NALC News

North American Lutheran Church April 2016

Bishop's Easter Message

Dear Disciples of Jesus throughout the North American Lutheran Church:

May the Lord bless your journey with Him through the Easter Season!

Jesus with His Disciples on the Road to Emmaus by Robert Zünd (1826-1909)
(From Wikimedia Commons)

We are all on a journey through this life. It's important to realize how special a day this is as we travel that journey. The first Easter day included the journey of two disciples traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Sometimes the journey of life can be overwhelming. That feeling is manifest in exhaustion, a lack of energy, emptiness, a lack of meaning and hope, and feeling trapped by past or current circumstance. So it was for those two disciples on their way to Emmaus on that first Easter day.

They are two despondent disciples, exhausted not by the seven-mile journey but by their grief. From my own personal experience I know that no matter how physically fit you may be nothing will drain your energy and strength faster than grief. There were days following the death of our son that it was all I could do to get out of bed. Standing in a funeral home for hours receiving friends is not physically exhausting, but emotionally debilitating. People all around us are carrying with them the exhausting burden of grief.

When I am exhausted I know it affects my perceptions. I don't see or hear as well as I normally do. It is harder to engage in meaningful conversations and make important connections between content and context. My reaction time is diminished. For this reason it is dangerous for pilots and professional drivers to reach the point of exhaustion. For everyone's safety laws govern their time for work and periods of rest.

As those two disciples walked and talked, Jesus joined them and walked with them. But they didn't recognize Him. They have grief written all over their faces, and Jesus asks them, "What are you so concerned about?"

I love their opening line with Jesus: "You must be the only person around here who hasn't heard."

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"About what?" Jesus asks.

Those two disciples begin to recount their grief. They are telling Jesus about Jesus as if He has no idea! "We were following Jesus from Nazareth who worked wonders, performed miracles, was a mighty teacher, highly regarded. But others arrested Him, condemned Him to death and crucified Him." (Every time I read this text I imagine Jesus saying under His breath, "You don't say!" "Really!" "I can't imagine.") Of course He didn't say any of those things. He understood their grief, pain, loss and despair. He understood their exhaustion, and He gave them His presence.

Two thousand years later He still understands our loss, our grief, our pain, and our exhaustion and wants nothing more than to be present with us. He is willing to be a constant companion on this journey.

When Kristi and I are traveling by car and we are exhausted, we rely on one another to keep the driver awake and safe. We talk, ask questions, encourage and support one another. Jesus offers us His presence for the same purpose: to keep us safe and to give us strength, spiritual strength! He is willing to be present with us even when we fail to recognize Him. He is alive and with us!

Those travelers on the road to Emmaus were also experiencing emptiness. They were searching for meaning, trying to make sense of their experience, longing for fulfillment and wholeness. It sounded as though they once had it but somehow lost it. Three words in the text tell us what they were missing: "We had hoped."

Their hope is in the past! They had hoped Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would save and redeem God's people. Their hope was anchored in their own expectations, desires and plan for what was going to happen and how it would all unfold. When we lose hope we have no peace. When we lose hope it is quickly replaced with anxiety, fear and the loss of meaning and purpose.

Dr. Carl Menninger, founder of the Menninger Clinic in Kansas for the treatment of mental illness, writes about the single most important factor in caring for people. It is hope. Hope is necessary for survival. It is hope that causes us to rejoice and to have peace. Our hope must be anchored in the future, not the past.

Hope draws us forward into the future. Hope will be a fleeting goal and evade us if we fail to surrender our expectations. We may not be able to change our circumstance, but we need not give up hope if only we surrender our expectation to Jesus. The hope He longs to give us is for all time — past, present and future. Our hope and assurance is that our past has been redeemed, our present is fulfilled, and our future is certain. For our emptiness, Jesus gives us His peace.

Those two disciples on the road to Emmaus were also trapped by their fear and regret. What would they do now? If the religious leaders had Jesus crucified, perhaps the same leaders would destroy the disciples as well. Perhaps these disciples felt trapped by their guilt. Could they have done more to save Jesus? Perhaps they felt trapped by their own bitterness and anger: Why did God let this happen? How could Jesus fail to meet their expectations? When fear pervades our lives, all power is gone.

Jesus does three important things to empower those weary travelers.

Jesus offers them revelation. Jesus opens up the Scriptures and reveals to them the deeper meaning of God's Word regarding who He is and the nature of God's plan for redemption and salvation. His suffering and death paid the price for our forgiveness, covered our sins, and fulfilled God's deepest love for us and that includes justice. Through the work of His Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to reveal the truth of who He is and His will for us through His Word. In the midst of our own powerlessness there are answers as close as the Scriptures. This Word of truth sets us free.

