

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

October 2015

NALC responding to flooding in Carolinas

The North American Lutheran Church is responding to recent flooding in the Carolinas. Flood waters continue to threaten areas of the Carolinas including in and around NALC congregations.

Mary Bates, chair of NALC Disaster Response, reports that a box truck from the NALC warehouse in Caldwell, Ohio, has been sent. The truck contains 300 flood buckets, health kits, Bibles, and other early-response and clean-up materials to be ready for volunteer work.

A call for volunteers will be announced as soon as the NALC congregations onsite alert us they are ready.

“We ask for prayers for our brothers and sisters in the Carolinas as they struggle through these early stages of disaster, for their safety, and for God’s comfort and hope,” she said.

NALC Disaster Coordinator David McGettigan has been in contact with Pastor Stephen Johnson of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Goose Creek, S.C. (near Charleston). Pastor Johnson reports the church is fine, but the area has suffered and still is threatened with further flooding as water from higher ground is expected to continue running. He also reports that some member families have experienced flood damage.

Advent Lutheran Church in North Charleston, S.C., reports the church facility is safe, but there is severe flooding all around with many affected households. Again, rivers and lakes may not fully crest until later this week.



Aerial photo of South Carolina flood damage (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman Megan Floyd).

Some clean-up work has begun but full efforts have not yet commenced. Calls for large numbers of volunteers have not yet been heard. Pastor Johnson is in close touch with local authorities to assess and request both materials and volunteer help as soon as the waters allow.

If you wish to assist financially in what will become a long term recovery effort for many who will not have adequate resources, please send checks payable to NALC Disaster response with a memo notation of “Flood Relief” to:

NALC Disaster Response
2299 Palmer Dr., Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Your gifts will be channeled directly and promptly to Carolina congregations as they identify families in need and begin to work with them.

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.

Pastor Henry Graf of Promise Ministries in Fort Wayne, Ind., will be the featured speaker for three plenary sessions at the Mission Festival.

Pastor Graf 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 sharing his time with the larger body of Christ, including Youth Encounter events across the country, connections with the Danish Lutheran Church and recently taking the stage at TEDx Fort Wayne.



Pastor Henry Graf is the featured speaker for the 2015 NALC Mission Festival.

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

Bishop John Bradosky will be speaking for the opening and closing celebrations. Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, will be leading the plenary session on Saturday.

Sixteen different workshops will be offered during two breakout sessions. The list of workshops is available online.

Cost for the Mission Festival is \$100 per person. For more information or to register go to: thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015.

Assisting congregations in mission is so central to the NALC’s Mission-Driven focus that a special mission focus will be incorporated into the NALC’s annual Convocations in August starting in 2016 rather than holding separate mission festivals.

NALC Pastors Conference

“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.

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).

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

Theologians Without Borders

Pastor Scott Ness shares his experiences while serving in Denmark

By Pastor Scott Ness

People, no matter the culture, really are not all that different. Our struggles are the same. The world really isn't all that big. The struggle against human sin knows no boundary. It needs no passport. It is everywhere. Fallen human nature effects and affects us all. And it does so in the same way.

The struggles we face in the United States are so very similar to the struggles families face in Denmark.

For two weeks in July, I had the joy of traveling to Denmark as part of the NALC's "Theologians without Borders" initiative. (You can learn more about the program at thenalc.org/theologians-without-borders.) I taught parents at a family camp some simple steps to reclaim their rightful place as chief faith formers for their children.

Repeatedly I was told how blessed they were to have me there to teach and share. But, truth be told, I was the one who received the blessing. Something powerful happens when the people of God gather around His Word and His purposes.

Together we wrestled with questions like: How to insulate our children with an identity rooted in Christ to keep them anchored in a society that has little to no use for Jesus — at least in society's mind.

It was clear that we all struggle with priorities. We all struggle with investing daily time in the Word. We all struggle with the challenges presented by our culture, our governments, and the broken human condition. We all need to be encouraged.



Pastor Scott Ness traveled to Mørkholt Strand, Denmark, as part of Theologians without Borders with the North American Lutheran Church.

We all need to be reminded of God's grace. We all need to be inspired from time to time. We all desire the best for our families. And we all fear that, too often, we are failing as parents. In short, we all need Jesus. And the beauty of the Holy Spirit is that as He draws our gaze toward Jesus we are drawn together — we are united to those right next to us and to those who live on the other side of the sea.

I know about five words in Danish — not all that helpful. And yet the language barrier was hardly a barrier at all. Why? Because many there have learned to speak my language. By second grade the Danes are learning English in school. While at camp I was fascinated as I listened to the Danes talk back and forth. I understood nothing. Sometimes things were translated for me. Sometimes not. At points it was very lonely, even though I was sitting in a room with 10 or more people.

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I think we do the same thing in the Church. The world no longer speaks our language. The Church (rightly so) is obsessed with things like the Sacraments and Scripture and worship. We speak of grace and justification and righteousness. But, to the world, this sounds like gibberish. Are we willing to translate? Are we willing to leave our native tongue to welcome in the foreigner? To learn a new language in order to translate the timeless truth of Jesus? To get outside of our blockheadedness so that those who don't know Jesus might come to know Him?

There are certainly times for conversations about Sacraments and the rest — the vital work of theology — but we must become more aware of our surroundings. “Let those with ears, hear.” And let those of us who know the story of Jesus tell it in ways that can be heard.



