



What if it were always winter and never Christmas?

A Christmas message from Bishop Bradosky

How would you describe winter? I always struggle with the lack of light, long nights and short days. It is dark, gray and cold. We spend more time trying to get warm and stay warm. We have all been warned about hypothermia and its effects. If you get cold and stay cold for very long you lose consciousness and then you die! So in the winter we insulate and isolate ourselves from others. Not only do we wear more clothes, we stay in more often. We spend more time alone. We eat more and exercise less. We are preoccupied with our own needs.

When we look around there are few signs of life. Nothing seems to grow or bear fruit. There are even more deaths during the winter months. Some people talk about reaching the “winter” of their personal life while others wonder about the state of our nation or the world. Have we reached the “winter” of creation? Imagine a world blanketed by isolation, negativism, despair, selfishness and hopelessness. What if it were always winter?

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In a recent rereading of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (as well as driving in the northern part of our nation through snow squalls), the images of the snow-blanketed land of "Narnia" came to mind — a land ruled by a wicked witch whose magic spell keeps the entire land always winter, but never Christmas.

I commend the book for your reading pleasure. It is the story of four children — Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy — who discover a secret passage through a wardrobe into the world of Narnia. Lucy discovers it first. During her first visit she meets Tumnus, a fawn who explains that the reason it is so cold and dreary is because of the White Witch. "The White Witch? Who is she?" asks Lucy. "Why, it is she that got all Narnia under her thumb. It's she that makes it always winter. Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!"

We live in a world under the spell of evil, a world committed to making it winter but never Christmas. Take away the Nativity scenes. Remove any religious symbols. Change the words in Christmas hymns to make them completely secular. Cut off the Salvation Army kettles because they are doing good in the name of Christ. Remove the name of Christ so it is just a vacation day. Then remove holiday, because it has its roots in a holy day, and we are left with "Season's Greetings" or "Happy Winter!" Perhaps the work of the White Witch is more real than we care to admit!

Think for a moment about a Christ-less world. Is that really what we long for — just winter and never Christmas? Imagine a world without the selfless love that Jesus taught, a world without the support of widows and orphans, the sick and disabled, or comfort for the dying. These all started with Christians who built, staffed and paid for hospitals, orphanages and nursing homes. It was those following Christ who founded the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Lutheran World Relief, Compassion International, Habitat for Humanity, and a host of additional caring agencies.

In a Christ-less world education would be set back countless years. There would be no Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard or Yale. In fact, the first 200

colleges and universities in the United States were founded by those following Christ.

So much good would be missing in a Christ-less world. We would be without hope, living in isolation and despair. Without that first Christmas, I wouldn't be writing this and you wouldn't be reading it.

Into such a world as this, Jesus was born — a world of decadence and decay, immorality and injustice, deceit and corruption, poverty, distrust in government, doubt and misunderstanding, spiritual immaturity, and the worship of countless pagan deities. It was a world of broken relationships, dishonor and divorce, aliens alone in a foreign land, and the slaughter of innocents. Before Jesus came into the world it was always winter and never Christmas!

Martin Luther writes about the reality of that first Christmas. Of Mary, Luther writes, "Among the downtrodden people she was one of the lowliest, not a maid of high station in the capital city but a daughter of a plain man in a small town. She appears in her hometown tending the cattle and the house." Of their journey to Bethlehem, Luther says, "Think of how she was treated in the inns on the way ... the mother of God on foot, in midwinter trudged her weight across the fields! How unequal it all was!"

Of the birth, Luther comments, "The birth was still more pitiable. No one regarded this young wife bringing forth her firstborn. Not one took her condition to heart. No one noticed that in a strange place she had not the very least thing needful in childbirth. There she was without preparation: no light, no fire, in the dead of night, in the thick darkness. No one came to give assistance. With no table, cradle, bench or board they laid him in the feed box of the oxen. What a sight for tears!"

Jesus is not put off by the winter of our worldview, the spell of the White Witch, or the presence of evil and its influence. He enters into the midst of our world for the very purpose of confronting and doing battle with such forces.

In Narnia, the Lion, Aslan, is the character that represents Jesus. He is muscular, powerful. His

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roar shakes the earth. They say of him, “He is no tame lion!” In Scripture Jesus is referred to as the Lion of Judah. At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump inside of them. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got “the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.”

There is power in the name of Jesus. Paul writes that one day “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” The power of Jesus goes to work every time the Gospel is proclaimed. It is nothing less than the work of the Holy Spirit calling people to faith in Him.

There is our hope! Jesus breaks into the world and into our lives to bring us hope! Mary felt something jump inside of her when the angel first spoke to her. Luther says the greatest power at work in the Christmas story is not that God became a baby. With God all things are possible. The greatest power at work in this Gospel is that Mary believed! Mary trusted the Word concerning Jesus and she was filled with hope!