Jesus offers them a renewed relationship. The disciples invited Jesus to stay with them. They offered Him a place to sleep and shared a meal with Him. In the midst of their hospitality, Jesus reminded them of the last meal He shared with His disciples by what He did. When He blessed the bread and broke it, something amazing happened.

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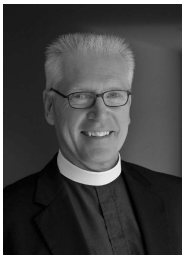
Why do you seek the living among the dead?



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We heard the question of the angels to the women who arrived at the tomb early on that first Easter morning, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” This is a profound question that begs for more time and consideration in our life together and in our ministry.

People are searching for life — new life, a renewed life, a fulfilled life, a greater life, a forgiven life, a hope-filled life. The problem is that so many believe they will find such life by following their own passions, desires, directions, and selfish ways. They believe that the life they seek can be found within themselves or in those who will point them back to “discovering” their true self. This is an important question to hear and to ask: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

Many believe that the life they are searching for will be found in our collective culture — in our wisdom, our technology, scientific advances, political solutions and new values of tolerance, acceptance, inclusivity and self-esteem. For them, theologically, humanism and universalism are the only acceptable answers in pursuing this new life. Personal spiritual growth and personally-designed syncretistic faith provide the basis for such new life. Do you see why this is a question we must be asking those we seek to serve: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

Paul understood this when he wrote to Timothy. “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Paul understood how non-Christians could be easily persuaded to pursue life where there was only death, but it is even worse when it happens in the church. Paul saw the disunity of the church when people sought the living Lord Jesus Christ among all the deadly solutions the world offers. When people were not reproved, rebuked or exhorted with faithful preaching and sound doctrine, Paul saw how heresies spread and people were led away from Christ as a result of false teaching.

His warning is just as appropriate today as it was when he first penned those words to Timothy. Many search to find teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. They will turn away from the truth of the Word of God and create their own fables in order to justify themselves. This is seeking the Living One among the “dead-ends” that seem so promising but offer no hope, redemption or salvation.

This life can only be found in the one who is the way, the truth and the life — Jesus Christ. It is the life the Church proclaims through Word and Sacrament. It is the life the Body of Christ experiences together as a community of faith. This question is an important part of the Easter proclamation: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

In my Easter message I wrote about another important event on that first Easter day. Jesus caught up with two disciples as they were walking away from Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus. During that encounter, Jesus revealed the truth the Scriptures taught regarding the Messiah and Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. Jesus stayed with them, broke bread with them, and in the breaking of bread they recognized Him. When Jesus disappeared from their sight they asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). Immediately they got up and went to Jerusalem and proclaimed the good news of the

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Resurrection. Jesus is alive! He met us. He spoke to us. He broke bread with us!

This is the ministry of the Church. This is our ministry — to take people who have itching ears and provide them with every opportunity to become those with burning hearts, people who are passionate about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This transformation can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Word rightly proclaimed, and the Sacraments rightly administered. This transformation is the nature of discipleship. It is what happens when we seek life in the only One who gives us life that is eternal! He lives and is the only source of life! That is our Easter proclamation! May it shape our ministry in every word and deed.

With you following Him.

Bishop Bradosky

Bishop Bradosky's Easter Message

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"Suddenly, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him."

Jesus so loves us that He never forces His way into our lives. Scripture says that He stands at the door and knocks. He enters when we invite Him in. This relationship empowers us for any problem we face.

Jesus offers them the greatest empowerment of all, the reality of the Resurrection. These disciples had heard the report of the empty tomb from the women who were there early that morning. They heard that an angel told them Jesus was alive! They knew that other disciples had confirmed their report. But now they had direct evidence. Jesus appeared to them. The Resurrection is real. Jesus is alive! He had already spoken to His disciples numerous times regarding the Kingdom of Heaven. He appeared to His disciples and to many others following the Resurrection, because He wanted us to live with the assurance of eternal life.

Church leaders meet

As part of the application process of the North American Lutheran Church for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation, NALC leaders met with leaders of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada on Monday, March 21, at the Westin Washington Dulles Airport Hotel.

Membership in the Lutheran World Federation was approved by the 2012 NALC Convocation and ratified by NALC congregations. LWF leaders had asked for a meeting between the NALC and the ELCA and ELCIC.

Representing the ELCA were Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton; Bishop Kurt Kusserow, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod; and Kathryn Johnson, Director for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations.

Representing the ELCIC were National Bishop Susan Johnson and Pastor André Lavergne, Assistant to the Bishop, Ecumenical and Interfaith.

