepted the challenge.

The only “mission impossible” in this text is that Paul would continue with his initial mission. That mission was now impossible to maintain. After this encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ, Paul's new mission was not only possible, but to do anything but proclaim Christ was the only impossibility.

How do our lives reflect Paul's initial mission? We may not be committing overt acts of violence against Christ or His Church, but how have we prevented the Church from fulfilling its mission?

It is often the more subtle acts of being busy with everything except the mission of the Church that undermines and thwarts Christ's mission of making disciples.



NALC Bishop John Bradosky preaches at the opening celebration of the 2015 NALC Mission Festival.

We are busy with worship but do we work toward the end of people hearing Christ's call to follow Him?

We are busy with Christian education, but do we work toward the end of people knowing Jesus, receiving a Kingdom of Heaven worldview and becoming fully equipped to disciple others?

We are busy with service and outreach, but do we work toward the end of loving people into a relationship of faith in Jesus so they too can begin to follow Him?

We are busy with buildings and administration, but do we work toward the end of creating a caring community that can use every resource to make and nurture disciples of Jesus?

I could go on, but you get the point.

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What often happens in ministry is that we become so busy that there is no time to invest in the lives of others. Is it any wonder that our people are skeptical about their capacity for making disciples when they consider our lives? If we are too busy to invest in the lives of others, then we are too busy! There is no time for making disciples and, therefore, no time for the mission of the Church!

We need what Paul experienced. By the way, the Church has always needed what Paul experienced, and Jesus has provided for it. Many of the early Church Fathers had conversion experiences. St. Augustine of Hippo was a notorious sinner who became a saint. St. Ignatius of Loyola was a wounded soldier who was more concerned with women and war than with Jesus. He became the founder of the Jesuit community. Embezzlers, murderers, like Saint Olga or Saint Vladimir, were all converted. Even Luther was struck down by lightning. The list of those whose lives have been transformed is long. No one is too far gone for God!

Every conversion, no matter how it unfolds, has this in common: the realization that Jesus is real! He is alive, and He continues to empower His Church for mission. If Jesus is alive and real, then His Kingdom is real and eternal. If Jesus is real, then the spiritual realm is just as real as this moment. If

Jesus is real, then His Word is true and can be trusted.

Even today there are Muslims who have never read a word of Scripture who have seen a vision of Jesus and come to believe in Him. There are Mormons who have come to faith in Jesus by simply reading the Bible. One young Mormon girl started reading the Bible and came to faith in Jesus and converted her entire family!

Jesus is still converting, transforming and renewing the lives of people. When Jesus becomes the only focus of our lives, we will have a new direction for living and our behaviors will change. This is what it means to follow Jesus. This is precisely what it means to be His disciple.

This is only “mission impossible” for those who are unsure if Jesus is real. For those who know He is real, it is the only mission possible.

Let me leave you with the words of St. Augustine of Hippo: “No saint is without a past, and no sinner is without a future!”

It is my prayer that Jesus will bring you that certainty and assurance as we meet these days and, through you, renew and inflame His entire Church for His mission of making disciples.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.



New members at California mission

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Santa Barbara, Calif., has been meeting on the Westmont College campus since 2013. Beginning as a NALC mission start, this campus parish has been introducing students to historical Lutheran liturgy.

On Sunday, Oct. 4, Prince of Peace welcomed five new members: the Rev. Marvin Combs, Dean of the Southwest Pacific Mission District, and his wife Linda Combs, and students: Eric Fauss, Meredith Olson, and Matthew Maler.

Trinity in Warrenton, Va., broadcasts 'Conversations on Faith' radio program

Today's Christian radio consists mostly of recorded Sunday sermons, conservative political talk shows, and syrupy/repetitive praise music.

So the members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va., wondered if it might be possible to offer an informal, conversational radio program that would discuss questions that are important to Christian listeners — and approach those questions from a Lutheran perspective.