Pastor Scott Ness teaches a tent full of adults on both the importance of being the chief faith formers for their children and also equipped them with tools to make this a reality.

I serve as one of the pastors at St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio. We have been working hard to develop a relational ministry that provides opportunities for deep levels of communication. We believe that it is in these moments, when we connect with others deeply, that God can do some really amazing things.

However, in our culture, this is not an easy thing to do. Midwestern Americans are pretty good at being polite. I can talk about the weather with anyone — and do it with a smile on my face that makes us all feel good. However, it is challenging to go deep and to have real, meaningful conversations.

It was very clear that the Danish attendees at the family Bible camp struggled through some really rough life experiences. And yet, like Job, the beauty of their faith witnessed to an overwhelming trust in Jesus. It was a true ashes-to-alleluia story. And it continues to unfold. Oh, that we would be willing to be more open with our deepest pains and God's providence through them all! And, in sharing out of our pain inviting others to be vulnerable in sharing their story as well.



The flag of Denmark

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I found the opposite to be true in Denmark. The Danes, self-admittedly, are less polite. Small chit chat is not the norm. They can appear to be stand-offish, almost rude, to my Midwestern sensibilities. But, oh, once you break through that exterior; once you are welcomed into their homes, you are welcomed all the way into their lives.

The hospitality and vulnerability provided opportunity for amazing conversations. Over the course of one lunch, a couple shared their heart-wrenching story of pain and ongoing challenges.

The most beautiful story that was shared with me was from the mouth of a six-year-old named David. One day, seemingly at random, he told his mom, "God is



There were more than 1,500 people of all ages at the week-long camp along the Vejle Fjord in Denmark.



The artwork above the altar of a church in Copenhagen. Jesus rises from "a treasure box."

going to have so much fun one day when he opens all of those treasure boxes." Confused, she asked David, "Treasure boxes? What do you mean?"

"You know, treasure boxes. Those boxes that people are put in when they die. God is going to have so much fun when He opens them up one day."

A casket as a treasure box — there is an image for you! "And a child will lead them."

I was blessed to take my nine-year-old son, Ethan, with me on the trip. On Sunday, in Copenhagen, we went to worship and, half way through worship, Ethan pointed above the altar and said, "Look Dad, a treasure box!"

Yes, Ethan. The greatest treasure box of all. The treasure box that leads to all of the others. Thanks be to God.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring greetings to the people of Denmark on behalf of the North American Lutheran Church. It was a true blessing.

The Rev. Dr. Scott M. Ness is associate pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio where he lives with his wife and their six children.

NALC-LCMS reps address Biblical authority, contemporary issues

By Joseph Isenhower
LCMS Reporter

As representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the North American Lutheran Church continued their ongoing consultations Sept. 9-10 in St. Louis, leaders of both church bodies agreed that despite some differences, their discussions about common commitments to the authority of Scripture and other matters of agreement are invaluable.



Participants in the Sept. 9-10 consultation between leaders of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the North American Lutheran Church were, from left, the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer (LCMS), the Rev. John Pless (LCMS), the Rev. John Bradosky (NALC), the Rev. Dr. Albert Collver III (LCMS), the Rev. Mark Chavez (NALC), the Rev. Larry Vogel (LCMS), the Rev. Paull Spring (NALC) and the Rev. Dr. David Wendel (NALC).

Key leaders of the two church bodies have been meeting together — usually twice a year — since late 2011, initially at the invitation of LCMS President the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison. Also involved in the discussions are leaders of Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC). Harrison and LCC leaders were not available for the September meeting.

A rapidly growing church body, the NALC has about 140,000 members in the United States and Canada. It was formed in 2010 by confessional Lutherans who opposed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's decisions allowing same-sex marriage and ordination of homosexual pastors.

At this most recent consultation, the representatives continued their look at the authority of Holy Scripture — foundational to both church bodies' stances on matters such as marriage as only the union of one man and one woman, as well as the

evils of abortion. Representatives also noted that both churches also share concern that religious liberty is at risk in the face of court rulings and legislative action contrary to their confessional stances. The representatives also discussed persecution of Christians worldwide.

For their discussion on Biblical authority — which also will be on the agenda for their next consultation March 16-17 in Bradenton, Fla. — the representatives looked at a 1973 report of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled "A comparative study of varying contemporary approaches to Biblical interpretation."

They also reported on other recent developments within their two church bodies.

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After the September joint consultation, LCMS Director of Church Relations, the Rev. Dr. Albert Collver III told *Reporter* that although “one of the purposes of the dialogue is to see where we have differences and similarities, what we’re finding in most cases is that we have much in common, for which we can continue to rejoice.

“We look to continue talking and to mutually encourage one another to make a bold confession in the world and in our country,” Dr. Collver said.

NALC Bishop Rev. John Bradosky of Bradenton agrees.

“We were and continue to be grateful to have another Lutheran church body with whom we can share in this journey, facing the unique challenges of a faithful witness in our culture,” Bishop Bradosky said. “Our conversations have been candid, honest, void of any agendas, focused on our faith in Christ and our commitment to boldly proclaim the Gospel. ... It is our fervent prayer that working together will strengthen our witness to the world.”

Of the consultation’s current focus on Biblical authority, Bishop Bradosky said, “In the course of reviewing Missouri Synod theological documents regarding Holy Scripture and faithful ways to interpret the Bible, we discovered that we share so many common understandings that the differences seem minor and a matter of word choices to express the same truth.”