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

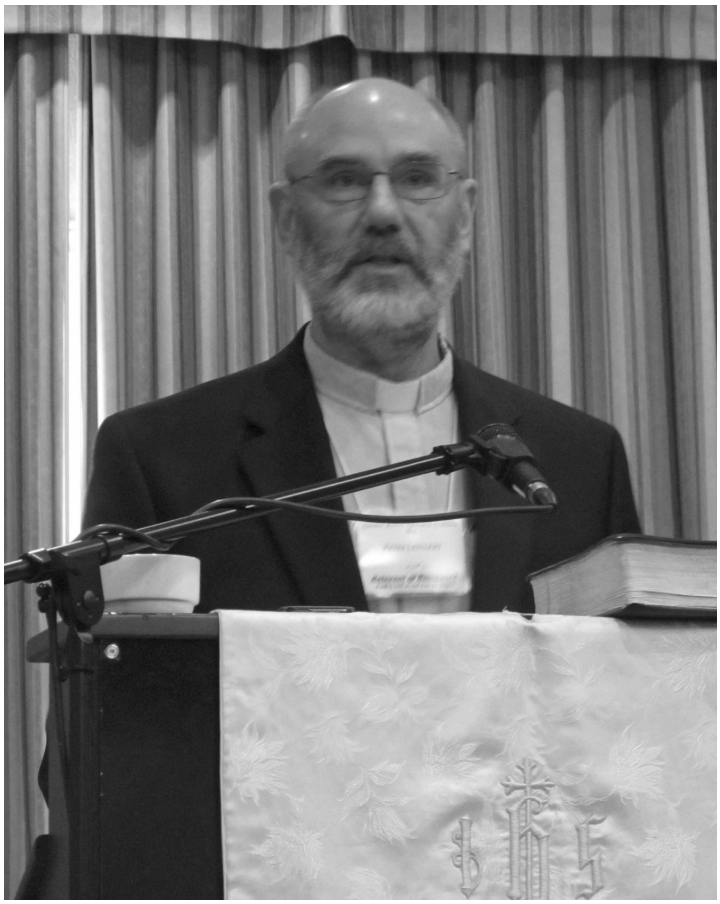
No actions were taken as a result of this meeting, and no future consultation was scheduled.

In the midst of our grief-filled lives Jesus offers us His presence, hope, peace and the power of the Resurrection anchored in the truth of His Word, and He graciously invites us to follow Him. This is the power that brings new life, transformation and complete confidence for the future.

The best that life can offer is Jesus, and Easter proclaims that life in Jesus is eternal, abundant in meaning, clear in purpose, and selfless in direction.

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!

Rod Dreher



Dr. Peter Leithart

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

April 5-8
Canmore, Alberta

Bishop John Bradosky

‘Holy God, Holy Lives’ is theme for 2016 NALC Convocation

“Holy God, Holy Lives” is the theme of the 2016 NALC Convocation and Mission Festival Aug. 10-12 at the Wyndham Anaheim Garden Grove Hotel in Anaheim, Calif. The theme is based on 1 Peter 1:16: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The NALC Convocation opens with worship at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 10. A Mission Festival will be the focus of the Convocation for most of Wednesday afternoon and Thursday. The Mission Festival is designed to inspire and serve as a resource to congregations. The Convocation is scheduled to conclude at 5 p.m. on Friday.

The Rev. Dr. Malcolm Guite, Chaplain of Girton College of the University of Cambridge, England, is the featured guest speaker for the Convocation. Dr. Guite describes himself as a poet-priest of the Anglican Church, giving lectures, concerts and poetry readings. He collaborates with musician Steve Bell, who was featured at the 2015 NALC Convocation. The two will blend their unique gifts to highlight the Convocation theme.

The $185 registration fee for the Convocation includes Wednesday dinner and lunch on Thursday and Friday.

The Convocation is preceded by the Women of the NALC Annual Gathering and the Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology.

The Women of the NALC Annual Gathering will be held on Tuesday, Aug. 9, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. One delegate from each congregation may vote at the Annual Gathering. Additional congregational members may attend as visitors. The $75 registration fee includes lunch.

The Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology are scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, Aug. 9, and Wednesday morning, Aug. 10. The $115 registration fee for the lectures includes lunch on Wednesday.

To register or for more information on any of the events during Lutheran Week go to thenalc.org.

Nominations needed for NALC positions

Nominations are now being received for positions to be elected at the NALC Convocation Aug. 10-12 in Anaheim, Calif.

The Convocation will elect two members of the NALC Executive Council (one lay person and one pastor) and one member of the Court of Adjudication to four-year terms.

The Convocation will also elect four members of the Board of Regents for the North American Lutheran Seminary. Three people will be elected to six-year terms and one person to a four-year term.

Nominations are also welcome for next year’s Nominating Committee.

Congregations and individuals are welcome to nominate individuals for any of the open positions.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position are available on the NALC website.

Please submit nominations by May 1. This will enable the committee to meet the constitutional deadline to make biographical information available to NALC members.

