



NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

October-November 2021

2022 NALC PASTORS' CONFERENCE IS FEB. 15-17 IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA

“Always be Ready: Apologetics in Real Life” is the theme of the 2022 NALC Pastors’ Conference set for Feb. 15-17 at the Crowne Plaza Orlando-Universal Boulevard in Orlando, Florida.

The theme of the conference is based on 1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV): “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.”

Pastors are encouraged to come for two days of presentations and conversations about apologetics.

According to the *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, “Apologetics concerns itself with errorists outside the Church ... the classical period of Christian apologetics is the 2nd century, a period of widespread persecution of Christians by Romans. The apologists defended Christianity against various charges.”

In the same way that Philip Melanchthon presented an “apology” or “defense” of the Augsburg Confession against its detractors, pastors today may find themselves challenged to “always be ready” to present a defense of the faith as North America is full of “errorists” and those who deny the reality of the Triune God, the Christian faith, the Word of God and Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Where pastors once waited in the church building for visitors and inquirers to walk in the door, in the 21st century, the role of a pastor is more likely to involve engagement with those outside the Church who are unbelievers, atheists and skeptics.



Dennis Di Mauro



Thomas Jacobson



Maurice Lee



Mark Mattes

The 2022 NALC Pastors’ Conference will feature a theme and presenters aimed at deep engagement

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with pastors who are regularly challenged to give a reasoned, yet gracious, defense of the Christian faith.

How is one always ready? How does one respond to youth and college students in particular? What is most helpful in sharing the faith with unbelievers, atheists and secularists?

The conference format will provide extended time for conversation, questions and interaction between speakers and pastors.

Keynote speakers will be:

The Rev. Dr. Mark Mattes, professor of theology at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. He is the author and editor of several books including *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty*. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

The Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Santa Barbara, California. The congregation meets on the campus of Westmont College where Dr. Lee taught theology. He is chair of the NALC Commission on Theology and Doctrine and teaches at the North American Lutheran Seminary. He has a Ph.D. from Yale University.

The Rev. Dr. Dennis Di Mauro is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Virginia. Dr. Di Mauro is a successful NALC mission developer. He has a Ph.D. in church history and sacramental theology from Catholic University. He teaches at St. Paul Lutheran Seminary.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas Jacobson is currently pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Lindy, Nebraska, and dean of the Eastern South Dakota Mission District. He has accepted a call to serve Grace Lutheran Church in Thornville, Ohio, and will be moving in January. He has a Ph.D. from Luther Seminary in Christian history. He teaches at the Institute of Lutheran Theology.



The Crowne Plaza Orlando-Universal Boulevard in Orlando, Florida, will host the 2022 NALC Pastors' Conference.

Each of these pastors and theologians bring in-depth education and experience in polemics within the Church and apologetics outside the four walls of the church building.

The NALC Pastors' Conference also includes the annual meeting of the NALC Ministerium and a service of Holy Communion at which oil will be blessed for use in congregations.

There also will be time during the conference for one-on-one meetings with the bishop, NALC executive staff and representatives of Hahn Financial Group, which manages the NALC retirement plan and Lutheran Benefits program.

All NALC pastors are encouraged to participate in the 2022 Pastors' Conference. Congregations are asked to encourage their pastors to attend and to provide assistance with registration and travel expenses.

Clergy spouses, seminarians and non-NALC clergy are welcome to attend but must register to ensure that adequate seating is available.

Registration fee is \$125 per person and includes breakfast each day and dinner on Wednesday evening. A discounted hotel rate of \$139 is available Feb. 13-17 via the link on the NALC website.

To register, make hotel reservations or for more information go to thenalc.org/pastors.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WORKS ON TEXAS OFFICE PLANS, APPROVES ORDINATION UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES PLAN

The Executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church met Oct. 21-22 in Irving, Texas.

Some highlights from that meeting included an update on the central office to be established in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, area. We have committed to an opening date of May 1, 2022. At this point, we are narrowing down the location to three suburbs in the DFW metroplex.

Thanks to the team of Lynn Kickingbird, Scott Cramer and Mark Braaten the Executive Council has made significant progress on what type of office building we want and the size of office we will need.

The Executive Council continues to work on policies and procedures for the good order of the church. A sabbatical policy was approved for pastors who are part of the bishop's staff.

The Executive Council and the Board of Regents of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) are forming a subcommittee to ensure continued communication for the sake of the church and the seminary. This liaison team will have representatives from both boards to continue to facilitate a good working relationship and build on the ministry we share.

The Executive Council heard an update on the vision appeal that was presented at the 2021 NALC Mission Convocation. This initiative is a three-year appeal process that will be rolled out to congregations in the future.

Staff members have been working hard to discern the needs of congregations in terms of discipleship, local mission, training, pastoral support, seminary education and more.