Bishop Bradosky told *Reporter* that as the NALC’s Commission on Theology and Doctrine works to develop a “teaching statement on Holy Scripture, we look forward to utilizing both these documents and our conversations as the basis for our statement’s formation and content.

“While we continue our conversations knowing there are many more issues and concerns to be addressed,” Bradosky concluded, “we have confidence in the power and work of the Holy Spirit to draw us ever closer to Christ and one another.”

“The discussions between the LCMS and NALC leaders over the past three years have been extremely cordial, theologically substantive and

quite productive,” said the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations. He said that is especially true “in terms of identifying issues of agreement and disagreement, topics that need further attention and discussion and critical society and cultural issues on which we can speak together.”

The Rev. Dr. David Wendel, the NALC’s Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, said that this most recent meeting of the consultation further confirmed for him that “the greatest value of these consultations is the opportunity to share deeply from our Biblical and Confessional commitments as brothers in Christ, facing real challenges in our day and context.”

Wendel said he finds the tone of these discussions “much different ... from many previous inter-Lutheran conversations because we no longer are engaged with one another as a form of academic exercise, but meet together fully aware of the increasing secularization of our culture, the decline of our churches [in membership] and the real persecution of Christians in our world. These are not ‘ivory-tower’ conversations, but more like discussions of battle strategy in the bunker, while under spiritual attack from the enemy.

“We give thanks to God for our brothers and sisters in the LCMS,” Pastor Wendel said, “for their willingness to stand for the unchanging truth and authority of God’s Word. We give thanks that we are not standing alone, but with all the faithful in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”

Others representing the LCMS at the recent consultation/dialogue were CTCR Associate Executive Director the Rev. Larry Vogel and the Rev. John Pless, assistant professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions and director of Field Education at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Also participating for the NALC were Bishop Emeritus the Rev. Paull Spring and General Secretary the Rev. Mark Chavez.

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‘Honduras happened and I would never be the same’

Reflections on visiting the ministries supported by her congregation

By Lara Dyer

After running 16 miles on Aug. 28 I gulped down ounce after ounce of cold, clean water. Then I soaked in a cold tub, then a hot bath. Then later than night I boarded a flight to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. From that moment on, neither of those three actions — drinking clean water, cold baths and hot ones soaking — would ever feel the same.

Honduras happened and I would never be the same.

Our adventure had begun just a few weeks earlier when our congregation — Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo. — asked if we’d be willing to be the “boots on the ground” to check out several organizations that are recipients of our prayer and financial support.

The answer from myself and my two traveling partners Julietta Carpenter and Andrew Byrd was “Yes” before the question was “Where?”

Worries about the safety of Honduras were softened after we registered with the State Department and had a security professional do some research. Emails began to flow between organizational offices, onsite personnel and my computer. Led by the Holy Spirit, everything from the newly-opened hotel that was willing to assist in acclimating us to our host country to the availability of hosts from Water Missions International, Lutheran World Relief, and Lunches for Learning seemed to be perfectly timed and so we landed in Tegucigalpa with a little apprehension and hearts filled with excitement.



Members of Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs visited the water tank being built by Water Missions International at Casa Corderitos, Honduras, with Carlos Mejia from Water Missions.

After two days of sightseeing and exploring new food with Carlos from The Honduras Executive Inn, we started our third day by jumping into a pickup with Carlos Mejia from Water Missions International to head to two sites where their water projects are in full swing.

Our first stop was Casa Corderitos, located in the Municipality of San Buenaventura. This is an

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Andrew Byrd of Saint Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs getting his first taste of clean, safe water out of the community tap in Laguna Seca at San Francisco de Becera, Olancho, Honduras.

to their voices swell with pride as they spoke of their new water system, spoke about how important having clean water was to their community, and saw their smiles grow as they gave us glasses so we could taste for ourselves.

In addition to learning a great deal about the process of water purification, our hearts were opened to the vision of Water Missions International. It is heartbreaking to hear an educator, parent or community leader share that they knew that the water they were providing to their children was unhealthy and the source of illness but it was the only option. As a parent, I cannot fathom having to decide between no water and water that I know would harm my child.

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orphanage/school where Water Missions is in the process of building a 15,000-gallon water tank to supply the orphanage with clean water.

Our second stop was Rancho Santa Fe, located in the community of La Venta, Francisco Morazán. This orphanage is run by the Catholic Church and has an existing pipe system to each of the buildings but was supplying the residents with contaminated water. Water Missions International provided a clean water system to the school about four years ago.

Our second day included a stop in Orica where a community water system comprises a bore hole, pumping system, tanks and chlorination system for a whole town. Standing on top of one of the two water tanks, listening to water flowing through the purification system, gave a new perspective to what real need is.

Our final stop was in Laguna Seca at San Francisco de Becera, Olancho. To our surprise we were greeted by the majority of the members of the Water Board, including the president. We listened

Water Missions International provides clean drinking water, but also, through their WASH program, families learn to use the clean water for cooking and personal hygiene.

There is community investment in each WMI project through their financial commitment and labor, and a great deal of study and evaluation goes into each site proposed to ensure the best chance of long-term sustainability. Communities are even able to utilize their excess clean water by selling it at fair prices to other communities in need of clean water so that they can make money for the upkeep and repair of their system.