To submit a nomination, complete the Nomination Form available on the NALC website (under the 2016 Convocation tab) and return it to the Nominating Committee. Nominees will be asked to complete the Nominee Biographical Form.

Lectures to focus on Person of Christ

To celebrate the Reformation, the annual Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology will devote the 2016 lecture series to the Second Article of the Creed. The annual theological conference, held prior to the NALC Convocation, is scheduled for Aug. 9-10 in Anaheim, Calif.

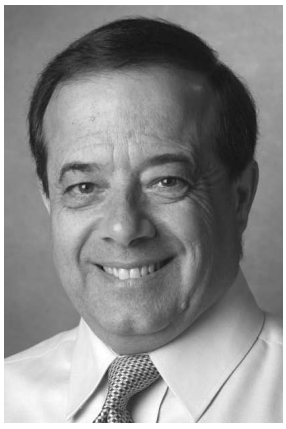
The lectures will honor the Reformers by reflecting on what was most important to them, the confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. The 2016 lectures will respond to our Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" and reflect on the Church's answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Carl E. Braaten

Phillip Cary

Wesley Hill

Mickey L. Mattox



Michael Pasquarello

Dr. Carl E. Braaten is among the speakers for the NALC's annual lecture series named in his honor. Other speakers include Dr. Phillip Cary, Dr. Wesley Hill, Dr. Mickey L. Mattox, and Dr. Michael Pasquarello III.

Dr. Carl Braaten has been one of the leading theologians and teachers in the Lutheran Church for the past 50 years. He has authored and edited numerous books, journals and theological papers. He taught at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago for many years. He later founded the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.

Dr. Phillip Cary is Professor of Philosophy at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pa. He earned his doctorate and master's degrees from Yale University. He is the author of four books on the theology of St. Augustine."

Dr. Wesley Hill is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa. He is a graduate of Wheaton College and Bethlehem College and Seminary. He earned master's and doctoral degrees from Durham University in Durham, England. Dr. Hill is the author of three books.

Dr. Mickey L. Mattox is Professor of Historical Theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis. He earned his doctorate at Duke University and holds master's degrees from both Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Simon Greenleaf School of Law.

Dr. Mattox is a historical theologian with primary expertise in the life and theology of Martin Luther. His publications include four books.

Dr. Michael Pasquarello III is the Lloyd John Ogilvie Professor of Preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif. He earned a doctorate and a master's degree in the history of Christianity from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He earned his M.Div. from Duke Divinity School.

Dr. Pasquarello is the author of several books including *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* and *Sacred Rhetoric: Preaching as Theological and Pastoral Practice of the Church.* One of his forthcoming books is entitled, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Homiletic Theologian.*

To register or for more information go to thenalc.org.

A home visit in rural China

Pastor Jeff and Mim Nellermoe, NALC Global Workers, offer this first-hand account of a home visit with a China Service Ventures scholarship recipient in rural China.

Our goal today is to make home visit evaluations in Long Jing Township — a 60 minute bus ride north of Xinyang. It is cold outside (-4 degrees Celsius). Mim and I climb into the bed of a truck and sit on two tanks full of propane that resemble scuba diving air tanks.

The ensuing bumpy ride reminds us why riding in the bed of pickup trucks is not a good idea. I am nervous that we might tip over or fall out. Jin Jing sits over the axle on a small wooden slat the size of a 2 x 4 with four 6-inch legs. She has the worst of it. We are ready to lunge for her in case we hit a bump and she flies over the railing.

Finally, we stop. We are in the middle of Yan Huai village, I think. There are no street signs, just dirt roads and brick homes. We are lost. A husband and wife are watching their two kids nearby. The husband knows of FENG Jin Qi and offers to fetch him. He lives nearby.

FENG Jin Qi comes quickly to greet us. It is a short walk to his home. We were close. Mr. FENG and his wife are in their 70s. They take care of their four grandchildren. They welcome us into their home and offer snacks of sunflower seeds and peanuts.

The main living room is typical of rural homes — a main room with adjacent bedrooms. One wall is plastered with achievement awards of their grandchildren, one belonging to FENG Xin Qing, a 12-year-old boy in Grade 6, whom China Service Ventures sponsors. The FENG family receives 2600 RMB ($406 U.S.) per year to help with Xin Qing's milk, food, and book expenses at school. The money also helps to pay the 3 RMB (50 cents) roundtrip bus ticket from school to home on the weekends.