Joseph’s heart was changed, his own will subverted when he heard the news of Jesus through the message of an angel. He believed and his hope was renewed!

Something jumped to life in the shepherds as they heard the proclamation of this good news, and by faith they obeyed and went to Bethlehem, saw Jesus, and believed. They had hope again, for the angel said, this Savior is for you! “For unto you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”

In Lewis’ masterpiece, the children journey to meet Aslan at a famous landmark called the Great Stone Table, all but Edmund. Edmund sneaks off with his friend the witch. Only this time the witch doesn’t treat him as well as she did previously. Isn’t that what sin always does to us? It appears to be fun and rewarding but it ends up enslaving us, ruling over us like a tyrant. The White Witch is furious



Poster from the “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,” a 2005 movie from Walt Disney Pictures based on C.S. Lewis’ book.

with him for failing to bring his brother and sisters to her, and even more furious to learn that Aslan has entered Narnia.

The story reaches its climax with Aslan, the children, the witch and Edmund meeting at the Stone Table. Now Edmund is her prisoner, a traitor. The witch reminds Aslan that according to ancient law, all traitors belong to her and she has the right to kill them. Aslan promises, “all that can be done will be done” for Edmund. So Aslan offers her a trade — his life for Edmund’s. In the most dramatic scene, the witch has Aslan the lion tied down, shaved, humiliated and put to death on the Stone Table. The table breaks in two much like the curtain of the temple was torn in two!

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The children are in despair. All hope is gone. How could this happen? How could one so powerful have something this awful happen to him? Just before dawn, the girls sneak back to the now-deserted Stone Table and untie the ropes around Aslan's dead body. His body is mangled and mutilated, but a few minutes later, they can't believe it, as life actually returns to him, and they witness his resurrection.

Aslan explains that, while ancient law dictates that all traitors belong to the witch, an even more ancient truth is that when a willing victim who has committed no treachery is killed in place of the traitor, death will work backwards and restore life to the innocent victim. The battle against all the forces of the witch begins with Aslan and all his followers who are restored to life, turned from the stone they had become into living beings again. The White Witch is defeated, a celebration ensues, it is Spring again, the ice melts and the snow is replaced by the warmth of the sun. All of Narnia lives in peace and joy — especially Edmund, the wayward boy whose life was redeemed by the innocent lion.

The story of Narnia is a compelling one because it is rooted in history. It is a story that really happened. It is the Christmas story that takes us all the way to Easter. The real power of Christmas is not that Jesus became a child but that Jesus came to offer his life for ours. He came to save us, redeem us and give us new life. He came to bring hope, joy and peace. These are all ours through faith in Him.

There is profound hope for those who are still living in winter without Christmas. C.S. Lewis, who was an avowed atheist in the early part of his life, wrote to a friend, "I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best. They are all merely man's own inventions"

But a change began to take place while he was a professor at Oxford. Lewis became friends with two other professors who were Christians, Hugh Dyson and J.R. Tolkien, the author of *Lord of the Rings*.

As he got to know them, he was persuaded that their faith was real. He wrote that he came into Christianity kicking and screaming. He wrote,

"Every night as I tried to work I felt the unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had come upon me. In the summer of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed, the most reluctant convert in all England."

When Lewis decided to follow Jesus, it was like the snow melted from his heart. He came to Christmas, because Christmas came to him. Lewis began reading the Bible, attending Church, praying consistently, helping the poor. For the rest of his life he donated two-thirds of all his book royalties to widows whose husbands had died in World War II.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe came out of Lewis's personal experience. He was Edmund, a traitor who experienced what it was like to have someone die in his place.

It is not just his story, but it is mine and yours as well. Even more, it is the story of the God who so loved the world that He came on that first Christmas and comes this Christmas as well — not to judge us or condemn us but to save and redeem us. He came to melt away the ice of depression and despair with his love. He came to replace the oppressive gray sky and cold with grace and truth. He came to exchange the isolation and insulation in our relationships with forgiveness and reconciliation. He came to bring us to the wellspring of new life in His resurrection that He promises to all those who believe in Him.

Our celebration of Christmas boldly proclaims that this is not a Christ-less world. Jesus has entered our world and our lives, and He is on the move again! I encourage you to share your faith with someone dwelling in the darkness of winter, in need of what only Christmas can bring — Jesus Christ. As you share the Christmas story you might also share this little book by C.S. Lewis. It may provide a great opportunity for meaningful discussion of the faith we share.

It isn't always winter. Christmas is still breaking into the lives of people through faith in Christ our Lord. May His gentle yet powerful presence renew your faith and warm your soul!

Soon we will unite our hearts as one in that Christmas proclamation, "Christ is Born. O come let us adore Him!"