No two communities look alike — from the rocky ground that the shovels need to break up to place pipes, to the height of the hills available to build water storage tanks that utilize gravity to supply water to the community, to the method of transporting water to each household. Sometimes it's pipes; sometimes it's bright blue containers on the back of a motorcycle and other times it's through each family procuring their own water at one of the many taps placed throughout the town.

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Water Missions International works with a community to help them determine the best way to meet the needs of their community, based on their resources and willingness to invest.

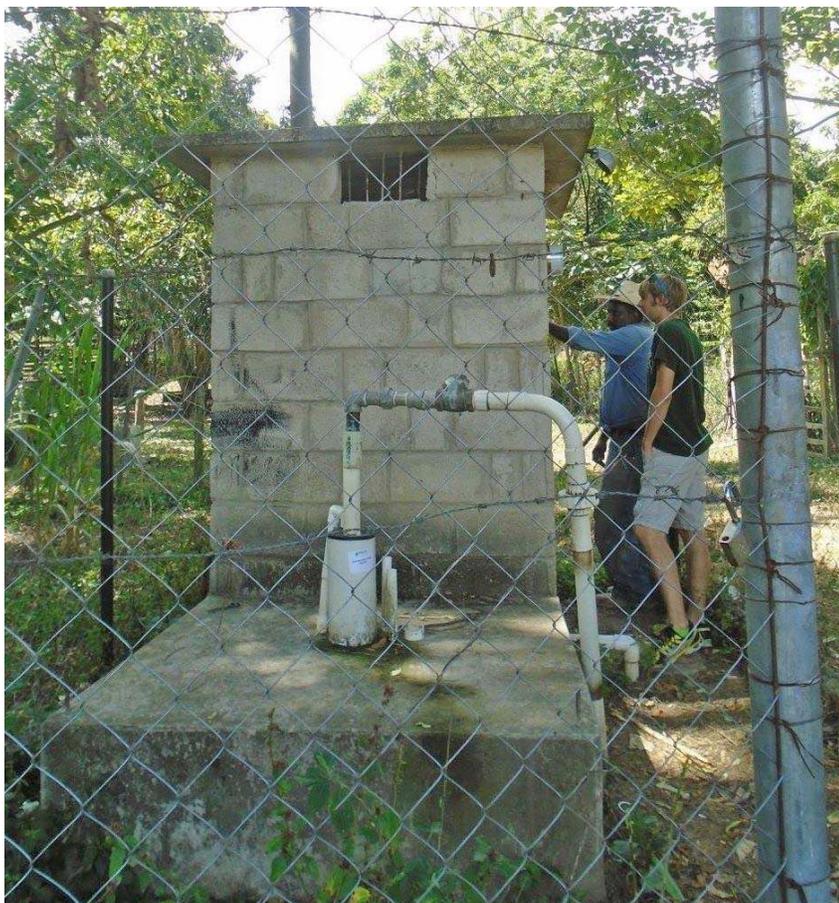
Our adventures in Honduras continued with a few hours with Nancy Quan from Lutheran World Relief learning about the many projects that LWR does in Honduras. Nancy balances the oversight of coffee and chocolate production, youth and women's programs, and crisis response from an office so small that the four of us met in Lutheran World Federation's offices instead.

Nancy shared with us the struggle of deciding between focusing on programs that are long-term community development or those that meet the immediate needs of people in crisis or natural disaster. Although this is not unique in the non-profit world, it means that in order to provide life-saving resources, efforts to change the climate of unemployment and poverty are sacrificed.

The final days of our stay were spent with Lunches for Learning, visiting schools in the Nacaome area, about two hours from Tegucigalpa. This small organization, based in Roswell, Ga., serves a healthy lunch to over 1,600 children every day during the school year.

Fernando Oritz and Jessica Gonzales warmly welcomed us to their community and their mission as they drove us through the rural areas that they serve. Each child is given scoops of rice, beans, cheese, a tortilla and a cup of milk each day. The lunches are prepared by a team of parents who proudly cook in the school *cocina* (kitchen) — which is anything from a concrete wood burning stove to a cinder block building with two concrete stoves inside.

Fernando faithfully delivers supplies monthly to schools that are accessible by little more than trails, in some cases, as an option to the government food program that is often unreliable and offers food that is frequently spoiled or contaminated and where someone from the school must find a way to



The Water Missions International water station at Rancho Santa Fe in La Venta, Francisco Morazán, Honduras.

transport the food themselves. All of this at a cost of just 50 cents a day per child!

The needs in many schools go beyond food, but teachers find ways to hold handmade wooden desks together one more day, stretch the odds and ends of school supplies so they are ample for a classroom, and the rare soccer ball that is enough for an entire school's recess.

It has taken me almost a month to begin to process our experiences in Honduras. The poverty there is extreme, but so is the warmth of the people. In my life I have struggled financially and been considered "poor" by U.S. standards, but I have never had to drink known contaminated water. I have never been without the option of government assistance or a local food bank to supplement what my family could provide.

Each of the organizations that we visited are helping those who want a better life for their

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children and are willing to do something themselves to ensure just that. They are also people who offered us sips of their precious clean water, a serving of the limited lunches, use of their restrooms, and endless hugs and smiles. We were greeted with songs, appreciation for making the trip to their school or community, and open doors in each place we stepped. We even rode back to Tegucigalpa with an armadillo shell in the back seat because Carlos admired it and someone happily presented it to him.

