



NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

June 2019

PLEASE REGISTER EARLY FOR LUTHERAN WEEK

Delegates and visitors are encouraged to register early for Lutheran Week 2019, which is set for Aug. 5-9 at The Westin Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Electronic voting devices will be used for the NALC Convocation because of the election of a new bishop. Registering early will ensure that the proper number of devices can be ordered.

Hotel reservations should also be made early. The block of rooms at the hotel is filling quickly.

“Walking by the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit,” based on Galatians 5:16-23, is the theme for Lutheran Week 2019.

Lutheran Week is the annual gathering of the North American Lutheran Church. The events of Lutheran Week include the Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium, Women of the NALC Annual Gathering, Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology, Mission Festival and Convocation.

NALC Mission Festival and Convocation are Wednesday, Aug. 7, through Friday, Aug. 9. The \$250



The Westin Indianapolis is the site of Lutheran Week 2019

registration fee for the Convocation and Mission Festival includes four meals – dinner on Wednesday and Thursday and lunch on Thursday and Friday.

The Mission Festival will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 7. The Mission Festival will include a worship service, keynote address, as well as presentations and breakout sessions.

Mission districts will meet separately from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Wednesday.

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The NALC Convocation will be held Thursday, Aug. 8, and Friday, Aug. 9. The Convocation is the annual meeting of the NALC.

Among the highlights of this year's Convocation will be the election of a new bishop for the NALC and a banquet honoring the Rev. John Bradosky for his service to the Church. The banquet will also feature entertainment by Canadian musician Steve Bell and English poet Malcolm Guite.

The Convocation begins at 8 a.m. on Thursday and will conclude with a service of Holy Communion including the installation of the newly-elected bishop of the NALC. The closing worship is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. on Friday.

The Convocation will elect the bishop as well as members of the NALC Executive Council and Court of Adjudication. Twelve pastors have been nominated to serve as the next bishop of the NALC.

Biographical information on all of the nominees is available online at lutheranweek.com/nominations.

The first ballot for bishop will take place on Thursday afternoon. If no candidate receives a majority on the



Alex Mkumbo



James Nestingen



Yonas Yigezu

first ballot, all but the top four candidates by votes received, including ties, will be eliminated. The remaining candidates will address the Convocation and have opportunity for informal conversation with delegates on Thursday afternoon. Additional ballots are scheduled for Friday and will continue until a candidate receives a majority vote. The candidate receiving the fewest votes on a ballot will be eliminated from the next ballot.

The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, a renowned Martin Luther scholar, will offer a Bible study address on Thursday morning on the Lutheran Week theme: "Walking by the Spirit, with the Fruit of the Spirit" from Galatians 5:16-23.

Special guests for Lutheran Week include leaders from two of the largest Lutheran church bodies in the world. The Rev. Yonas Yigezu, president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and the Rev. Dr. Alex Mkumbo, bishop of the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, will be featured speakers during the Mission Festival. They will also take part in the installation of the new bishop.

Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology will be offered on Tuesday, Aug. 6, from 1 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and on Wednesday, Aug. 7, from 8 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. Registration fee of \$150 includes lunch on Wednesday following the lectures.

Women of the NALC Annual Gathering is on Tuesday, Aug. 6 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Registration fee of \$100 includes lunch on Tuesday.



Steve Bell and Malcolm Guite

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BISHOP JOHN BRADOSKY FUND FOR LIFE-TO-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP

By NALC Executive Council

We are all aware of the coming election of a new bishop. We want to be intentional about recognizing and giving thanks for our beloved bishop, John Bradosky, whose term is coming to an end. Those who serve in the Church know that ending a ministry well is as essential as a strong beginning. Bishop Bradosky and his family gave faithfully and sacrificially of their time, energy and talent in service to the North American Lutheran Church for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

We trust that Bishop Bradosky will continue to be present and involved in the life and ministry of the NALC; we know that his service will be different. Many will miss his faith, confidence and presence. For these reasons, the Executive Council would like to honor his years of leadership and passion for sharing the Good News by establishing the Bishop John Bradosky Fund for Life-to-Life Discipleship.

Without a doubt, the driving force for Bishop John's life and ministry has been the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples..." It is now part of the DNA of the NALC, with growing numbers of pastors and congregations being renewed and strengthened through the NALC's Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative.

The Executive Council intends to create an ongoing scholarship fund that will assist pastors and congregations interested in becoming involved in Life-to-Life Discipleship, whether having an NALC Discipleship Guide, receiving training or education in some aspect of discipleship, engaging in CREDO, or other congregational resources and events. The NALC financial office will oversee disbursements from this fund as approved by the Life-to-Life Discipleship Leadership Team's executive members.