NALC Pastors Conference is Feb. 14-16

The 2017 NALC Pastors Conference will be held Feb. 14-16 at the Crowne Plaza Orlando Universal in Orlando, Fla.

The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, noted Martin Luther scholar, will be the featured speaker. He will have two presentations on Luther's Doctrine of Vocation and two presentations on the lectionary preaching texts for Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

Bishop John Bradosky will lead a meeting of the NALC Ministerium and a worship service including the renewal of ordination vows and the blessing of anointing oil for use in congregations.

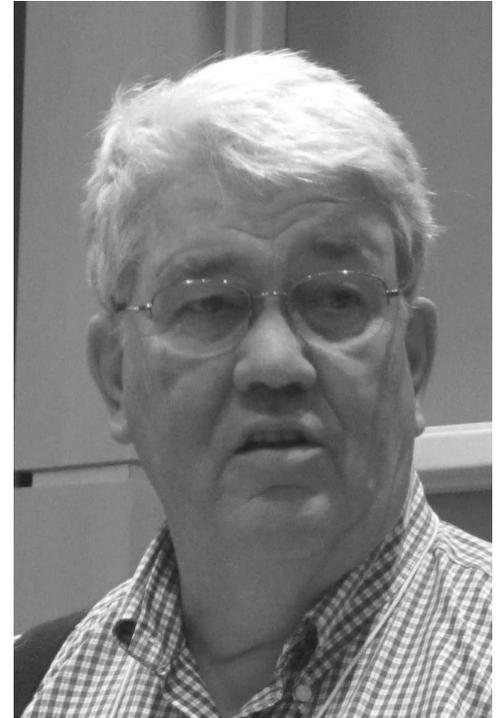
All congregational leaders and members are asked to support and encourage their pastor's participation in the annual NALC

Pastors Conference through council/congregational action and to provide financial support. Each congregation and pastor will benefit from full involvement in the NALC Ministerium.

Registration is \$100 per person until Dec. 31 and \$125 beginning Jan. 1. Registration includes breakfast and dinner on Wednesday and breakfast on Thursday.

A discounted hotel rate of \$120 per night is available at the hotel for rooms booked by Jan. 16. The discounted rate will be honored two days before and one day after the conference.

Clergy spouses, seminarians and non-NALC clergy are welcome to attend but must register to be included in the group meals.



James Nestingen

To register or for more information go to the NALC website — www.thenalc.org.

Life Conference precedes March for Life

The North American Lutheran Church is planning a Life Conference on Thursday, Jan. 26, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Va.

The conference will begin with lunch followed by two pro-life speakers and conclude with worship. Both clergy and laity are invited.

This should be a wonderful opportunity for the NALC to coordinate pro-life witness and charities for the coming year.

The next day features the Memorial for the Preborn service at 8:30 a.m. at DAR Constitution Hall in Washington D.C., where Bishop John Bradosky and the NALC Executive Council will be in attendance. Clergy should plan on vesting and participating in this service.

After the service, NALC Lutherans will join the March for Life Rally at noon on the grounds of the Washington Monument.

Following the Rally, the March for Life will begin on Constitution Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets at approximately 1 pm. The march concludes with Silent No More testimonies outside U.S. Supreme Court building at 3 p.m.

The theme for the 2017 March for Life is "The Power of One." You can learn more about the March for Life at www.marchforlife.org.

Those needing housing for the evenings of Jan. 26 or 27 or with questions about the event are encouraged to contact Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at 703-568-3346 or dennisdimauro@yahoo.com.

Bringing the Light of the World to Muslim refugees

Translation of Catechism explains Christian faith in their own language

By Jennifer Bagnall

Lutheran Heritage Foundation

Sometimes it's hard to see God's plan.

Young Mary never imagined she would be pregnant before she was married. Certainly, as her labor pains began, neither she nor Joseph planned on Mary having to give birth to the Savior of the Nations in a lowly stable.

God's plans are often not our own.

Like Mary and Joseph, 32-year-old "David" is learning how to fully rely on God. Until last year, David lived in Iran where he made a good living as a flight attendant. Like 99.4 percent of Iranians, David identified as a Muslim — until he found a Bible.

"It was so good!" David exclaimed. "I could feel the difference between Muslims and Christians in the Bible. The Quran always talked about killing; Jesus never talked about killing. He said to turn the other cheek."

As David's faith grew, he found other Christians hiding in Iran. But fearing for their lives, they had to study Scripture in secret.

"In Iran, if they find out you are a Christian, you will die," he stated bluntly. "In the Quran, if you are Muslim and convert to anything else, you have to die. They would also cause problems for your family."

Not long after David's conversion, a friend at the airline where he worked gave him a warning. "Be careful," he said. "You are in danger."



Copies of the new Luther's Small Catechism in Farsi are distributed as the Pastor Gottfreid Martens (in the clerical vestment) greets parishioners at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Berlin, Germany.