On Sunday, May 31, Trinity Lutheran Church broadcasted its first half-hour episode of "Conversations on Faith," a radio show that airs every Sunday at 8 a.m. on 88.1 FM WPRZ in nearby Culpeper, Va.

The Rev. Dennis Di Mauro, Trinity's pastor, hopes that this outreach will engage those who may have "dropped out" of church and are looking to "plug in" to a local faith community.



Elaine Onstad is one of the hosts of "Conversations on Faith," a radio program produced by Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va.

He also hopes that the show will change public perceptions of conservative Christians by offering thoughtful discussion on hot-button issues such as the sanctity of life and traditional marriage in a loving, informal, but nevertheless Biblical manner.

Hosted by Pastor Di Mauro, Trinity's president Lynn Windingland, and its secretary/treasurer, Elaine Onstad, a Biblical studies student at Liberty University, the program has already covered such topics as the Inspiration of the Bible, Baptism, traditional marriage, forgiveness, the Dome of the Rock, religious persecution, the feeding the 5000, and common Bible misconceptions.

The show can also be streamed online by going to www.wprz.org and clicking on "Listen Live Now" during airtime. Podcasts of completed shows can also be heard by going to <http://www.trinitylutheranva.org/go/downloads>.



Pastor Dennis Di Mauro of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va., is one of the hosts of the "Conversations on Faith" radio program.

The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious

***The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious* is a new book by Pastor Eric Riesen of Zion Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pa. Bruce Randolph offers this review of Pastor Riesen's book:**

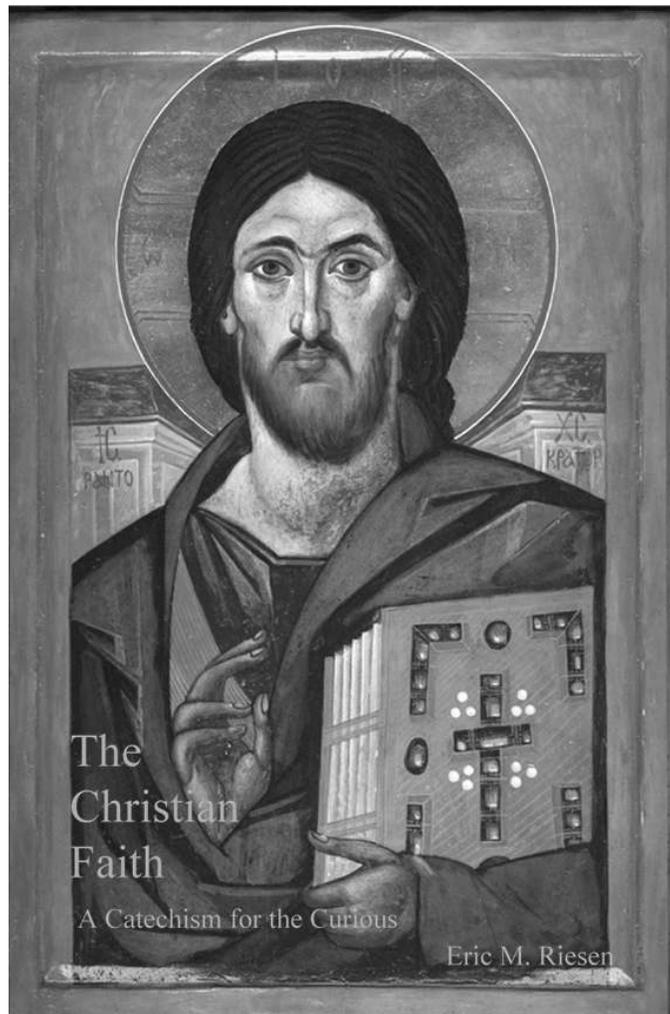
In eight chapters author Eric Riesen's book, *The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious*, (available through the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau) strives to impart an introduction to the Christian Faith. Riesen's book is an example (somewhat rare) of enlightenment, clarity, likeability and brevity coexisting in a religious text.