As we settle back into our safe and comfortable lives with fresh, clean water running through every pipe in our homes, a refrigerator full of food, and access to medical care and an education, I think about all I take for granted.

I will never know that sadness of filling my child's cup with water I can only hope does not make him sick or having to decide if he should go to school hungry or spend the day begging for food. For that I am grateful. I am also challenged to do better at using my resources to make sure other parents can provide for their children in a way that preserves



A volunteer school mom preparing lunch for students through Lunches for Learning.

their dignity, culture, and values. That is a challenge I pass on to each of you.

Lara Dyer is director of family ministry at Saint Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs.

To learn out more about these organizations visit www.lunchesforlearning.org, www.lwr.org, or www.watermissions.org

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is in November

The first two Sundays in November are recommended as International Days of Prayer for the Persecuted Church — a time for local congregations to focus on the persecution of Christians worldwide.

Resources to assist congregations in observing a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church are available from several ministries.

Voice of the Martyrs is providing a variety of resources at their websites persecution.org and

vomcanada.com. Voice of the Martyrs ministry was featured at the 2014 NALC Convocation.

Raymond Ibrahim, who was a featured speaker during the NALC's 2015 Lutheran Week, offers regular updates on Muslim persecution of Christians at his website: www.raymondibrahim.com.

The World Evangelical Alliance hosts a special website at idop.org. Open Doors is offering resources at its websites: www.opendoorsusa.org or www.opendoorsca.org.

Traditionally-Grounded Leadership and Discipleship in the 21st Century

Following is a portion of a presentation by Bishop John Bradosky to NALC seminarians during Lutheran Week in Dallas.

What is the tradition?

During his very first service a new rabbi is doing well until he gets to the *Shema* prayer. Only half of the congregation stand up. The other half remains seated. Those still seated start yelling “sit down” to those who are standing and those standing start yelling “stand up” to those who are seated. The new rabbi is so perplexed and disturbed about this disruption he decides to consult with the former retired rabbi about the correct tradition. So he arranges a meeting with Rabbi Bloom and describes his experience. He asks Rabbi Bloom, “Is the tradition that we stand for the *Shema*?” After thinking for a moment the rabbi says, “No, that is not the tradition.” The new rabbi concludes, then the tradition is that we sit for the *Shema*! After thinking about it for a moment, the former rabbi says, “No, that is not the tradition.” The new rabbi protests, “Rabbi Bloom, you have to help me. Every Sabbath half the congregation sits, while the other half stands. Each group thinks they know the tradition. They shout at each other and the situation becomes hostile and chaotic.” Rabbi Bloom smiles and says, “Ah, that is the tradition!”

Elements of tradition include repetition, consistency and meaning that are shared and practiced by a group. These elements are present in the traditions described in the Scripture. It is also true that the Scriptures both affirm and offer words of caution regarding traditions.

Our faith and the Scriptures are rooted in the oral tradition. The truth is meant to be heard! We are to proclaim it, talk about it, take it, in drink it up. The creeds are a similar expression of this oral tradition. They are meant to be spoken, repeated and heard.

The tradition spans countless generations — thousands of years. How do we receive it? How do



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

we pass it on? In this tradition the ancient meets the contemporary. The ancient tradition has meaning for contemporary culture. Our disdain for tradition is grounded in a contemporary value that “new” is implicitly better and of greater value. The forsaking of the old for what is new is always the beginning of heresy.

When I hear the word “tradition” I often think of the movie, “Fiddler on the Roof,” and Tevye singing the song “Tradition.” Life is meant to be balanced, like a fiddler on the roof. There is danger. It is easy to fall. You have to concentrate on many other things and still keep your balance. What is it that maintains our balance? In a word: “Tradition.”

Traditions are a way to pass on the values, morals and customs that hold a culture together from generation to generation. Diversity that undermines tradition is not only overrated, but destructive for any society. Traditions are the means to pass on our history, the meaning of life, and our faith.

Tradition is a vehicle to convey the truth, but it is not the truth. Traditions point to something much bigger. I believe this is what Jesus is referring to in his concern for the attitudes of some when the tradition takes the place of the larger reality to which it should be pointing.

Knowing the faith, understanding the faith, and passing on the faith are all facilitated through our traditions. How are we harnessing them for

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the sake of mission? Have we abandoned traditions that undermine our capacity to bear witness to the faith we share?

What has happened to the tradition of parents discipling their children in fulfillment of their Baptismal promises? What about the tradition of the Church for maturing people in their faith and equipping them to share their faith with others who do not know Christ or the Gospel?

You can call it discipleship or catechesis or teaching the faith or a number of other things, but it is essential to the mission Christ set before us.

What has happened to our traditional understanding of Christian vocation? How are we encouraging the faithful to fulfill every role in their lives as followers of Jesus?

How are honoring the tradition of Christian community by encouraging one another and holding each other accountable consistently?

All three of these elements — knowing Christ and our faith, following Christ in daily living, and remaining accountable to Christ and one another — are fundamental to discipleship. There are a number of ways to pursue this. The models for accomplishing this can be as varied as our congregations but without it the Church cannot fulfill Christ's mission.

What I have learned over these past several years is the focus on person-to-person discipleship, life-to-life. If we are going to equip everyone for this important work, it cannot be just in large groups, or small groups, or in programs, events or other community ministries, no matter how important or wonderful they are. Most of our people will not lead any of those so they won't get the chance to implement what they are learning about discipleship until we apply it to individual relationships. Everyone has personal relationships. That is a field ripe for harvest.