Heeding his friend's words, David decided to take a drastic step: he would join the thousands of other refugees seeking a new life in the West. As a college graduate with a degree in English, he hoped to make it to Great Britain, the United States or Canada.

Those plans didn't materialize. David wasn't able to make it to any of those countries. Instead he ended up in Leipzig, Germany, where he has lived for the past year, sharing a small room with two other men in government refugee housing. He's having trouble passing the test to show his mastery of the German language, which is required in order to get a job.

"Everything is just ... hard," David sighed heavily, tears beginning to build. "I miss my family. I have no job. I wonder, what will happen to me?"

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But God does not abandon His children! Just as God loved and protected Mary and Joseph, He is taking care of David.

“When I decided to leave Iran, I tried to move to England because I was so sure that Germany wasn’t the best choice for me,” remembered refugee David. “I don’t know Germany. I don’t know the language.

“Then, in our first camp, I met another Christian Iranian and we talked about why we came here. He told me, ‘There is a church in Leipzig, and their pastor knows Persian (Farsi) and English.’ I said, ‘Really?! In Germany? So I went to take a look at that church.’”

“That church” was Trinity Lutheran Church, where Pastor Hugo Gevers has baptized more new believers in the past year than he has in the previous nine years combined. Almost all of those baptized have been Iranians and Afghans seeking political asylum.

“Our roads have been flooded with refugees, just as our churches have,” said Rev. Gevers. Five years ago, most of Trinity’s pews stood empty on Sunday mornings. But now, “our church is packed — packed with refugees speaking a different language. It is quite a challenge for the locals. How do you teach people about our faith when they don’t know the language at all? It’s a big, big problem.”

But it was a problem with a solution. Lutheran pastors wanting to share the Good News now have a new way to communicate with Iranian immigrants throughout Germany, Europe and the rest of the world: *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, translated and published by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation in the Farsi language.

In November, LHF executive director Pastor Matthew Heise spent a week helping distribute the Farsi catechism to Lutheran churches ministering to thousands of Iranians in cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Leipzig.

“The catechism — especially in our context with the refugees — really relates to the core of what it means to be a Christian,” said Pastor Gevers. “This



Pastor Hugo Gevers of Trinity Lutheran Church in Leipzig, Germany, left, is pictured with “David,” an Iranian parishioner.

kind of question-and-answer teaching might not be an ideal approach if you speak the same language; for example, you might share the faith through stories or other ways of teaching. But if you have a language barrier, a pastor needs to be able to gauge the level of knowledge, even though he doesn’t know his parishioner’s language. He can do this with the Small Catechism, because if they don’t know the answer, it’s easy to see they haven’t studied the material.”

Of course, whether the refugees are sincere in their faith or simply trying to attain political asylum is a question that often arises.

“We know that there are some who are spying on us,” said Pastor Gevers. “But we cannot allow this distrust to influence the way we work with them. We are not trusting in human strength, but in God’s

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message — which is what changes the heart. So if he is a spy or a staunch Muslim, then he needs the message just as much as I do.”

The cover of the Farsi Small Catechism reflects this philosophy. “The illustration shows a man sowing the seed,” Pastor Gevers explained. “It’s very fitting to the situation, because we are sowing and sowing and sowing. But God is making the seed grow. So it is with this catechism. We are sowing the seeds of Biblical teaching.”

As new believers delve deeper into their Biblical studies, the differences between Islam and Christianity become even more apparent.