Riesen, a seasoned Lutheran pastor, provides an orderly introduction to the contemporary Christian faith using common tools of religious literary communication such as Scripture and apologetics. While the word "contemporary" often suggests abandoning critical or historical Christian theology in favor of appealing to popular culture, Riesen avoids such pitfalls, remaining faithful to tradition while still being able to convey engaging, yet orthodox instruction. What draws the reader into the text is a winning conversational style combined with stories the author shares from personal life experience, education, reading and long-term ministry.

I found the text indirectly suggesting strategies for teaching an introductory class. While being a fine stand-alone read, the participatory aspect of the book makes it an excellent tool for group study or a "new members" class. The questions for discussion, which follow each chapter, encourage not only discussion, but critical debate and exploration of the faith.

While I was disappointed that the book contained no graphics, illustrations or photographs, which its writing style strongly suggests, the winsome composition overcomes the absence of artwork/visuals with ease.

The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious explores a broad range of topics concerning Christianity (with a definite Lutheran flavor) from history to a personal faith journey, but it never loses itself to the esoteric or dogmatic long-windedness that so often

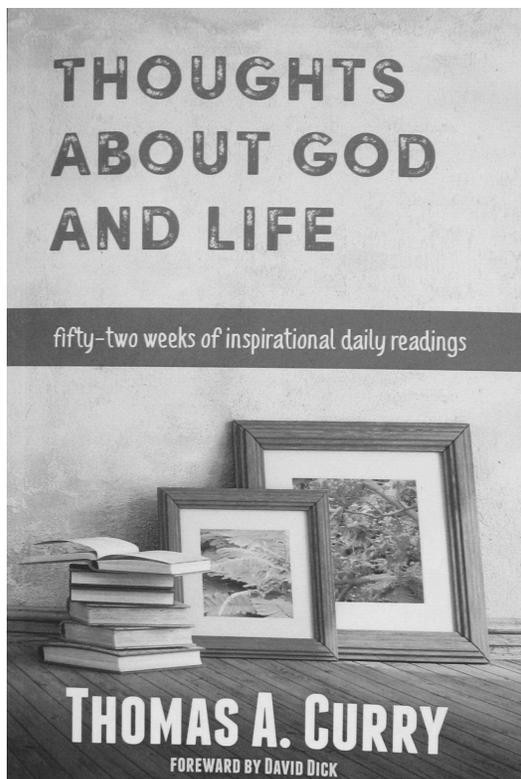


***The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious* by NALC Pastor Eric Riesen is available from the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (alpb.org) for \$15.**

plagues such discussions. This book provides solid foundational teaching that any Christian, curious or seasoned, will find worth reading.

Bruce Randolph has been in technical and creative communications for 32 years. He spent 10 years in corporate communications and 15 years in ecumenical television, radio and publishing. He currently owns a consulting firm based in Pittsburgh, Pa.

NALC pastor authors devotional book



Thoughts about God and Life is a daily devotional, a 52-week overview of the Christian faith as revealed in the Old and New Testaments and experienced by pastor and missionary Thomas Curry of Living Faith Lutheran Church (NALC) in Wabash, Ind.

Reading through the entire year will take the reader through the whole Bible as to content, highlighting many of its great characters.

Pastor Curry has been actively engaged in Christian ministry for 34 years. The nation of India has been a focus of his life since 1991. Pastor Curry and his wife, Rhonda, helped found Hope Home, an orphanage for destitute children, located in south India and have assisted in the founding of the mission agency, Friends of Hope (www.Fohglobal.org). He is also the author of the book, *God's Heart for India*.

The book may be purchased through Amazon.com for \$11.95. It is available on Kindle for \$6.95.

All royalties from the sale of *Thoughts about God and Life* go to Friends of Hope for the continuation of its ministry in India.

Books from theological conferences

Books from the annual Theological Conferences sponsored by the NALC and Lutheran CORE are available from the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (alpb.org).