Gifts may be given online at thenalc.org/donate or sent to the NALC, P.O. Box 860565, Minneapolis,

MN 55486-0565, clearly marked "Bishop Bradosky Discipleship Fund."

We will announce the cumulative total at the 2019 NALC Convocation, during the Thursday evening banquet. However, our prayer is that gifts will continue for years to come as people remember and give thanks for Bishop Bradosky's leadership, specifically, his enthusiasm for discipleship!

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Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium will be on Monday, Aug. 5, from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and on Tuesday, Aug. 6, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Registration fee of \$80 includes lunch on Monday.

For more information on Lutheran Week or to register for any or all of the events of Lutheran Week go to lutheranweek.com.

Hotel rooms at The Westin Indianapolis are available at a discounted rate of \$149 a night. The discounted rate is available Aug. 1-13 depending on availability. A link to the hotel is provided on the Lutheran Week website. Alternative hotel suggestions will be listed on the website when the block is full.

Because parking at The Westin is expensive, alternative parking arrangements have been made with Gate Ten Events and Parking. Gate Ten will provide complimentary shuttle service to and from the hotel and their parking lot. More information is available at lutheranweek.com.

The Westin does not have an airport shuttle. The Go Green Airport Shuttle offers regular service to and from the Indiana Convention Center, which is across the street from The Westin, for \$12 one way. More information is available at lutheranweek.com.

BRAATEN-BENNE LECTURES TO FOCUS ON WORK OF HOLY SPIRIT

The 2019 Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology will focus on the work of the Holy Spirit under the Lutheran Week theme, "Walking by the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit." The annual theological conference is Aug. 6-7 at The Westin Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Registration fee for the lectures is \$150 and includes lunch on Wednesday, Aug. 7. You may register for the lectures and the other events of Lutheran Week online at lutheranweek.com.

Dr. Robert Benne will address the Holy Spirit and Christian life. Dr. Benne was Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion and chair of the Religion and Philosophy Department at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, for 18 years before he left full-time teaching in 2000. He founded the Roanoke College Center for Religion and Society in 1982 and served as its director until 2012. Upon his retirement, the college renamed the center in his honor. He is the author of several books including *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*; and *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics*. The annual lecture series is co-named in his honor.

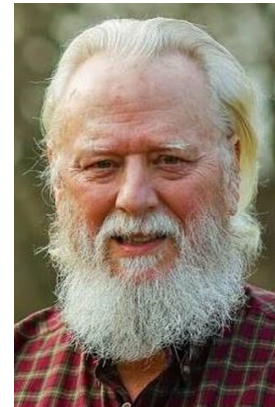


Robert Benne

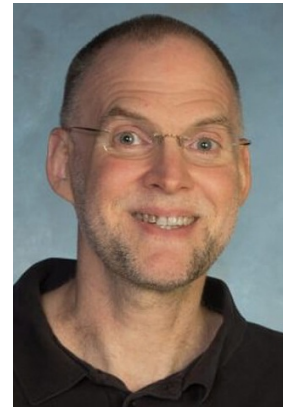
The Rev. Dr. Paul Hinlicky will explain how the Holy Spirit "disappeared in Lutheranism." Dr. Hinlicky is the Rev. J. Marshall Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College. He is the author of several books including *Luther for Evangelicals: A Reintroduction*; *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* and *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics*.

The Rev. Dr. Craig Keener will address the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. He is the F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He is the author of 25 books including *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*; *Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* and *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost*.

Dr. Matthew Levering will focus on the Holy Spirit and salvation. Dr. Levering holds the James N. and Mary D. Perry, Jr. Chair of Theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake in



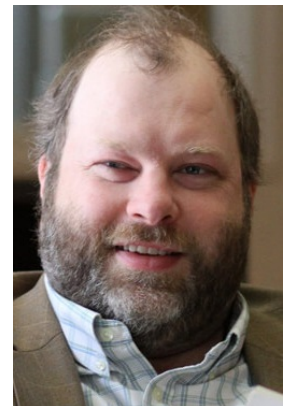
Paul Hinlicky



Craig Keener



Matthew Levering



Derek Nelson

Mundelein, Illinois. He is the author of more than 20 books including *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*; *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation* and *Was the Reformation a Mistake?*

The Rev. Dr. Derek Nelson will speak about the Holy Spirit and the stuff of life. He is Professor of Religion and Stephen S. Bowen Professor of the Liberal Arts, at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. He is the author or editor of 10 books including *A History of Christian Theology*; *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther* and *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Hinlicky co-edited *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*.