Ordination Under Special Circumstances

When a congregation with a prolonged pastoral vacancy is geographically isolated, or options for support as described above are otherwise unfeasible, and the Holy Spirit raises up a potential candidate with discernible gifts for Word and Sacrament ministry, the bishop's office may recommend an accelerated candidacy process for ordination under special circumstances (OUSC).

This proposal is, in part, a correction of the former policy of the NALC and its predecessor bodies to authorize laypersons to offer Word and Sacrament ministry under such circumstances, a practice without foundation in the Lutheran Confessions.

Once recommended to the bishop's office by the local congregation and/or mission district dean, an OUSC candidate will work with the OUSC coordinators. The candidate will undertake a set course of study, designated as the initial term, through the NALS or another candidacy-approved institution. He or she will not normally be authorized for Word and Sacrament ministry prior to completing this initial term of study.

Upon satisfactory completion of this initial term and subsequent approval, the candidate will be ordained and will have the same constitutional standing as other pastors in the NALC. However, he or she will not normally be available for call beyond the originally calling congregation.

Following ordination, the pastor will undertake the equivalent of a year of additional coursework, as determined by the OUSC process. The new pastor will also take part in a two-year (minimum) cohort for further ministerial formation and extended review.

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Participation in the cohort will continue as long as necessary at the discretion of the OUSC coordinators, local dean and the bishop's office. Upon completing the entire process, the pastor may be approved for availability for additional calls in the NALC.

The "special circumstances" in question are Congregationally Focused and arise from a sense of call impelled by the needs of a particular parish. As such, the accelerated process for ordination will be exercised infrequently as the exception to the rule of Traditionally Grounded ministerial formation.

It is in no way intended to minimize the importance of the master of divinity degree, and it will not constitute a conventional second path for NALC candidacy.

Expectations of moral character, spiritual maturity, biblical fluency and confessional orthodoxy will remain the same for all candidates for ordination in the NALC.

There should always be high standards for seminary education for the sake of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the church has the authority and historical responsibility to make exceptions to the rule as necessary. It is in this spirit that the NALC Constitution empowers the Executive Council to "define the standards of acceptance into, and continuance in, the ordained ministry of the NALC" (NALC Constitution 4.01).

This option will not be "ordination to place." Once ordained, a pastor is a minister of Word and Sacrament in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Nevertheless, he or she will initially be limited as to wider availability for call.

After a period of five years, the NALC Executive Council will undertake a formal review of this process, in conversation with the OUSC coordinators, Candidacy Committee, NALS faculty, and the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, to determine if it is a) still necessary and b) successful in producing pastors of quality for the church.

The Executive Council's next meeting is an online meeting on Jan. 18, 2022.

NALC DEANS MEET IN TEXAS

Deans serving the 35 mission districts of the NALC met Nov. 9-10 in Irving, Texas.

The deans heard reports from Bishop Dan Selbo and NALC staff members on their work and progress on the NALC's 2020 *Vision*.

The deans joined in discussion and offered suggestions for ministry and mission. They also talked about the role of deans in the church and how to best serve congregations and mission districts.

The deans reviewed a presentation on the 2020 *Vision* fundraising initiative and offered suggestions



on how to best present the \$7.5 million "Today, Tomorrow and Forever" initiative in congregations and mission districts.

CHRIST THE KING

As we come to the close of the month of November, we also come to the close of another year in the life of the Church. The final Sunday in the Church year is celebrated as Christ the King.

It is a celebration of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus and the reign that belongs eternally to Him. Crucified for the sins of the world and raised for the salvation of all who place their faith in Him, Christ the King Sunday is a celebration of the saving work God has accomplished for us in Jesus, as well as the culmination of another year on the Church calendar.

The following week is the beginning of the Advent season — looking forward to the celebration of our Lord's birth, as well as to that great day when He will come again.

Before moving into Advent, looking back to Jesus' birth and forward to His return, it is appropriate that we remember that His reign as King is one that covers all of human history.

Looking back on this past year, filled with challenges to our churches resulting from a global pandemic, it is good to remember that the Church universal belongs to Jesus, and that under His reign we, in the Church, are secure. It is also good to remember that the kingdom of our Lord is not the same as the kingdoms of this world and, as a result, the way in which our Lord reigns and the way in which He calls us to live is different as well.

Several differences in our Lord's kingdom are worth noting, in contrast to the kingdoms we often find in this world. For starters, Jesus is a King who came not to live in a palace, but in the hearts of His people.

Have you ever thought about that for yourself? It is a hypothetical question. If you could live anywhere you wanted, where is it you would choose to live? And what would you do if you were king? What if the whole world was at your disposal? And what would you want more than anything else?



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

Jesus could have had anything He wanted. He could still have anything He wants. But what He wants is not His to give. What He wants is that which belongs to you.

One at a time is how it happened. Jesus went out and began to call His followers. And one at a time, they began to follow. It was not a command He made but a calling He gave. It was not an edict He declared but an invitation He offered. He said, "Come, and follow Me." And they did and they still are.