Rightly Handling the Word of Truth: Scripture, Canon and Creed is a collection of the papers delivered at the 2014 Theological Conference in Charleston, S.C.

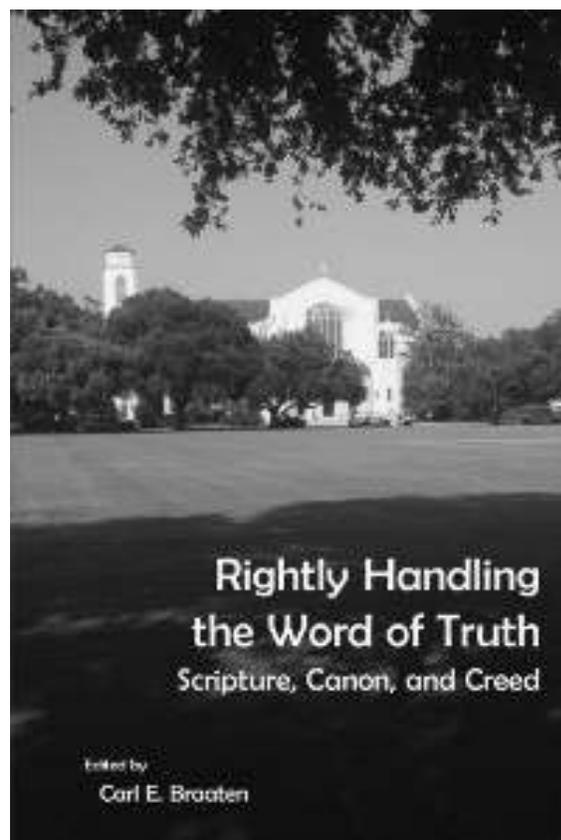
On Being the Church in These Precarious Times is from the 2013 Theological Conference in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God is from the 2012 Theological Conference in Golden Valley, Minn.

No Other Name: Salvation through Christ Alone includes the papers from the 2011 Theological Conference.

Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism: Biblical, Theological, and Churchly Perspectives is from the 2010 conference which preceded the constituting Convocation of the NALC.

All of the books were edited by Professor Carl E. Braaten.



God's Intended Future for the NALC

While not publicized widely, the NALC Executive and Support Staff meet twice a year. Of course, we communicate regularly and have Executive Staff meetings at least monthly and now Support Staff are having their own monthly meetings.

These "All Staff" meetings have taken a variety of forms, depending upon needs at the time, but our most recent gathering was significant, and we agreed one piece of our work together could be shared with the NALC as a whole.

In one way, this falls into the realm of desiring that our Church, in all its various parts, have a shared understanding and represent itself to the outside world as a whole — of one piece.

We began by discussing "God's Intended Future for NALC Staff," but we ending up concluding that truly this is God's vision for the North American Lutheran Church, its congregations, pastors, laity, seminary, and professors — in other words — as nearly as we could summarize it, this is who God is calling us to be as the NALC!

Let me say, as well, that this is what we try to get at when I am invited to work with congregations and their leadership teams: Given your current reality, who/what is God calling you to be in His intended future?

Many congregations are mired in their own current reality — often stagnated, frustrated and declining — without a shared vision or focus. How can a congregation, or the NALC, for that matter, move forward together, without a shared vision for mission?

That's what we were trying to get at as Bishop and staff of the NALC at our meeting in Bradenton, Fla., Sept. 24-26. I share the culmination of our session in the hope that together we might embrace God's future and be shaped by this vision for our mission and ministry. The points are listed in no particular order — except for the first:

1. Centered on Christ Jesus! We believe Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

2. It's about mission, mission, mission!
3. We are all about relationships — caring for one another.
4. We are Bible centered, reading and studying the Word of God.
5. We pray together.
6. We are disciplers — we invest in others.
7. We are mutually accountable — we hold ourselves and each other accountable.
8. We seek to be responsive, responsible and respectful.
9. We engage in confession and forgiveness so that we can move forward.
10. We are united.
11. We seek to put the best possible construction on our neighbors' actions (see explanation to the Eighth Commandment in Luther's *Small Catechism*).
12. We are committed to being honest and open.
13. We are servants, even as we are leaders.
14. We are childlike, as our Lord calls us to be like little children: always growing, asking questions, and risking.
15. We are ready to let go — we are a movement, not an institution.