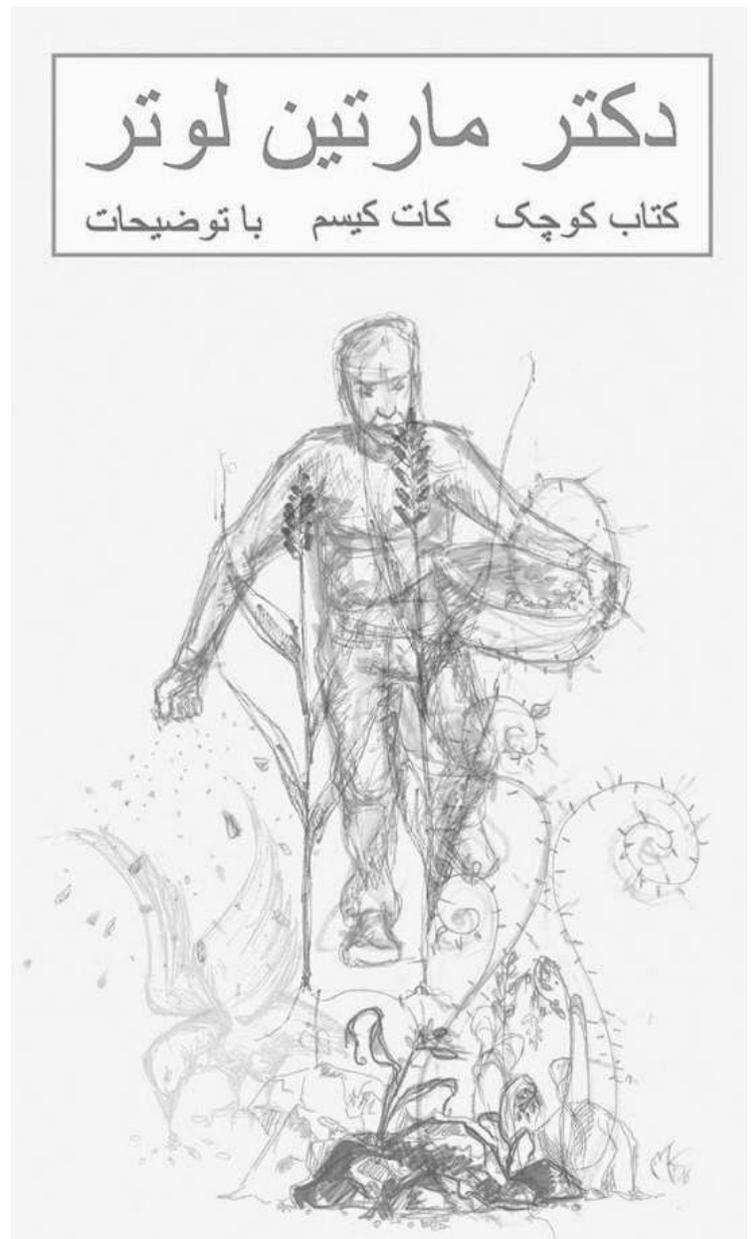
“I’ve found that those who have lived under Islam really love the healing stories of Jesus,” Pastor Gevers said. “The stoning of the sinful woman (John 8:1-11) is especially meaningful to them, because this is something they know. They’ve lived it under Sharia law. That Jesus forgives the sinner is something that really touches them. When we finished reading that story, one of the men said, ‘Hey, just a minute. Jesus was without sin. Why did he not throw a stone?’ I replied, ‘You are quite right. He could, by rights, throw a stone. But he chooses not to, because this is God’s way. He should punish all of us, but He chooses love and forgiveness.’ This is a message many have not heard before, that our God is a God of love.”

Pastor Gevers’ caring approach has made a world of difference to refugees like David.

“I have been baptized in this church,” David proudly shared. “I love my pastor; he is like a real father. He is so good and so kind.

“When people ask me how I am, sometimes I am quiet,” he continued. “I can’t tell them everything of how I am feeling, because it is so hard. But I know Jesus.

“I think of the time when Jesus was in a meeting with his followers, and they said, ‘Hey, Jesus, your mother is outside.’ Jesus told that man, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’ That was Jesus’ sentence. Now I’m here in Germany, of course. I have no family here. But my pastor is my father,



The cover illustration for Luther’s Small Catechism in Farsi depicts the sowing of seed — symbolic of sowing the seeds of Biblical teaching.

and all who read this, they are my brothers and my sisters.”

For his personal safety, David’s real name has been changed in this article.

Lutheran Heritage Foundation has published the Catechism in more than 80 languages, and many more translations have been requested. LHF has published and distributed more than 825 titles/editions and 3 million Lutheran books to pastors, seminary students, missionaries and churches — all at no cost to them. To learn more about their ministry go to www.lhfmissions.org.



Glenn Sokolowski was ordained Tuesday, Nov. 29, at Hope Lutheran Church in Ladysmith Wis. He is called to serve St. John Lutheran Church in Phillips, Wis.

November ordinations



Randy Drafts was ordained Nov. 12 at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Chapin, S.C. He is called to serve Faith Lutheran Church in Faith, N.C.



Leslie Haines was ordained on Sunday, Nov. 27, at St John's Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Ind. She is called to specialized ministry with Lutheran Military Veterans and Family Ministry.

Whose responsibility is mission?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we prepare for the upcoming training that will be taking place Jan. 5-6 in Fayetteville (near Atlanta), Ga., we have been asked by many people about the NALC's strategy for mission, specifically our strategy for planting churches. They have heard us say that the NALC does not plant churches at the national level. This is a new strategy and vision for many people.

The formation of this strategy change began several years ago after I read an analysis and study done on the topic of mission in different denominations.

A comparison of Lutheran denominations found that most of them (and other mainline denominations) established mission departments at the national level in the 1970s. They began to encourage congregations, synods, and regional associations to collect mission money and send it to the national office. The purpose was to centralize the mission fund in one pot.

The national office would then be responsible for planting churches, sending out missionaries, and supporting global projects. The role of the local congregation shifted from being engaged in mission to writing a check every month. This money was sent to a regional office, which often took a percentage, and then sent on to the mission office in the national headquarters.