In the hearts of people — that is where this King chooses to live. It was promised long ago: "I will write it on their hearts," the Father said, "and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

That's what Jesus wants. He wants your heart. He wants to live inside of you. He says, "Lo, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and live." It is not His to give, but yours. It is not a command on your life, but an invitation and a calling to follow.

When asked about the greatest commandment of all, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." Why did He say that? Because that is where He wants to live; that is where He wants to dwell. Because if He has your heart, then He has your life, and if He has your life, then He has what He wants the most.

How different our King is, in contrast to the ones of this world. He came not to live in a palace but in the

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hearts of His people, and not to be served but to serve.

Talk about a contrast from every other king this world has known. How many kings have had servants? How many kings have loved to be served? Every one of them – except for one of them.

Jesus did not live to be served but lived to serve. And that is what He called His followers to do as well. “The first shall be last,” He said, “and the last shall be first.” “If you want to be great, then you need to serve.” And then He gave us an example and He followed it with a command.

On a Thursday night is when it happened. The clearest example we have – the night before He was to die. Jesus took a bowl and a towel, and He washed the feet of His followers. If you had been there, He would have washed yours.

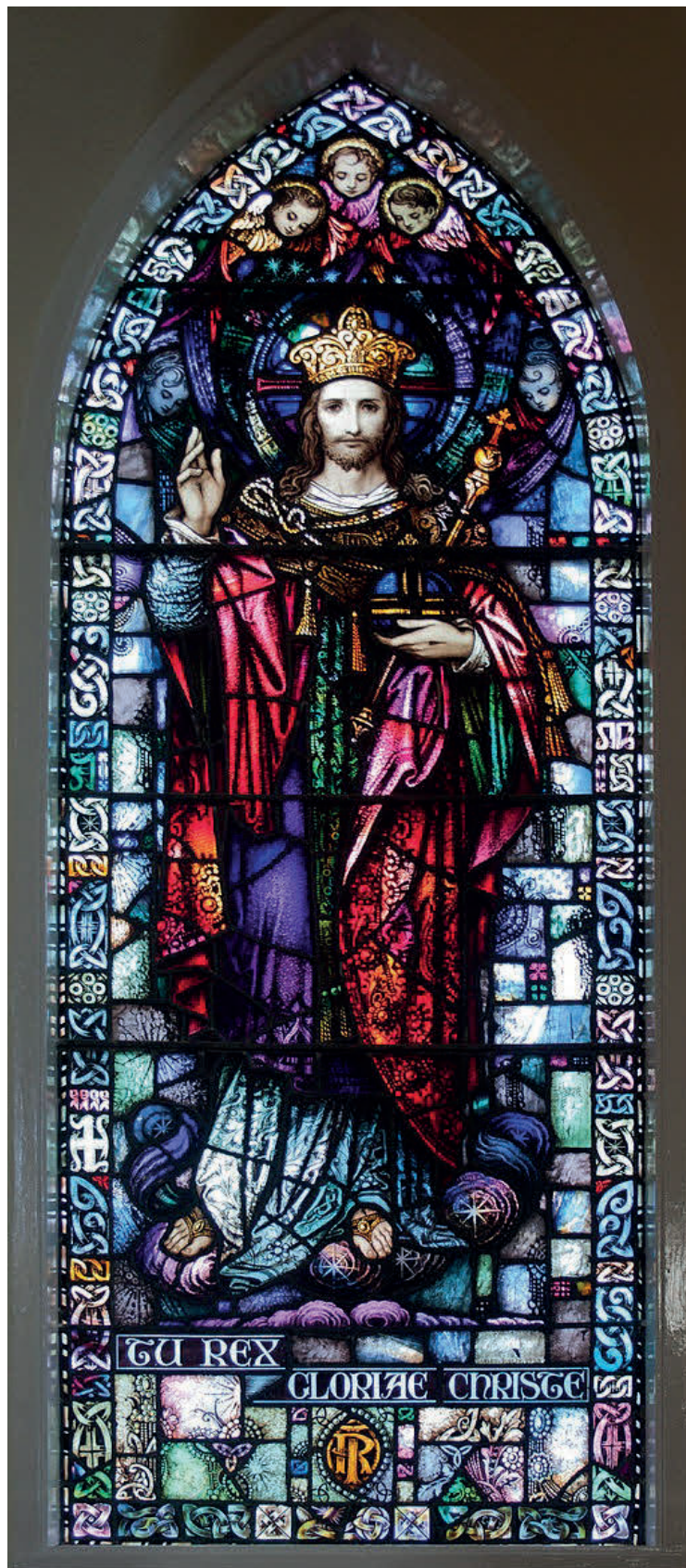
Then He said, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” And then He raised the bar as high as it could go, as He was raised on the cross and became as low as a person could become. And He did it for you and for me – not to be served, but to serve – and He calls us to do the same.

What a contrast we find in the One who is our King: not in a palace, but in the hearts of His people; not to be served, but to serve; and not to remember our faults, but to forgive our sins.