Mr. FENG and his wife had two sons. The first died of cancer, and the second son lives in Shanghai, working a part-time job. Mr. FENG and his wife take care of their four grandchildren. I ask where are his grandchildren's mothers? I am met with silence. All conversation stops and the

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mood in the room becomes uncomfortable. Once again, I unwittingly blunder into a sensitive topic. Fortunately, Jin Jing knows the back story and quietly tells us in English. The sons' wives abandoned their children — two each — with the grandparents. The widowed wife remarried, but represented herself as single without children to attract a husband. The other wife left the marriage and moved back to her family to start afresh, abandoning her children.

It is near noon and we rise to leave, but Mr. FENG insists that we stay for lunch. We realize that we made a cultural mistake and are embarrassed. To express his gratitude, his wife is busy in the kitchen preparing a feast for honored guests. They have enough money to buy meat only once every two weeks. She serves us fish, chicken, eggs, and rice. We are eating their best. Thinking to be polite, Mim and I eat meagerly, because we feel badly to be eating this poor man's bounty.

Jin Jing gently scolds us. It is the Chinese way. We will dishonor our host and his gift if we do not eat our fill. If we do not eat to our host's satisfaction, he will ladle generous portions into our bowls. Mr. FENG senses our hesitation and promptly puts more food into our bowls. We make the adjustment, hoping to achieve the correct balance of respect, to eat enough to honor but not too much to dishonor through greed.

We make small talk. The grandfather tells us that he and his wife are getting too old to parent and

work. He is a wheat and rice farmer and works five units of land. His annual net gain is 1,000 RMB ($156 U.S.) for his rice crop and 4,000 RMB ($625) for his wheat — a total of 5,000 RMB ($781) per year. He supplements his income with part-time construction work. He tells us that he has trouble finding work. Many potential employers consider him to be too old for manual labor. His current boss, however, knows of his situation and makes allowances to employ him.

After dinner, Jin Jing presents a small gift bag for the sponsored son: toothbrushes, toothpaste, winter gloves, pencils and pens, and a book — always a book. Jin Jing tells us that literacy is the way out of the cycle of poverty.

The work is monumental, never-ending, and difficult. Yet we count ourselves blessed to be able to sit at the feet of so many servants to truly learn. One day at a time. We are so grateful that we have been called into partnership in the kingdom to share the good news. Will you join us? For more information please visit thenalc.org/global-workers.

Haitian pastors are making disciples with support of NALC congregation

By Dennis McDaniel

A group of disciples from Living Water Lutheran Church in Centerville, Ohio, recently returned from their fifth mission trip to Haiti. In addition to supporting the discipleship efforts of 12 local pastors, the group was able to extend God's love to children at the Guitton School, orphans of the 2010 earthquake residing at a Bon Repos Children's Home, and dozens of families in several local communities.

NALC Bishop John Bradosky led a two-day workshop for local pastors on the theme of discipleship and also partnered with a local pastor during Sunday worship by delivering a message on spiritual maturity. Working with local pastors and supporting them on an ongoing basis is the key to having a lasting impact given the relatively short-term nature of most mission trips.

Living Water partners with Sundouloi Ministries (SMI Haiti), whose name comes from the Greek word *sundoulos* which means "fellow servant." SMI has been in Guitton, Haiti, over 20 years and has seen the Word of God significantly grow in influence in many local communities.

Three years ago, there was no church in the village of Nanwoch. Hundreds now attend worship each week and special events draw upwards of 500 people. One year ago, there were no Christians in the village of Kamitan. Now there is a temporary church structure where 60 people gather for worship on a weekly basis.

The church in the village of Guitton recently moved from a tent to a permanent structure as did a