How do we know if it is working? What is the measure or the metrics for that assessment? We will measure it more by the transformation of lives as people believe and follow Jesus, maturing in

their faith and becoming fully equipped to disciple others, maintaining and developing healthy relationships of mutual accountability.

Let me say a word about worship. Worship is central in our lives because it guides and focuses our life on Christ, in Christ. (All discipleship begins and ends in Christ.) We are to worship as Jesus instructed us in the Spirit and in the truth, relying on the power and work of the Holy Spirit and the truth of His Holy Word. We do this both as the community gathers together to be in His presence and as the community is sent out to serve Him, passionately loving others as He loves us.

Worship propels us in the direction of discipleship. In worship all hear the truth in the Gospel read and proclaimed. We experience Christ's presence through Word and Sacrament. In worship people have the best opportunity to hear Christ's call to "Come and follow me."

Many relationships may begin outside the sanctuary but they all must continue within the community gathered for worship. The danger is that we believe that the mission of the church is fulfilled during a brief period of time on Sunday morning or Saturday evening. Worship is where we are encouraged, nurtured, instructed in the faith and this is where we are compelled to invest in every other relationship the love of Christ, whose love and presence we know and experience in worship.

We have many excellent traditions but in which direction do they point us? Remember, traditions are vehicles for the truth, but they always point to something beyond the tradition. Those who came before us passed on the Gospel of Jesus Christ in those traditions. They point to Jesus and expose the nature of His life-transforming love, forgiveness, redemption, salvation, and new life that is eternal in Him. I believe those traditions call us to be His followers, His disciples and to invest our lives in the lives of others.

Those same traditions show us the way to disciple others: to share the Gospel, to nurture others in His love, teach the faith and be an example of an obedient life in Christ so that they too will become fully equipped to disciple others. This is both the nature of tradition-grounded leadership and discipleship in the 21st Century.

Bishop Bradosky's message for Thanksgiving Day in Canada

Thanksgiving Day in Canada is on Monday, Oct. 12 — the second Monday in October. Bishop John Bradosky sent this Thanksgiving message to NALC members in Canada.

My dear NALC friends in Canada,

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2: 6-7).

We live in a world that threatens religious freedom. Christians have been targeted worldwide with unspeakable acts of persecution including the torture and death of innocent children who refuse to denounce their faith in Jesus. For many this journey of walking with Jesus has become increasingly difficult, complex and filled with increasing risk and danger.

As you celebrate Thanksgiving in Canada, *Jour de l'Action de grâce*, it is my prayer that the fears, loss and grief in your life give way to the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. We have hope because we are rooted in Christ though faith in Him. We have hope because we are built up in Christ. We have hope because we walk in Christ.

In the midst of difficult circumstances, secularization, persecution, turmoil and threats, we have hope that causes us to abound in thanksgiving in this journey through life.

I mention the word journey because of the origins of the Canadian Thanksgiving celebration. The first Canadian Thanksgiving is often traced back to 1578 and the explorer Martin Frobisher. This explorer had been trying to find a northern passage to the Pacific Ocean. He held a Thanksgiving celebration not for the harvest but in thanks for surviving the long journey from England through the perils of storms and icebergs. On his third and final voyage to the far north, Frobisher held a formal



ceremony on what is now known as Baffin Island in Frobisher Bay. The purpose was simply to give thanks to God. Their worship included a sermon by Robert Wolfall and the celebration of Communion.

Martin Frobisher never completed his dream, but the journey itself was sufficient cause for giving thanks. The same is true for us who are followers of Christ Jesus. The end of the journey — our accomplishments, our goals, our buildings, our successes, and whatever else occupies our time and energy — are not nearly as important as being in Christ as we take every step in this life.

As I thought about Frobisher and those who accompanied him, I was reminded of the first disciples. When Jesus asked each of them to follow Him, I wonder if they were focused more on the destination or the journey? They must have seen themselves as those exploring uncharted territory. As Frobisher searched for the Northwest Passage, he faced

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unexpected dangers, placed his trust in some who deceived him, and suffered great losses along the way. In spite of all the pain, loss and tremendous risk, in Christ he was still “abounding in thanksgiving” in the journey.

Our journey through this life does not always turn out the way we imagined. We don't always reach our goals. We are confronted by the storms and icebergs of illness, broken relationships, unemployment, financial loss and a host of other difficult or tragic situations. The journey is still the focus because of the One in whom “we live and move and have our being.”

It is not a matter of traveling along looking for Jesus, or hoping we see Him at the end of the journey. We move in His direction every step along the way because we are in Him. The journey is always worthy of thankfulness and praise. Both the attitude and actions of abounding thanksgiving express the fact that our lives are in Christ and He is our life!

This abounding thanksgiving always leads to mission. The hope we have to proclaim in Christ is hope for the journey not for the pew. That is, it was never Christ's intent that it be proclaimed only among the faithful but that it be shared with a world that is dying to experience it, longing to know Him.

I know of no better way to celebrate this Day of Thanksgiving than to take time to participate in the most important meal of all, the Eucharist. It is the greatest expression of life in Christ and the life of Christ in us. It is for us the central expression of abounding in thanksgiving. This is what compels us to proclaim to others in this journey that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It is my prayer for you and the entire North American Lutheran Church that we follow St. Paul's instruction, to walk in Christ, to be rooted in Christ and to be built up in Christ, through faith in Christ. In Him we are abounding in thanksgiving. Have a blessed *Jour de l'Action de grâce*.