Consider how that played out in His ministry and in the lives of the people He touched. Nicodemus came at night, wanting to learn more about this one called the Christ. Jesus said that he must be born again, be given a new start, and he was.

And then there was the woman at the well who had been married five times. She came that day to get a drink, and she left that day, having had her deepest thirst quenched.

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Stained glass window in St. Joseph's Church, Toomyvara, County Tipperary, Ireland, created by William Earley (1872-1956) in 1933, titled Tu Rex Glorïae Christe. Photo by Andreas F. Borchert. (This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International [license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).)

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And then there was the paralytic, lying at the pool. For 38 years, unable to walk, Jesus told him to get up and take his mat and to go home, and he did.

Go down the list. There was the blind man, given his sight. There was the woman caught in adultery, given another chance. There was Lazarus, raised from the dead. There was Peter who denied his Lord. There was Thomas who had a hard time believing it was true. And then there was you and there was me, along with every other follower in this world whose life has come up short.

King Jesus came not to remember our faults, but to forgive our sins; not to hold over our heads the things we have done wrong, but to lift up our heads and make it right.

“I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. ... For I will forgive their sins, and I will remember their iniquities no more.” And so it happened in this one we call the Christ. And so it continues to happen each time a new follower turns to Him in faith.

What a different King we have in Jesus: not in a palace but in the hearts of His people; not to be served but to serve; not to remember our faults but to forgive our sins; and not to fight with armies but with the truth.

Remember the story? Jesus is on trial before Pilate, the Roman governor, and He is being asked whether He is a king? Remember what He said? He said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would be ready to fight.”

Do you remember what happened when Jesus was about to be arrested? Peter took out a sword and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Do you remember what Jesus did? He took the soldier’s ear and put it back.

Why did He do that? Because He came not to fight with armies, but with the truth! He said, “If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Jesus came to set us free. And not by fighting against the armies of this world, but against the things that can bind and deceive and ultimately destroy. “For this reason, I was born,” He said, “and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”

All throughout the story, it is the same message. “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God ... and the word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus said, “I came to testify to the truth.” He said, “I am the truth,” and He said, “I will send the Spirit of truth when I am gone.”

Christ the King is so different: not with armies but with the truth; and not to recruit soldiers but to gather sheep. One hundred sheep is what the shepherd had. Ninety-nine were still there. Only one had strayed away. What does the shepherd do? The shepherd went after the one, and He continues to search until it is found. And why? Because every sheep matters. Every one of the sheep counts.

Can you imagine a king who goes out looking for sheep? Can you imagine a king who searches until He finds? You can if you know Jesus. You can if you know what He has done for you. You are that one lost sheep. That is how much your life matters to Him.

Our King in Jesus is so different: not in a palace but in the hearts of His people; not to be served but to serve; not to remember our faults but to forgive our sins; not with armies but with the truth; not soldiers but sheep; and not from a throne but from a cross.

It was on a cross that the thief first spoke to Jesus. He said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” What did Jesus say? He said, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

That was the purpose of our Lord’s life from the time the angel first appeared to Joseph. He said, “Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sin.”

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NALC LEADERS AND SCHOLARS MEET WITH LEADERS AND SCHOLARS FROM LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD AND LUTHERAN CHURCH-CANADA

Leaders and theologians from the North American Lutheran Church met with leaders and scholars from the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC) Oct. 25-26 at the International Center of the LCMS in St. Louis, Missouri.

As new members have been recently appointed to the ongoing NALC, LCMS and LCC inter-Lutheran consultation and given that this was the first post-pandemic, in-person meeting, an informal “reset” took place in the conversations between the church bodies.

Recent appointees to the consultation are:

LCMS: The Rev. Dr. Richard Serina, Jr., associate director of the Commission for Theology and Church Relations; and the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Shaw, director of church relations and assistant to the president.

LCC: The Rev. Michael Keith, pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran Church and Christian Academy in Stony Plain, Alberta.

NALC: The Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee, pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Santa Barbara, California,



Participants in the inter-Lutheran consultation between the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Lutheran Church—Canada and North American Lutheran Church pose for a group photo. They are, from left, front row: Richard Serina, Jonathan Shaw, Dan Selbo, Joel Lehenbauer; back row: John Pless, Maurice Lee, Eric Riesen, Larry Vogel and David Wendel.

and chair of the NALC Commission on Theology and Doctrine; and the Rev. Dr. Eric Riesen, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Ongoing participants in the consultation are:

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LCMS: The Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, executive director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations; the Rev. Larry Vogel, assistant to the executive director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations; and the Rev. Dr. John Pless, assistant professor of pastoral ministry and missions at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

LCC: The Rev. Robert Bugbee, pastor of First Lutheran Church and Christian Academy, Windsor, Ontario.

NALC: The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, professor emeritus at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota; Bishop Dan Selbo; the Rev. Dr. David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism.

Present for a portion of the meeting was the Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, LCMS president.