What happened with that money? What did that system do?

Because the national church was responsible for mission, most congregations made themselves responsible only for worship. This killed their capacity to multiply and plant other churches.

And now we can see the outcome: Each of the mainline denominations (whether more conservative or liberal in theology) that employed that vision and strategy has dwindled. And they continue to dwindle. There is clearly something wrong with that mission strategy.



Missions Update

Pastor Gemechis Buba

Assistant to the Bishop
for Missions

In the NALC, we are embracing a different strategy for mission. Rather than the national church being responsible for planting congregations, it is critical to put mission in the hands of congregations. Mission funds *need* to be in the hands of congregations. Mission projects and strategy *need* to be in the hands of congregations. That is why we emphasize that the NALC is Mission Driven and Congregationally Focused.

Congregations are in the driver's seat of planting churches. Rather than making one office responsible for mission, we make thousands of congregations in the mission field responsible for the propagation of the Gospel — and for the planting of churches. That is why we say the NALC does not plant churches from the national office. If planting churches is not done by congregations — and specifically your congregation — it is not going to be done.

That's why responsible pastors and mission congregations work individually or collectively within their Mission Districts to make pastors, lay leaders and members responsible for the work of mission.

As we engage in this work of mission together, it is my joy to remind you of the words of Jesus in Matthew 16: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

As we engage in mission — whether church planting, evangelization or discipleship — we can be certain we will be attacked right and left. Our

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Church Planting and Renewal Conference

The North American Lutheran Church is hosting a Church Planting and Renewal Conference Jan. 5-6 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Fayetteville (near Atlanta), Ga. “Plant, Grow, Bloom — It’s Not an Option” is the theme for the conference.

Hotel rooms are available at the Holiday Inn Express Fayetteville. The \$25 per person registration fee includes lunch both days and transportation between hotel and conference site.

Speakers for the conference include: Pastor Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions for the NALC; the Rev. Dr. Richard Dalton, an ordained Presbyterian minister and director of Storehouse Ministries in Dayton, Ohio; Pastor Trina Petersen of A New Thing Christian Church in Lithonia, Ga.; and Pastor Wendy Berthelsen of Call,

Inc., and Hope Lutheran Church in Cedar Hill, Texas.

For more information, please visit: <http://nalcnetwork.com/plant-grow-bloom>.

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relationship with God and relationships with each other will be attacked. But the good news is that nothing will overcome the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We encourage you to join us in Georgia for this critical training. For more information, please visit: <http://nalcnetwork.com/plant-grow-bloom>.

NALS-TSM celebrate Luther Bowl victory

For the second year in a row, the team from Trinity School for Ministry — which included North American Lutheran Seminary students — is the champion of the Luther Bowl.

The Luther Bowl is an annual inter-seminary flag football tournament that has taken place since 1965. The Luther Bowl is held on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa. and took place on Oct. 29.



Other schools participating in the Luther Bowl were Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Trinity Episcopal Seminary, LTS-Gettysburg, LTS-Philadelphia, Lutheran Southern Seminary, Union Presbyterian Seminary, Virginia Theological Seminary, and Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

The NALS students who participated included: Matthew Vatalare, Chris Boyd, Makayla Cook and Joshua Roach. Dr. Amy Schifrin, NALS President, was also in attendance to cheer on the team and celebrate the victory!

The all-too-human church

What is a pastor and what is pastoral leadership?

A familiar saying goes, “For God so loved the world that He didn’t send a committee!” But the Bible affirms, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son” and that Son became flesh — human — to live among us full of grace and truth. The Church is the Body of Christ in the world today — and the Church is all too human!

A pastor is one called and ordained to minister to and with human beings. The pastoral leader is one who leads, serves and ministers to the congregation entrusted to him or her, fully aware that this congregation is full of sinful, broken men and women. While pastors might wish it were different, the people who fill the pews and the council meeting room are not perfect, not always loving, not always Christ-like. And neither are pastors!

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to faithful ministry together is unrealistic expectations. Like a newly married couple, full of hope and anticipation, the pastor and congregation are often surprised and shocked to find that their new partner is a sinful schmuck just like everyone else in the world.

This is why we refer to the first year or two (or less) of ministry together as pastor and people as the “honeymoon.” As shortcomings, failings and weaknesses come to light, the honeymoon period dies out and reality sets in. Would it be great to have each year of ministry be like the honeymoon? Not really.

I prefer reality. I prefer pastors and congregations enter into ministry together fully aware that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” so that we have realistic expectations. Our Lord Jesus was human *and* divine. We are just human, no more and no less. We dare not expect our fellow church people, pastors or leaders to be otherwise.

Better that we are clear and up front about our expectations so that they are realistic, rational and attainable. Most pastors and congregations have



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

strained relationships because they have not been clear about expectations.