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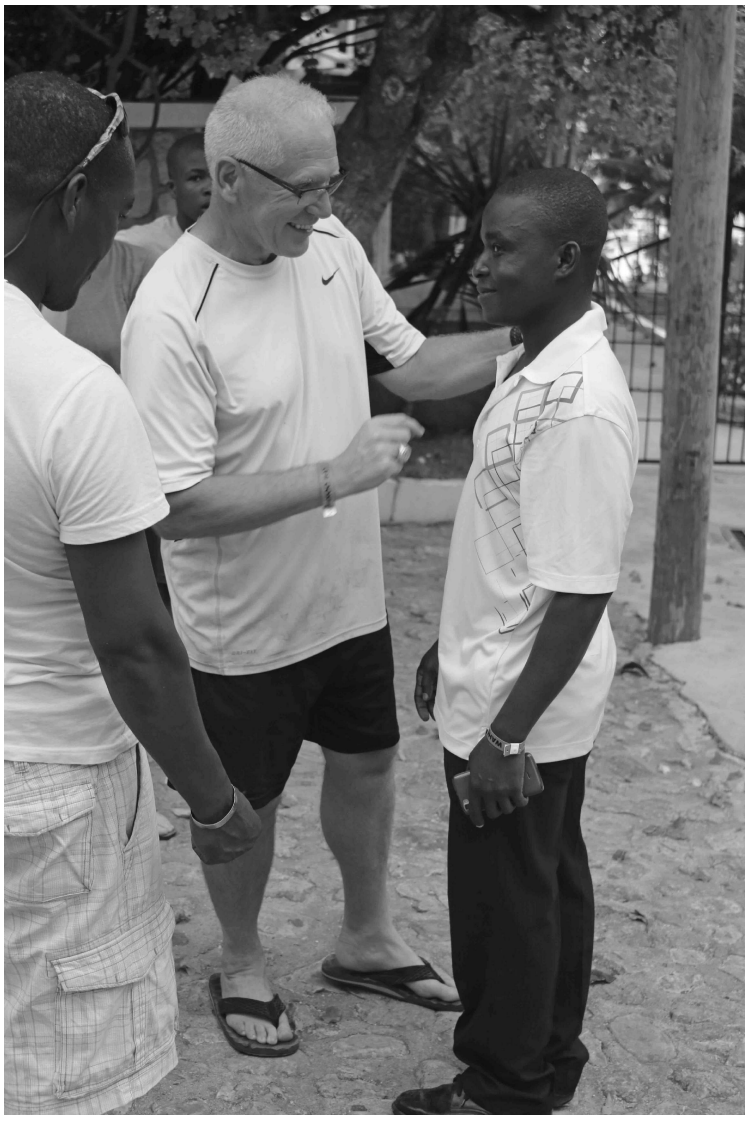
congregation of 1,000 disciples at Cepres. None of this would be possible without the leadership of local Haitian pastors who proclaim the Word of God, provide Christian education, and build networks of caring Christian disciples who care for the wider community. It is in support of these efforts that Living Water supports the efforts of several local pastors in building-up the body of Christ.

The Living Water congregation and friends of the congregation most recently supported their mission team by raising more than $10,000 which will be used to purchase food for students and orphans throughout the remainder of the calendar year.

Additionally, the congregation supports many efforts of the Haiti mission team through the church's annual mission budget including: supplies for a prenatal clinic, shoes and clothes for 25 orphans on



the island of LaGonave, 20 student scholarships at the Guitton school, various construction projects, after-school activities, and many other local church ministries.

By supporting local Haitian pastors, and by working with a visionary mission partner in SMI Haiti, and with the prayers of many people, Living Water is able to be obedient to the command of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. A team is already looking ahead to a return trip to Haiti in early 2017.

If you are interested in working with the people of Haiti and would like to develop your own mission trip we would be willing to help you get started and walk with you throughout that process. Contact Dennis McDaniel of Living Water Lutheran Church (dennis_mcdaniel@att.net, 937-609-4648) or Kit Brunson of SMI Haiti (kit@smihaiti.org, 317-496-4622).

Engaging the Aging

NALC Aging Network - Equipping congregations for ministry with older adults

By Pastor Brad Hales

North America is aging at a rapid rate. By 2040 one out of every four people will be 65 and older. But this is only part of the story. The church is experiencing the "age wave" now! The average age of many church members is already 60 or better. So what are we going to do?

Are we going to be like ostriches with our heads in the sand thinking that nothing will change? Are we going to throw in the towel, believing that this is how it's going to be until the local congregation ultimately folds? Or are we going to renew the church by "engaging the aging," and help our older members to grow in discipleship and witness?

When I worked for a denominational office, I spent much time in rural congregations with aging populations. When discussing evangelism and church growth, inevitably, many would say, "Let's hire a youth director and our congregations will be teeming with youth and young families." But this is not always the best solution, is it? Obviously, we need to reach out to children and youth and share the Gospel of Jesus with them. But this is not possible in every congregation. The main constituency in many of our churches is seniors. Why can't we turn this question around? Why can't senior ministry be an essential ministry in our parishes? Why can't we look for ways to share Christ with this population and to help them grow in the faith?

For years we've known that older adults have been the "mainstay" of the church. They worship, provide needed offerings, support missions, and are always around when ministry work is needed. Instead of taking this group for granted, why don't we engage them and help them to grow in their relationship with the Lord Jesus?

In Psalm 71:17-18 it is written, "O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even in my old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those who come." And in 2 Samuel 19:32, we learn about an older man named Barzillai who supported King David in his efforts.

So what can we do in our congregations right now to reach out to older adults, and make this a priority? How about modeling this ministry after the **"5 Ss of Senior Adult Ministry?"** These elements include; **Spiritual, Study, Social, Service and Self.**

Practically speaking, how about starting an older adult Bible study or a senior adult Vacation Bible School? What about starting a senior worship service? A weekly "lunch and learning program" or a senior mentoring ministry? Perhaps you could hold a "Senior Celebration" that includes music, Bible study, a speaker, and other topics of interest. Consider joining the NALC Aging Network, and learn about upcoming webinars, resources, and future regional and national conferences on ministry to older adults.