Official discussions between representatives of the LCC, LCMS and NALC began in December 2011, at the invitation of President Harrison. Face-to-face meetings continued through 2019, typically twice per year. The consultation continued via online meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Topics addressed have included: the relationship of Gospel to Law; church fellowship; the Church's mission; the doctrine of ministry; Christian witness in the public square; confessional subscription; marriage and sexuality; Biblical authority; the role of women in the church; and discipleship and catechesis.

Dialogue participants have prepared several statements including a working agreement for the discussions and consultation between the churches; "God's Word Forever Shall Abide" (a statement on biblical authority) and a three-year reading guide to Holy Scripture, accompanied by readings from the book *Luther on Scripture* by the Rev. Dr. Johann Michael Reu.

A joint conference is being planned for May 24-25, 2022, at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Catharines, Ontario, entitled "Being Church in a

Cancel Culture." This conference will include the LCC, LCMS, NALC and the Anglican Church in North America.

Upcoming meetings will take place Nov. 15-16, 2022, in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, area and April 25-26, 2023, at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

BISHOP'S MESSAGE

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Years later, Paul would write, "I decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Years later, John would say, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son."

And years later, people like us continue to come together because of the greatest and most important story ever told.

As we look back on this past year, it is easy to remember the challenges we have all faced. Our hope and our prayer are that those challenges will soon come to an end. But let us not forget that we follow and serve a King who will be there when it all ends.

He is our Lord. He is our Savior. He has called and claimed us as His own. As different as His kingdom is, in contrast to the ones we find in this world, it is one that will continue forever. And all because of a cross and an empty tomb, for our salvation, through Christ our King.

NALS IS SEEKING A RECRUITMENT MANAGER

The North American Lutheran Seminary is seeking to call a pastor as recruitment manager. More information on the position is available at thenals.org/the-nals-is-calling. Resumes must be submitted by Dec. 31.

REFRESH, RE-ENERGIZE, RENEW

NOW SCHEDULING 2022 “FRESH EYES FOR MISSION SUMMITS”

We hope you are familiar with our “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits,” aiming at “refreshing, re-energizing and renewing” NALC congregations. In 2021, four summits have been held as “trial runs,” so to speak, and the results have been so significant, we are committing to scheduling as many “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits” as possible in 2022.

Renewal is clearly needed in many congregations in North America, including congregations of the NALC. This was true before COVID-19, and it is especially so as we are moving out of the pandemic. Smaller and struggling congregations may benefit from renewal, but mid-size and larger congregations are not immune to decline, stagnation and loss of clarity with regard to vision for mission.

As NALC executive staff recently reflected upon challenges facing the NALC, there was a consensus that renewal is at the top of that list if we are to have vibrant, vital and sustainable ministries.

For this reason, to offer significant support to every NALC congregation, we are shifting responsibilities so that I will be able to facilitate as many “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits” as possible in 2022. Now is the time to respond if your congregation would like to consider a “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit: in the coming year.

What is a “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit?” Many congregations struggle with a decline in attendance and income, transitioning neighborhood and context and the lack of coherent and appropriate vision for mission.

Time and time again congregational leaders make efforts to retool and reshape the congregation’s life and ministry, only to find resistance to change, lack of commitment and little positive result.

At the heart of all we do as Lutherans are the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament, which communicate to us the real presence of Jesus Christ. Our response



MINISTRY MATTERS

REV. DR. DAVID WENDEL
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP
FOR MINISTRY AND ECUMENISM

to His life-giving, life-renewing presence is often hindered by lack of focus, unclear vision and ineffective communication, cooperation and commitment.

One of the challenges to renewal and re-formation is our closeness to our own congregation’s history, culture and current practices. As with any family system, we can be so involved that we are blinded to the reality of our situation, unable to see clearly God’s will for new direction and transformation.

The goal of the summit is to involve an NALC facilitator, together with congregational pastors and leaders, praying first, “Lord, let our eyes be opened!”

And Jesus stopped and called (the two blind men), saying, “What do you want me to do for you?” They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” And Jesus in pity touched their eyes and immediately they received their sight and followed him (Matthew 20:32-34 RSV).

We then trust that the Lord will give participants fresh eyes to receive new insight and understanding, aimed at new or renewed direction for mission and ministry as the congregation seeks to follow Jesus firmly and faithfully.

Each summit begins with extensive, but manageable, pre-work by the pastor and congregational leaders, enlightened by in-depth demographic profiles within your congregation’s geographic area, provided by the NALC, using an online tool from the FaithX Project.

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The pre-work is reviewed by a team of NALC leaders who bring varied experiences and expertise. An onsite visit is scheduled with the NALC facilitator, who joins congregational leaders in a tour of local context, neighborhoods surrounding the church, neighborhoods bordering the congregational service area, and making visits, where appropriate. The goal is to look with “fresh eyes” at the congregation, context and community, asking, “What have we learned? What is a surprise? What preconceived ideas were supported or dispelled?”