The same is true in marriage. As a pastor (and a husband), I can only fulfill what is expected of me when I understand the expectations.

Unfortunately, as difficult as it may be for pastors and church leaders to communicate openly and honestly, we find it even more difficult to talk about and agree upon expectations. This leads to frustration, misunderstanding and, sometimes, feelings of betrayal and lack of trust.

How do we address this proactively for the good of the Body of Christ as a whole?

1. Accept and give thanks to God that we are all sinful, broken human beings who are in need of God’s grace and forgiveness and need to forgive as we have been forgiven (Matthew 6:12).
2. Beginning the first council meeting together — and quarterly after that — pastors and church leaders should discuss and clarify expectations they have of each other. Expectations should be stated clearly and be realistic and attainable.
3. Bear with one another (Ephesians 4:2). Hold each other in prayer. Be patient with one another. Encourage each other.
4. Speak the truth in love. This is how we grow up in every way into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

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Addressing generational challenges

The generational challenges facing North American churches are only becoming more pronounced and daunting. While young adults 19 to 29 years old make up 22 percent of the adult population in the United States, these younger adults only represent 10 percent of churchgoers.

The Fuller Seminary Youth Institute recently completed a four-year study of 250 congregations that are particularly effective at involving 15- to 29-year-olds in congregational ministry. These churches represented more than 20 denominations in nearly 40 states. The September 2016 *Christianity Today* magazine summarized the findings from this four-year study.

In part, this article listed congregational characteristics that did *not* have that much to do with their success reaching young adults and teens:

1. A specific denomination. A congregation's denominational identity neither helped or hampered its effectiveness reaching and engaging this generation.
2. A congregation's size had little to do with success ministering to this age group. The 250 congregations studied "came in all sizes."
3. A big budget was not a factor. Some of the congregations in this study had very limited financial resources.
4. Contemporary worship was not an important factor. "It's not that worship style is unimportant; it's just that there is no one 'right' worship style for attracting teenagers and emerging adults."

So what *did* make a difference? The most significant factor was described at the beginning of the article.

A group of 20-somethings from Immanuel Church of the Nazarene in Landsdale, Pa., were asked by the study team what they loved about their congregation. "When one 22-year-old offered her two-word answer, every head nodded. It wasn't the name of a program but a person: Bill Wallace."



In Pursuit of the Great Commission

Pastor Don Brandt

Bill Wallace is 76 years old. However, he has made it his personal mission "to ensure that young people know they matter." Not only is Wallace personally involved in his congregation's young adult Bible study, he has organized a group of seniors who are each involved in attending outside events that are important in the lives of these young adults. The goal: "To cheer on young people and remind them that they have a family at Immanuel."

I found the results of this study a powerful argument for the importance of relationally-focused ministry — ministry that deliberately prioritizes *mentoring* friendships between older adults and young adults and/or teens.

Two additional strategies were recommended based on this study's findings. One is a strong effort at involving young adults in community service ministries. Younger adults consider this to be an extremely important focus for congregations.

The second strategy is involving younger adults and teens in congregational leadership. This is much broader than recruiting them for committee positions. This means including them in any and all lay leadership opportunities including more informal roles that involve visibility in congregational life. (Think, in particular, about "up-front" visibility in worship.)

"In this model, leaders remove the keys of power and authority from their own key chains — sometimes quite literally — and hand them to the young people who are ready." The study team heard this from youth at a Memphis church:

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5. Do not bear false witness against one another, but put the best construction on the words and actions of the other — whether pastor, church leader or church member (Exodus 20:16). Remember the Ten Commandments and Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment in the Small Catechism.

6. Make this your prayer: *Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips* (Psalm 141:3). In other words, think before you speak! And, sometimes, don't speak!

7. Especially in the Church, the Body of Christ, remember to "love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 15:12). It is Jesus' "new commandment." "Beloved, let us love another!" (1 John 4:7).

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"Anything an adult can do on Sunday morning, a teenager can do."

To conclude this article, I'd like to return to the importance of a mentoring ministry that focuses on this age group. This can be especially effective in smaller congregations.

One-to-one or one-to-two mentoring friendships can cross any and all generational boundaries. Its effectiveness is in no way limited by a congregation's size or lack of financial resources.

I believe that there is openness on the part of a great many teens and young adults to the counsel and support older adults can offer.

What about your congregation? Can you perhaps organize a small group that would see this as their ministry priority? If so, you might want to consider discipleship resources from the NALC Discipleship Task Force or from organizations like Navigator Church Ministries.

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



By Gary and Laurie Pecuch

As we take a break from the monthly webinars during the holidays, this is a good time to ask about your congregation's best practice safeguarding system regarding minors.

Is your system in place? Has it been vetted by your insurance agent? How about your congregation's attorney? Do you need to run background checks on your volunteers? How often?