Most of our congregations are filled with seniors who want to grow in discipleship and service. How can we use this energy to renew the local church? When I came to my present call 11 years ago, we had around 30 people with an average age over 60. There were few children and a majority of older adults. So we focused our discipleship ministry on seniors. As this happened, the congregation began to flourish. Our emphasis on mature adults has not waned, but increased. Now we've even added more ministry to younger families that have been led to the congregation. Many of our parishes have a great asset in their midst — older adults. Why don't we intentionally disciple them and witness Jesus to them? This can bring renewal to the church!

Brad Hales is the pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va. He is also the Dean of the Virginia Mission District and Coordinator of the NALC Aging Network. He may be reached at pastorhales@hotmail.com or at 540-270-1026.

How NALC congregations can help when disaster strikes

With the arrival of the spring and summer storm season and its resulting floods, tornadoes, and fires, what should NALC pastors or congregation leaders do when a natural disaster strikes in their community or in an area where the congregation is able to or desires to provide assistance?

Since the NALC is a small church with widespread congregations, it is important that you contact us when a disaster occurs in your area.

First and foremost, if the disaster is nearby, make sure you are safe.

Next, contact the NALC Disaster Response Coordinator, Pastor David McGettigan (disasterresponse@thenalc.org; 609-742-2449), as quickly as possible so the prayer power of the NALC can be unleashed. Be sure to also contact your Mission District to see if your local NALC disaster response team can provide assistance.

NALC Disaster Response has resources and capabilities to assist in early response and longer term recovery. We can open the gates to material resources, networking, counsel, training, and volunteers. Remember, the key is early communication! The sooner we learn of a disaster in your area, the more quickly NALC Disaster Response can respond to the needs of your community.

The NALC Disaster Response Fund provides resources to:

+ respond rapidly when domestic natural disasters occur,

+ alleviate human suffering,

+ provide transitional assistance, and

+ enable those affected to begin the rebuilding process.

The NALC's Disaster Response Coordinator administers the use of the fund, working cooperatively with and through local NALC congregations and members, as well as other compatible disaster relief organizations such as LCMS Disaster Response.

You may donate online to the NALC Disaster Response Fund at www.thenalc.org, or mail your gift payable to the North American Lutheran Church; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton MN 55112-2202, noting Disaster Response Fund on the memo line of your check.

Faith Webbing

The North American Lutheran Church has an agreement with faithwebbing.com to provide congregational youth ministry coaching. To get connected, visit faithwebbing.com and fill out the contact form. The site is designed to provide forms, resources, and links for adults that work with children and youth.

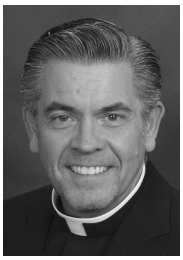
Video clips and handouts from the Faith Webbing Webinars have been posted on the faithwebbing.com site under the “concepts” tab. The entire webinars are available online in the NALC section of faithwebbing.com.

A Safeguarding Webinar also has been posted to the NALC section of faithwebbing.com.

Two more webinars are scheduled. Both will run from 2 to 3 pm (ET). Registration details are available on the NALC website calendar.
April 19 - Website Tutorial
May 17 - Intro. to Outcome-Based Youth Ministry

Pastors and Pastoral Leadership

Preach the Word in season and out of season and preach only the Word of God



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

After the last Ministry Matters article on "Pastoral Trustworthiness," I realized the comments by Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring warrant an entire reflection of their own — that the faithful pastor, seeking to offer pastoral leadership, must be focused always on the Holy Word of God.

Bishop Spring stated: "The most effective way for a pastor to build trust in the congregation is through a faithful ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. Isaiah says, 'Thy word shall not return to me empty.' Truer words were never spoken. A pastor who ministers the Biblical word of Law and Gospel, according to the Lutheran Confessions, is laying a firm foundation for an ongoing, trusting relationship with a congregation."

It is truly unfortunate and tragic that there was a movement away from faithful preaching and teaching of the Word of God in some parts of Lutheranism in the last few generations.

At the recent Canadian Rockies Theological Conference, lecturer Rod Dreher quoted another writer who said the problem is that much of Christianity has been reduced to (or replaced by) "MTD" — "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."

This means that, rather than preaching, teaching and pastoral leadership being guided by the truth of Holy Scripture, proclaiming that we are saved by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, what has been offered are selective moralistic, agenda-driven presentations that aim at helping people feel better about themselves, drawing upon a general notion of God (deism), when it might be useful. The bankruptcy of this approach is obvious, given that such a proclamation is devoid of "the power of God unto salvation."