A Saturday workshop follows involving formal and informal leaders of the congregation, using the “Missional Capacity Assessment” tool. This framework, originally developed by Pastor Gemechis Buba, assistant to the bishop for missions, for the 2014 NALC Mission Festival, has now been expanded into a tool that assesses missional culture (faithfulness, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, centeredness on Word and Sacrament, church as Body or building, unity and healthiness, prayerfulness), missional leadership and missional context, with specific conversation, evaluation and numerical rating done by congregational leaders to arrive at a “missional capacity.” In other words, the assessment helps the congregational leadership determine capacity for mission in the present and the future.

The final step in the mission summit is to ask, “Where are we and where do we go from here?” The focus is on, “How has God gifted you? What do you have to share? What are your greatest assets for mission and ministry? What are your current challenges? What is hindering your mission and ministry? What is God’s vision for your future as a congregation? What is God calling you to be and to do? What action steps are necessary to move toward God’s intended future for your congregation?” The summit ends with Sunday worship and, when desired, a congregational forum.



“Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit” at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Owosso, Michigan.

The “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit” was first introduced in the *NALC News* in November 2020. At that time, only one summit had been completed, with Advent Lutheran Church in North Charleston, South Carolina. Since then, summits have been held with St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Portland, Texas, and Redeemer Lutheran Church in Owosso, Michigan.

Listen to some of the reactions to the most recent “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit” in Owosso:

Church leader Roger Weyersberg writes:

I knew from the moment that our initial introduction via Zoom began that this was going to be something different. I had no idea by title alone; one can only imagine. But once we began with prayer and Pastor Wendel outlined what we would be looking at to bring the title to fruition, I could feel the excitement build in myself as well as our other church leaders. “Fresh Eyes for Mission” is driven by the Holy Spirit, based on God’s scientific disaggregated data, and then analysis becomes outcome based. This study, this analysis, and subsequent conclusions were not just a cookie cutter program, but fine-tuned and focused to our community, our demographics; our reality both in house and in the community at large. And the focal center is not on a single weekend endeavor but instead, a lifetime of targeted mission based upon the strengths and gifts God

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has given us and surrounded us with and how we can use all of those blessings to reach out and serve all in our greater communities. “Fresh Eyes for Mission” is now an every month line item on the agenda to be discussed and nurtured at our council meetings, and I find it is a regular pop-up topic in many of our conversations.

Council president Matt Stark shares:

Redeemer Lutheran is a small NALC church located in central Michigan. Our attendance/membership has been on a slow, steady decline over the years due to an aging congregation and other factors (the recent COVID-19 lockdown certainly did not help). Our Pastor, George Zornow, recommended that we reach out to the NALC regarding a program called “Fresh Eyes for Mission.” Council agreed to participate after much discussion, deliberation and prayer (we were unsure if the timing was right, due to several factors) – and, in hindsight, I am certainly glad that we did!

Pastor Wendel was courteous, professional and knowledgeable. He thoroughly reviewed all congregational survey data and input, researched our specific area, and then presented demographic statistics and national comparisons in such a way as to help us understand who and where our target audience was, along with what and how we could potentially focus on reaching out to our surrounding community in an impactful manner. He also helped us to reflect on our own congregational strengths and weaknesses, and then provided recommendations along with real world examples of how we could apply them.

As council president, I can state that we were honestly a bit hesitant and skeptical to begin with, but at the end we were all nothing but thankful, grateful and excited about our future (which is a significant positive change).

Finally, congregational leader, Phyllis M. Seelye states:

Completing the information gathering for Pre-work Tasks 4, 5, and 6 and writing up a summary report “opened my eyes” to facts about my community (Owosso) and surrounding areas, that I was unaware of or had not given much attention. Learning about an

area’s population and characteristics, I now more fully understand, is critical to understanding and appreciating the mission field readily available to us – right here in our community! The pre-work and the on-site two-day forum, led by Pastor Wendel, brought to light, for me, the assets we are blessed with, along with the challenges that are before us. At times, I had been discouraged by our declining and aging church membership and attendance.

However, after attending the “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit” last month, my vision for the future of our church – spreading God’s word and demonstrating God’s love to others – has been rekindled and enlightened! During the forum we (our church leaders) discovered assets we had not even considered and challenges we had not fully recognized. We now have a clearer vision for our church, as well as some very urgent and significant action plans to put into place. I am excited about our future, and I pray to God for His steadfast guidance and grace.

The most recent “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit” was held Nov. 11-14 at St. Luke’s Lutheran Church in Monroe, North Carolina. Planning has also begun on a summit for First Evangelical Lutheran Church in West Palm Beach, Florida.

We will be scheduling summits in 2022 on a first-come, first-scheduled basis, anticipating the possibility of offering 20 to 25 within the coming year. Unlike many congregational renewal agencies and programs which often cost thousands of dollars, the NALC offers “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits” at no cost to NALC congregations, for the sake of renewal, refreshment and re-energizing mission and ministry within the NALC.