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16. We are intentional — seeking God's loving future for us.
17. We seek to be effective (being good stewards of God's gifts and blessings).
18. We live what we say (putting belief into practice).
19. We will seek to implement this vision with concrete, specific action steps.

This is the culture — the language, values, practices — that we believe God is calling us to enact in the NALC.

By stating them clearly, the staff of the NALC have committed ourselves to embracing this as our culture. We invite our congregations and leaders and maybe, each individual household to join us as we do so, giving thanks to God for this, our new church!

Advent devotions by Pastor Wendel

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, an Advent devotional booklet for 2015, is now available on the NALC website.

The devotions, prepared by Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, are new this Advent. They are based on Year 2 of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* daily lectionary.

The devotional booklet is free and may be copied for use in the home, by families, in congregations, Bible study groups, etc.

You may also sign up to receive the Advent devotional material as a daily text/email message. This option is available by texting *Advent* to 614-333-0334.

Daily Intentional Response and Action Step

As we journey through Advent together, it can be challenging to integrate our daily devotions with everyday life. For those receiving the daily text/email messages, there is an option at the conclusion of each Advent reflection to help live into this time of Advent preparation. This tangible, small step is offered up only as a suggestion to assist in living into that particular day's meditation. Together with your meditation on the daily devotional text, pray for the person listed each day, and then intentionally take the time to write a note, send a text message or email, or post a message on Instagram or Facebook for that person.

If you choose to use social media, please use the hashtag #ComeLordJesus to help us track this initiative. Blessings on your Advent journey!

Those not participating in the daily text/email program may download and follow along with the Intentional Response and Action Step Guide available at thenalc.org.

Mission Connect

The North American Lutheran Church is Mission-Driven. The challenge that we face in this digital age is trying to communicate in "real" time.

Finding our footing in Psalm 107:2 — "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story" — Mission Connect was created as a tool that will help connect us as we are "Living on Mission, Telling our Stories."

To receive a weekly text message update, text the word "mission" to 619-356-2910. If you prefer to receive the weekly update by email, please visit: <http://2hoots.com/users/login/60>.

Each week you can expect to receive a new story, prayer request, opportunity, or update from the NALC Mission Office. You may also text a prayer request to the same number listed above to be lifted up by the NALC Prayer Network. Join us as we journey together down this road of discipleship and mission!

Worship in Smaller Congregations

Virtually the entire July/August issue of *Worship Leader* magazine was devoted to the subject of leading and planning worship in smaller congregations. These articles included valuable, practical advice. My column this month is based on content from six different articles from that issue. These writers are all experienced worship leaders.

First, an acknowledgment, in this issue, that smaller congregations are, by far, more the rule than the exception in North America. One article stated that 95 percent of American churches average 350 people or fewer in worship, and 75-80 percent of those churches average 150 or less.

Writer Zac Hicks lamented the fact that too many published and/or online worship resources originate in large-church settings. "One of the downsides to the myriad online worship resources out there is that they come to us from the "big church" mentality. ...Large-community worship resources and practices don't always translate well to smaller communities." This, of course, means that pastors and worship leaders need to factor in this large-church bias when considering which resources might be appropriate for their setting.

Jon Nicol makes an important point about how a "band" is not necessary for a quality contemporary-music worship service. "One or two musicians creating solid musical accompaniment will do more for your worship than a cobbled-together band." In fact, the more instrumentalists, the greater the challenge when it comes to a "tight" sound.