There are many resources on the faithwebbing.com site that can help: webinars on safeguarding, example forms and templates, a list of questions to ask your insurance agent, a step by step guide to walk you through the process and more.

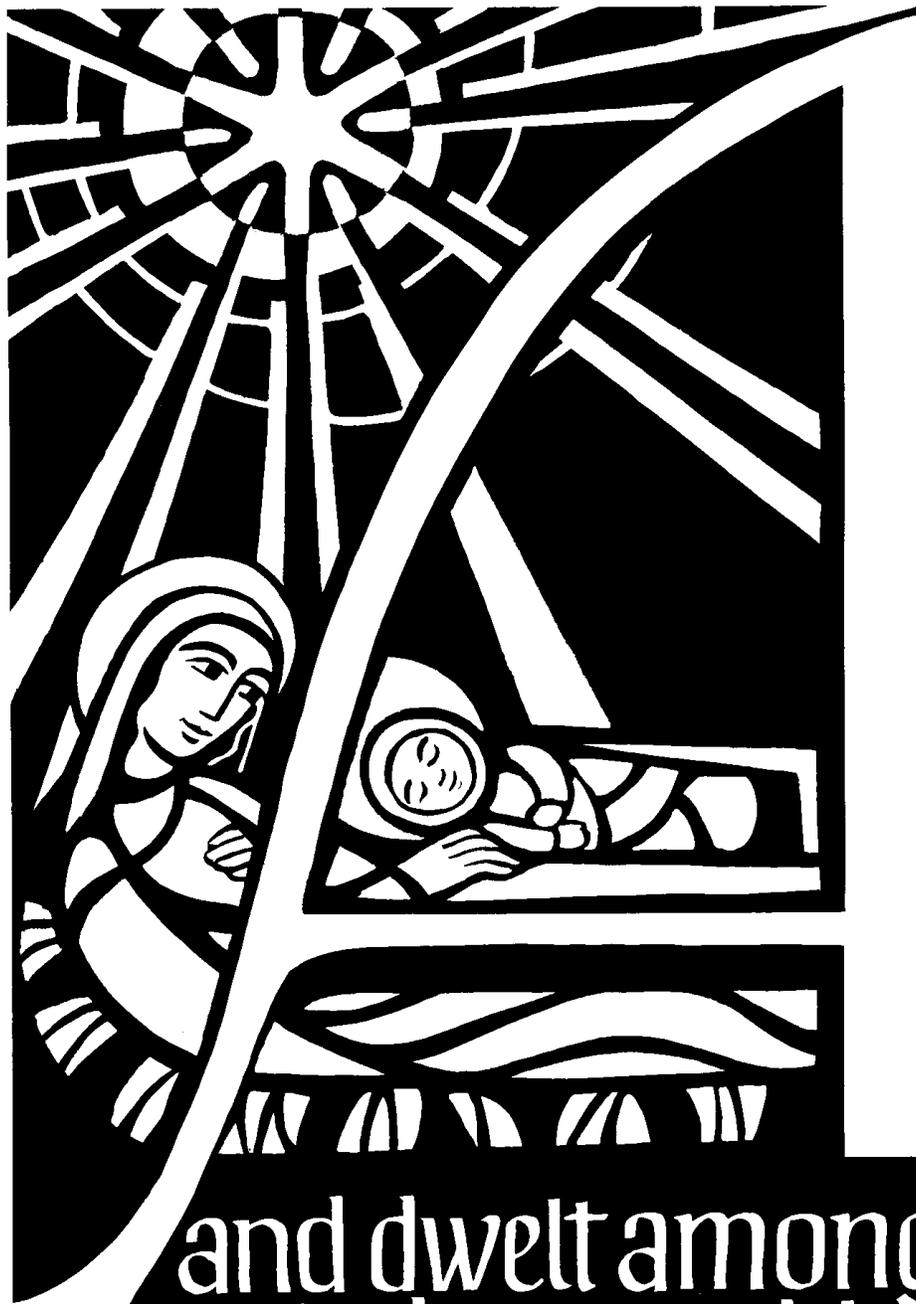
Also, we are ready to move forward with an NALC National Seminar and Certification Program on Outcome-based Youth Ministry. If you are interested, please contact us.

Want to get connected to the website and/or wish to start a discussion? Contact us at faithwebbing@gmail.com.

Gary and Laurie Pecuch have served in youth ministry for more than 30 years at St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio. They serve the NALC as youth ministry consultants. They provide a variety of resources for NALC congregations free of charge through their website, faithwebbing.com.

Congregations seeking pastors

The list of congregations seeking to call NALC pastors is available on the NALC website at thenalc.org/pastoral-vacancies.



AND
THE
WORD
WAS
MADE
FLESH

and dwelt among us
And we saw his glory
glory as of the only-begotten
of the Father
full of grace and of truth



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