To consider scheduling a “Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit” in your congregation, contact Pastor David Wendel as soon as possible at 719-650-8171 or dwendel@thenalc.org.

The NALC is committed to healthy, long-term renewal. We are praying you are, too.

Pastor David Wendel is the assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism.

DOES YOUR CHURCH COUNCIL HAVE A COVENANT OF CONDUCT?

Does your congregation council have a covenant of conduct?

Just asking that question sounds very businesslike, you might think to yourself. We are the Church! Why do we need to discuss and agree on appropriate ways of interacting with one another as we lead our local congregation? It might be an off-putting question at first, but when you stop to think about how conflict and disagreements enter into the family of Christ, perhaps you can see why making a covenant with one another would be a good idea.

Think about the times when an issue arose in the church and instead of thinking it through, someone reacted strongly or even unkindly and caused a major disruption. Any sort of argument that is not conducted in a respectful way can cause a ripple effect of emotion to make its way through the church body. If it's really bad, sides are taken and relationships can be severely damaged.

So how do we create a culture in our church that is healthy, open, graceful and honest? We cannot assume that just because we all love Jesus and seek to follow Him that we will do well at loving each other. We remain captive to sin and cannot free ourselves and sometimes our sinful nature creeps in to meetings, even when we try to do our best to lead the congregation in its business side.

Jesus taught His disciples how to respond when a brother or sister sins against us.

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and



FROM THE
GENERAL SECRETARY

REV. DR. AMY LITTLE

whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:15-20 ESV).

This passage can guide us in our relationships in the church, especially when we are serving in leadership positions. If you have an issue with another person in the church, Jesus directs us to go straight to that person — do not pass go, do not collect \$200! Don't tell the secretary. Don't tell the custodian. Don't talk about it with your friends in the parking lot. Go straight to the person who has offended you.

Why don't we do that in the first place? Is it fear? What do we think they will do to us? So gather up your courage, if that's what it takes, and ask the person who has offended you in some way to sit down and discuss the issue. Chances are, this will take care of things. If it doesn't, then Jesus says, "go back again, but this time with two or three others along to discuss the matter." Jesus is indicating here that with a few more people interested in reconciliation can help sort through the issue.

Finally, Jesus gives a last resort. Or does he? "If the person refuses to listen to you, and to the two or three witnesses, treat that person as a Gentile or tax collector." Sounds like excommunication, doesn't it? But when you really examine these words, perhaps

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the image of Jesus sitting at the table with those who no one else wanted to dine with pops in your head. Jesus isn't saying we should abandon folks because we disagree! That's too easy. The harder part is to keep at it. Invite them to supper. Go and have coffee! "I'm there with you," He says.

This way of being can and will change the culture of the church if it's one that is contentious, unloving or unforgiving. And it all begins with the leadership of the church.

A covenant of conduct can guide your church council and over time will reshape the culture of the parish to a healthier, more spiritual and loving church of Christ. All of this we do through Jesus who has promised to lead and guide us in our work.

The following is an example of what a covenant code of conduct might look like in your congregation. A suggestion for using it would be to present this document at the first meeting of the new year as council members gather together. A review of the church's constitution would be a great beginning as it describes the role of pastor and the role of the church council. Then, read through the covenant and discuss why the items in it are important. Have everyone sign the document and encourage them to keep it with their committee files.

Congregation Council Code of Conduct

All members of the parish are entitled and encouraged to respectfully and considerately offer their thoughts and opinions on matters that affect the congregation. A person is free to share those opinions with the pastor or church council member, at committee meetings, and at congregational meetings.

If a member desires to have a comment or opinion shared with the church council they will be invited to attend the next council meeting to speak for themselves. The time and date of the next meeting will be given to the person.

If the person prefers to have a council member or the pastor share their concern or comment, they must be willing to have their name attached. If the person refuses to let their name be attached to the comment, the council

member or pastor shall respond saying something to the effect of, "I'm sorry but I will not be able to share this comment because we do not permit anonymous comments." (This is a key component of the covenant. If we do not know who has an issue then we cannot do anything about solving that issue.)

The issue should be shared with the president of the council before the meeting so that it can be added to the agenda. (This prevents the president and pastor from being blindsided.)

When the issue is presented, the council will discuss it and create a response and share it with the person in a timely manner.

This covenant code of conduct is based on the work of the Rev. Dr. Peter Steinke.

If you or your church council would like more information on the creation of a covenant or how to implement such a covenant, feel free to contact me at alittle@thenalc.org.

PLEASE MAIL END OF YEAR GIFTS EARLY THIS YEAR

Please be sure to mail any year-end gifts to the North American Lutheran Church early this year.

The United States Postal Service has announced that its delivery services may be taking longer than previously. Please allow a week for your mail to reach its destination.

Gifts to the NALC and all of the church's designated funds should be sent to PO Box 860565, Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please be sure to indicate any designation for your gift on the memo line of your check.