Martin Luther, in his listing of the seven marks of the Body of Christ, says that we should first look for the Holy Word of God. The holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the Holy Word of God — and "wherever you see this Word preached, believed, professed and lived," Luther said, "do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, 'a Christian holy people' must be there, even though their number may be very small."

Luther continues, "Those who have the pure Word of God are those who 'build on the foundation with gold, silver and precious stones'; those who do not have it in its purity are the ones who 'build on the foundation with wood, hay or straw' … this is the principle item, and the holiest of holy possessions, by reason of which the Christian people are called holy; for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches: it is indeed the very holiness of God. 'It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith', as we read in Romans, and 'Everything is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer' as we read in 1 Timothy 4:5 … 'God's Word shall not return empty,' as we read in Isaiah 55:11."

Any pastor (or congregation) who moves away from a primary and foundational focus on the Holy Word of God will be skating on thin ice and always be in danger of falling through and drowning in the freezing waters of false teaching and belief. As a congregational preacher, my strategy has always been to stick with the Biblical text — if for no other reason than to keep myself out of trouble!

A congregation may very well disagree with a preacher's own personal opinion, thoughts and musings, and tell her so. If the sermon simply reflects the clear, unequivocal message of Holy Scripture, the pastor stands on solid ground.

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How does a pastor focus on the Holy Word of God?

1. Preach and teach only the Biblical Word of Law and Gospel. There is often the temptation for preachers or teachers to want to present new and innovative "discoveries" or understandings of Scripture that might, in the mind of the preacher, make the sermon more interesting, fresh, or reflective of the pastor's great knowledge, intellect or ability. This often leads the preacher and the congregation away from a focus on the message of the Biblical text, redirecting focus on the pastor's agenda or curiosity. I have said recently, and continue to remind our young pastors and preachers, to stick with "the meat and potatoes" of the Biblical passage. Because our parishioners, young and old alike, may not be familiar with basic Biblical accounts, it is helpful to preach on the clear, straightforward message of the text. This is good for the hearer and good for the pastor! It keeps the main thing as the main thing — that God's Word is the power of God for salvation.

2. Don't allow stories and illustrations to become the primary text of the sermon, taking the place of the Biblical text. Whole sermons are preached on stories, accounts or funny experiences of the pastor without the Biblical text being mentioned. Unfortunately, such material, while sometimes perceived as "entertaining" and "memorable" by the congregation, leaves them untouched by the power of God for salvation.

One congregational member told me years ago, "We love our pastor — he begins every sermon with several funny jokes!" While funny jokes may keep people coming back for more, it leaves them lost in their sins, without having heard the good news of forgiveness, life and salvation. Let the congregation receive humorous banter and stories on late-night television. As Luther wrote, "Those who have the pure Word of God are those who 'build on the foundation with gold, silver and precious stones'; those who do not have it in its purity are the ones who 'build on the foundation with wood, hay or straw.'"

3. Help people to grasp and understand the Incarnation! Until and unless our parishioners grasp the meaning and mystery of "the Word become flesh to dwell among us, full of grace and truth," there will be a lack of hunger and thirst for the Word of God written, read, studied and preached, and broken and poured out for us in the Lord's Supper. In much of Christianity today, there is often a "spiritualized" notion of Christ's presence. This means Jesus Christ is present with us "spiritually" if you can "feel" or "experience" Him with you through your own sensitivity or perception. This is a kind of "disembodied" Jesus, but not the Word made flesh, Jesus, incarnate to dwell among us.

We believe that the Scriptures proclaim not a spiritualized Christ, but an embodied, enfleshed Lord who comes to us, yes, through the work of the Holy Spirit, but through Word and Sacrament — what Luther and the Small Catechism term the "Means of Grace." Rather than expecting us to experience Jesus' presence with us, perceptible more or less depending upon our own "spirituality," God gives Himself to us in His Son, Jesus Christ, who is now embodied in the Word, written, read, studied and preached, and, in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, broken and poured out for us in the Lord's Supper.

Why is this so important? Because it is at just those times when Christians are struggling, lonely, in despair that they are least able to experience Jesus' presence spiritually. When we are distracted, burdened and troubled, we are most in need of our Lord who comes to us in tangible, touchable, concrete means — in Word, bread, wine, and water that we can hold in our hands, read, hear, eat, drink, to know that Christ is truly present with us, in spite of our own ability or inability to spiritually perceive or receive Him. This is a great blessing, and at the core of what it means that Jesus is Emmanuel — God with us — in Jesus Christ, risen and with us always!

Pastors and parishioners will want to teach the reality of the incarnate Word made flesh, understand it and focus on it, so that people will hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ, feasting on Him who is the Holy Word of God!

As pastors and congregations of the North American Lutheran Church, to be "Christ-Centered" is to be centered on, always and only, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh! The faithful pastor will keep the Word as the focus of his or her ministry.

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