With you in Christ,

Bishop John F. Bradosky

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.

'Retired' pastors still actively serving

I hesitate to call them "retired!" I recently had the opportunity to install two octogenarian NALC pastors who have accepted calls to two of our smaller congregations seeking pastors who can serve "part time."

The first was the installation of Pastor Patrick Kelly on June 7 at St. John's Lutheran Church, North Woodbury, Ohio, and the second was Pastor Kenneth Hauge on July 26, at Living Word Lutheran Church, Fredericksburg, Va.

St. John's is a well-established congregation in beautiful, rolling farmland in north central Ohio. Living Word is a small mission congregation in a thriving area between Washington D.C. and Richmond, Va. While very different in ministry and focus, both were in need of regular, faithful pastoral support by pastors who were willing and able to serve with only part-time compensation. These two "80-something" pastors responded to the call to service and are committed to helping these two congregations stabilize, strengthen and engage in mission!

The need for part-time pastoral ministry is a reality that will only increase in the near future. One pastor involved in part-time ministry has written the book,



Pastor David Wendel presides at the installation of Pastor Patrick Kelly on June 7 at St. John's Lutheran Church in North Woodbury, Ohio.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church, having served his first part-time congregation beginning in February, 2001. He reports that 30 percent of all congregations in the United States are served by a pastor who is considered part time. At the time, he thought part-time ministry was unusual, but he finds that is changing. He says, "it seems to me that we are currently sitting on the cusp of even more future changes as more and more churches put the possibility of a part-time pastor out on the table as a potential leadership option."

Although many Lutherans are resistant to such a model, the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA reports in their "Part-Time Ministry Guidelines" that currently over "50 percent of the congregations in our synod are now or will shortly be served by ... ministers on a part-time basis."

Until the middle of the 20th century, many congregations were served by part-time pastors or shared their pastor with one or more congregations in two or three-point parishes. "Rising prosperity plus a push toward professionalism and seminary graduates meant more congregations employed full-time pastors, but that trend has crested." (Associated Press, "Part-time Pastors Juggle Jobs", June 22, 2007)

While full-time pastoral service is and should be the norm, the reality of smaller congregations in rural and small-town contexts, together with the focus of the NALC on planting house churches and mission congregations suggests the need for part-time ministry is present and increasing.

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Part-time ministry allows for stability, strengthening and long-term growth without financial burden. It can also allow much needed funds to be used for mission and ministry rather than clergy compensation. For these congregations only able to afford part-time ministry, our retired pastors are a cadre of able, experienced, seasoned servants!

In this regard, several aspects should be kept in mind.

1. When a pastor is serving part-time, whether retired or a bi-vocational pastor, the congregation cannot expect full-time service. There may be times when the retired or bi-vocational pastor may not be available, and the congregation must have realistic expectations.

2. This is an opportunity for the congregation to develop folks who have gifts, time and ability to visit, respond and care for one another when the part-time pastor is not available. Many smaller congregations see this as a gift, not a burden!

3. The myth that a “younger” pastor will bring in young families and children is just that — a myth! Many retired pastors have a passion for relating to children, youth, young adults and young families. Younger pastors are sometimes caught up in their own child-rearing and family dynamics. Retired pastors appreciate the “catholicity” — the universality of the Body of Christ — the breadth and depth of the whole Church where young and old are equally important parts of the body, valued and valuable.

4. Finally, I find that many of our retired pastors are not susceptible to the narcissism of younger generations. Our seasoned pastors realize that pastoral ministry is not all about them! They know how to earn the love and trust of the congregation. They know how to respect the congregational members for who they are, taking time with change and transition, not hurrying things too quickly. They often see the value in human relationships, visitation and care, rather than focusing only on numbers, progress and program.



Participants in the installation service for Pastor Kenneth Hauge on July 26 at Living Word Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg, Va., were, from left, Pastor Cathi Ammlung, Pastor Chris Brown, Pastor and Mrs. Kenneth Hauge, Pastor David Wendel, and Pastor Brad Hales.

Please understand. I am not minimizing the wonderful gifts and ministry of all our pastors from the newly ordained to those nearing retirement age. I appreciate all our pastors called to the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacrament! I know what it means to offer yourself in sacrifice and service as a pastor in the Church. But I would like to say a word of appreciation to our retired pastors serving part-time and encourage others to be willing to step into active pastoral service again in this important ministry to our smaller congregations and our congregations just getting started!

For your information, several of the congregations needing part-time ministry now are:

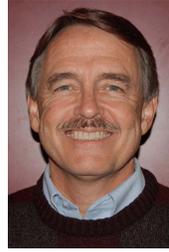
- + Leaf Mountain Lutheran Church, Clitherall, Minn.
- + St. Paul Lutheran Church, Ewart, Mich.
- + Martin Luther Lutheran Church, Johnson, Neb.
- + St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Middleburgh, N.Y.
- + Sacred Word Lutheran Church, Mobridge, S.D.
- + First Lutheran Church, Tulare, Calif.

If you would like to serve any one of these congregations on a part-time basis, please let me know (dwendel@thenalc.org). And please pray for these congregations and all the retired pastors who are serving to continue and strengthen our ministry in the NALC.