Gifts to the NALC and its designated funds may also be given online at thenalc.org/giving.

FLOODING DAMAGES MEKANE YESUS SEMINARY IN ETHIOPIA, EIGHT PEOPLE DIE AT SEMINARY

The seminary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in Addis Ababa was severely damaged by a flash flood that left death and destruction in its wake. The Aug. 17 flood killed three children and five adults at the seminary and displaced more than 98 people.

The Akaki River, which borders the seminary campus, rose rapidly and overflowed an earthen dike protecting the seminary. As the dike failed, waters rose quickly in the lower parts of campus, flooding that area in a matter of minutes.

The river rose six feet in three minutes. There was no warning, so students and faculty did not have time to get out. Many people survived by getting on the roofs of the buildings.

Church officials reported that a large part of the institution was badly damaged, including staff residences for both international and national missionaries. Those impacted lost all their personal belongings.

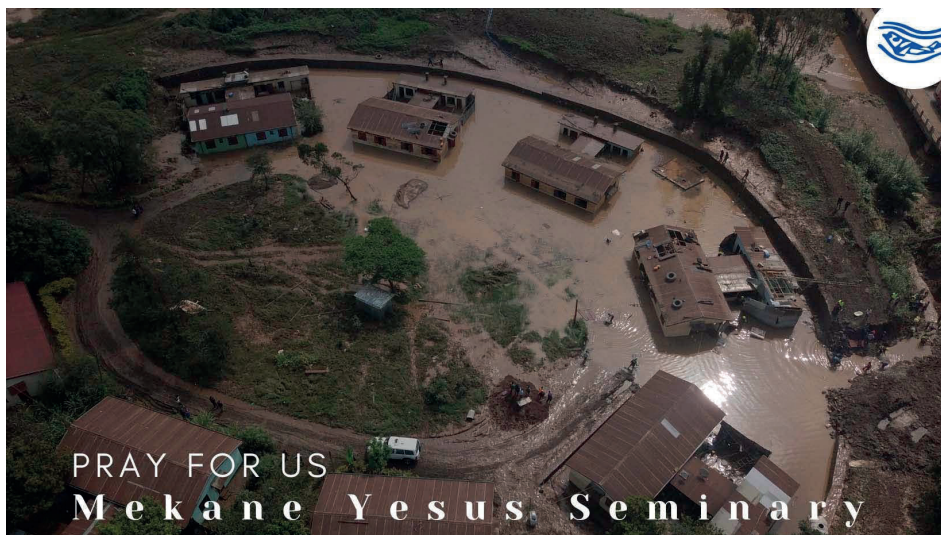
Initial estimates are that more than \$2.5 million will be needed to rebuild, relocate impacted families and



Flash flooding at the Mekane Yesus Seminary

install flood protection systems. About 21 buildings and roads leading to the seminary were badly damaged.

“This is a catastrophic, heartbreaking and unprecedented disaster that has resulted in the loss of lives, destruction and displacement of our people,” said Rev. Dr. Bruk Ayele Asale, president of the seminary. “We are in an emergency.”



Those who would like to help with building and rebuilding efforts at the seminary may send gifts in care of the North American Lutheran Church, PO Box 860565, Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please indicate “EECMY” on the memo line.

The construction of a new building for the seminary was not affected by the flooding because it is on higher ground. See the July 2021 and December 2020 NALC News for information on the building project.

YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

By Laurie Pecuch

In addition to our regular Facebook resource posts, we are posting a Faith Skills video clip every Thursday afternoon. Since September we have focused on spiritual disciplines, praying a daily purpose prayer, a method to process your day, how to develop a “Thankful List,” etc.

You can check out our autumn postings beginning at:

+ Facebook: NALC Youth Workers

+ Facebook: faithwebbing

+ YouTube channel: faithwebbing

We are happy to announce that the log-in feature to the faithwebbing.com website has been removed.

The website is made up of four sections: For Churches, Personal Growth, Trot Through the Bible and Verses to Live By.



This month we will highlight the “Personal Growth” section.

The Personal Growth section takes our list of 40 Faith Assets/Ministry Skills and through video explanation describes how we introduce the concepts to young people. Note that these concepts are actually for all ages and we are happy to connect with anyone looking to further develop their own skills or who wish to pass them on to others.

Laurie Pecuch serves the NALC as a youth ministry coach. You may contact her at faithwebbing@gmail.com.

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN SEMINARY JOURNAL

Simul is a new theological journal from St. Paul Lutheran Seminary.

The Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Di Mauro is the editor of the journal. Pastor Di Mauro serves as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Warrenton, Virginia, and on the St. Paul Lutheran Seminary faculty.

The first issue focuses on the Lutheran doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* — simultaneously justified and sinner. Articles on the theme are included from the Rev. Dr. Steve Turnbull, the Rev. Dr. Marney Fritts, and the Rev. Dr. Erwin L. Spruth.

You can read the journal at semnlc.org/simul.

Let's keep in touch

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