Singer songwriter Paul Baloche elaborated on this same topic: "Go slow when building a (musical) team. It's much harder to undo a team than put one together, patiently, over time. A capable keyboardist or guitarist with some spiritual maturity is more than enough to lead a small congregation, especially if you add a few gifted singers who are growing in their faith and talents."

Jon Nichol wrote about the mistake of assuming that a small congregation needs worship music every week. "I believe all worship leaders need to become students of non-musical forms of worship.



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

We limit our worship gatherings when we depend solely on music as the vehicle for exalting God."

David Manner wrote, "When smaller congregations depend on music alone as their only act of worship they are often disappointed. Unrealistic expectations are rarely met when comparing their vocalists and instrumentalists to much larger congregations." Manner gives examples of worship arts that do not depend on music. "Consider some of the following suggestions as a place for your congregation to begin multiplying their artistic expressions: drama, painting ... drawing, dance, mime, poetry, prose, dramatic readings, photography, film, technology, computer graphics, and sound."

Regarding congregational singing, Andy Chamberlain cautions worship leaders to be especially careful regarding the key of your songs/hymns. This definitely applies to both contemporary and traditional-music worship services. "So many songs have too wide a range for small congregations, with octave leaps that leave either the men or the women stranded. ... When trying to decide a good congregational key, many people don't sing notes above a top D. But that doesn't really tell the whole story. Finding the right key is much more than purely locating the song's ultimate high and low notes, it's fundamentally more to do with finding where the power of the song lies and setting the key so that those power notes can be sung more powerfully by more of the people, more of the time. If you're trying to find a workable congregational range I'd suggest using A below middle C on the keyboard as the lowest note, then up to a D above the octave."

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Rory Noland also speaks to the matter of insuring that your worship songs/hymns are truly participatory. “It’s becoming increasingly difficult to get people to engage (with singing) during worship. Part of the problem is cultural. Because of the prominence and popularity of the entertainment industry, modern churchgoers are culturally conditioned to be passive spectators instead of active participants. However, sometimes the problem is our own doing. There are things we worship leaders do (unintentionally of course) that actually inhibit participation. ... First, make sure the music is singable. Congregation members tend to drop out if a song is too complicated rhythmically or melodically or if the key is too high. Second, feature familiar songs. The people in the pews tend to sing out with songs they know, so make sure the majority of the tunes in any given worship set are familiar. As a rule of thumb, most congregations can’t handle more than one new song each week. By “new” song, I mean one used three times or less. After three outings, the song should be familiar.”

And then to end on an encouraging note, Zac Hicks wrote of how smaller worshipping communities often offer distinct advantages when compared to what passes for worship in very large congregation. “Small community worship puts gentle pressure on everyone to take ownership of the time. ... In large worship communities, if many worshipers aren’t singing, there’s still the strong possibility that the room will be filled with sound either from everyone else who is singing or from the music coming out of the main speakers. (Or from the organ.) In a small community, it doesn’t work like this. If some aren’t singing, it’s very noticeable. You can’t run and hide. You can’t be anonymous. Each and every worshiper must own participation. This increased ownership is an incredible gift to the worship experience.”

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

Congregations consider ratification of amendments regarding change in NALC - Lutheran CORE relationship

NALC congregations are considering several amendments to the NALC constitution that were approved by the 2015 NALC Convocation. The proposed constitutional amendments are all related to a change in relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

The amendments will go into effect if a two-thirds majority of the NALC congregations voting by the Feb. 14 deadline approve the amendments.

The amendments remove 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 “Vision and Plan” for Lutheran CORE and the NALC, as announced in 2010, was for Lutheran CORE to continue as “an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies” and for a close ongoing relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

Lutheran CORE leaders have decided it is now necessary for them to focus on providing “shelter” and “voice” for confessing Lutherans remaining in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. That focus requires an end to the formal relationship between Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

The details of the proposed amendments are available online at thenalc.org/2015-convocation.



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