Some anecdotes for your consideration

Consider this an unstructured, “stream-of-consciousness” column. The following is a list of quotes, anecdotes and news stories — all of which relate to our culture’s changing views regarding human sexuality.

1. There are now more than 50 gender options on Facebook.
2. From the *New York Times*, June 28 of this year: “The past week and the month that preceded it have been nothing short of a rout in the culture wars. Bruce Jenner, the famed Olympian, became Caitlyn Jenner in the most prominent moment yet for transgender people.” (And perhaps you’ve heard: Jenner received ESPN’s Arthur Ashe Courage Award which honors those displaying “strength in the face of adversity.”)
3. The California Supreme Court has instructed the judges of the California state judicial system that they can no longer be volunteers in the Boy Scouts of America. Why? Because the BSA does not allow for openly gay scout *leaders*. This policy, according to the court, makes the BSA a discriminatory organization and violates the judicial code of the state of California.
4. Speaking of California, the California State University system (23 campuses with a total of 437,000 students) has *derecognized* InterVarsity Christian Fellowship for requiring ICF *leaders* (not participants) to be Christians who adhere to specific rules of conduct.
5. In the June 27, 2015, issue of the *New York Times*: “Gay culture (has) a natural successor to which it is bequeathing its boundary-breaking qualities: queer culture, which questions rigid categories like male and female and gay and straight. Over the years, the relationship between the more established gay world and those who consider themselves transgender or queer has been strained at times. Some lesbians accuse transgender men of abandoning feminism, and some people who identify themselves as transgender or queer see gay men and women as too conformist.”



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

And now for a couple of *Christian* insights regarding the current sexuality debate.

First, from an interview in *Christianity Today*, with Dr. Michael Lindsay, President of Gordon College, a Christian school in Massachusetts. He is currently dealing with controversy because of his defense of Gordon’s long-standing policy asking students and faculty to refrain from sex outside of heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

“We reach our theological convictions from looking at the whole of Scripture. ... If you look at the whole narrative of Scripture, you just can’t find theological justification (for same-sex physical relationships). It requires extraordinary exegetical acrobatics to get to a place where you can somehow conclude that God would bless same-sex unions.”

And then, clarifying that Gordon College’s policy is *not* about orientation, but rather behavior, Lindsay says:

“We hold a theologically-nuanced understanding that says Scripture doesn’t actually speak on the issue of sexual orientation; it speaks on issues of behavior and practice.”

And then, columnist Ross Douthat in his *New York Times* column entitled, “Interview With a Christian” (April 5, 2015):

“The only clear biblical meta-narrative (regarding sex and marriage) is about male and female. Sex is an area of Jewish law that Jesus explicitly makes stricter. What we now call the ‘traditional’ view of

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sexuality was a then-radical idea separating the early church from Roman culture, and it's remained basic in every branch of Christianity until very recently. Jettisoning it requires repudiating scripture, history and tradition."

Douthat then responds to the question of how a loving God could possibly expect gay Christians to remain celibate:

"At Christianity's bedrock is the idea that we are all in the grip of an unchosen condition, an 'original' problem that our wills alone cannot overcome. ...

"The Christian idea is that God asks the seemingly impossible of all of us — and, fortunately forgives us when we fail. Nobody has to accept this idea, but if you do it's compatible with a lot of pain, struggle and mystery where humanity encounters God."

Finally, author and columnist David Brooks, a "secular Jew" who has some sympathetic recommendations for Christian "social conservatives" who are feeling discouraged after the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision:

"Christianity's gravest setbacks are in the realm of values. American culture is shifting away from orthodox Christian positions on homosexuality, premarital sex, contraception, out-of-wedlock childbearing, divorce and a range of other social issues. More and more Christians feel estranged from mainstream culture. ...

"The Supreme Court's gay marriage decision landed like some sort of culminating body blow onto this beleaguered climate."

Speaking to Christian social conservatives, Brooks continues:

"Consider putting aside, in this current climate, the culture war oriented around the sexual revolution. Put aside a culture war that has alienated large parts of three generations from any consideration of religion or belief. Put aside an effort that has been a communications disaster, reducing a rich, complex and beautiful faith into a public obsession with sex.

Put aside a culture war that, at least over the near term, you are destined to lose.

"Consider a different culture war, one that would be just as central to your faith and far more powerful in its persuasive witness.

...The defining face of social conservatism could be this: Those are the people who go into underprivileged areas and form organizations to help nurture stable families. Those are the people who build community institutions in places where they are sparse. Those are the people who can help us think about how economic joblessness and spiritual poverty reinforce each other. Those are the people who converse with us about the transcendent in everyday life.

"This culture war is more Albert Schweitzer and Dorothy Day than Jerry Falwell and Franklin Graham; more Salvation Army than Moral Majority. It's doing purposefully in public what social conservatives already do in private.

I don't expect social conservatives to change their positions on sex, and of course fights about the definition of marriage are meant as efforts to reweave society. The sexual revolution will not be undone anytime soon. The more practical struggle is to repair a society rendered atomized, unforgiving and inhospitable. Social conservatives are well equipped to repair this fabric, and to serve as messengers of love, dignity, commitment, communion and grace."

It seems like we have, over the last few years, entered a new era in congregational life and ministry. Our congregations are faced with the challenge of determining what it means to be both values-driven and, at the same time, grace-oriented.

I would love to hear how *your* congregation — on a practical level — is addressing this challenge. Email me at DonB@oursaviorssalem.org.

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



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