DISCIPLESHIP CAN ONLY EXIST AND FLOURISH IN A COMMUNITY THAT NURTURES DISCIPLES

Dear Disciples of Jesus throughout the North American Lutheran Church,

What is the nature of Christian community that nurtures people as faithful followers of Jesus, equips them to reach others with the Gospel of Jesus and provides for their growth and development as disciples of Jesus?

Following the amazing miracle of Pentecost, Peter's bold preaching, his explanation of who Jesus is and what He had done for them and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit as more than 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus, we read these important words about the formation of the community that was able to sustain and grow the Church, the body of Christ.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NIV).

How we minister to one another within our congregation has a direct effect on how we do ministry in the larger community. How we treat one another in the Church directly affects how we treat others beyond the Church. Our witness within the Church is our witness to the world about the difference Jesus is making in our lives. So how are we doing?



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. JOHN BRADOSKY
BISHOP

Unfortunately, there is often a great divide, rather than consistency, in our behaviors. We love the sensational until it affects our lifestyle, or compromises our security, or has implications for our finances. Today there are many who are searching for gratifying experiences rather than meaningful relationships. At times we care more about spiritual excitement and spectacular entertainment. If you wow them, they will stay; if they get a little bored, they are gone. Personal experience and feelings become the measure or standard for evaluating "real Christianity."

The community gathers together to create one mountain top experience after another with no valleys in between. A friend of mine once said, "it reminds me of a baby's digestive system, an insatiable appetite at one end and a total lack of responsibility at the other end."

We want the excitement without the relationship with Christ and His Body, the Church. Some stay for the experience but leave before it requires the conviction, commitment and mutual accountability of genuine relationships. Many are searching, not for Jesus, but for the path of least resistance, the easy way. They want to enjoy the sensational and hear preaching and teaching that never challenges.

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Enthusiasm is up; commitment is down. Excited audiences are increasing while disciples are decreasing. Many people in our culture are identifying themselves as “nones.” They prefer not to call themselves Christians and want to remain unattached to any particular community of faith so as not to mitigate their individualized faith or cramp their lifestyle.

Consumerism still abounds — demanding a smorgasbord of perspectives and ministries to meet every felt need. We heed the inner call to follow ourselves rather than the call of Jesus who says, come and follow me! Following the path of least resistance is what creates a meandering stream and results in people who never learn the meaning of persistence. It is so tempting to see our mission as meeting those needs.

However, that is not the nature of the Church described in the book of Acts. The disciples knew that following Jesus was never the easy path, but the only life-giving path. These disciples had been through struggles as they followed Jesus. They were the first community of believers. They knew what was necessary to live in community with Jesus. Following Pentecost, Jesus turned the leadership of His entire Church over to those He had trained as His disciples.

Look with me for a moment at those essential ingredients.

What led up to Pentecost is almost as important as what followed. They had an intensive focus on prayer that produced a passionate spirituality. I believe the same holds true for us today. We can either be a Church under fire or a Church on fire. In order to be on fire, we must become combustible material.

I am convinced that prayer makes us combustible material. If you go back and read what happened after Jesus’ death, you will find the disciples huddled together in prayer. Even just huddled in prayer, they grew from a group of 11 to a group of 120. That’s how many disciples there were by the time we get to Pentecost. From Ascension to Pentecost there is a 10-day prayer vigil. They were drawn closer to Jesus

and to one another. The Holy Spirit was already at work.

Now consider the text:

1. As the disciples devoted themselves to the teaching of Jesus, those in the Church devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. How many read and study Scripture daily, engaging in Bible study with other Christians?

2. As the disciples shared fellowship with Jesus and one another, they led the Church to do the same. Their fellowship was focused on sharing meals together and praying together. Many in the Church have little connection with others as “fellowship” has been devalued by the Church, thinking that we cannot compete with all the secular opportunities for fellowship, thereby undermining the strength of our community. Are you creating opportunities for genuine Christian fellowship?

3. They expected Jesus to act, and He did. As they experienced the miraculous when they were with Jesus, when they went out to do ministry in His name, that same miraculous power was manifest in the Church. If someone experienced Jesus’ call to follow Him in one of your worship services how would you know? Do we care? Do we really expect Jesus to show up? If we don’t believe He is truly present, why should anyone else?

4. The Christian community cared for one another. They loved one another the way Jesus loved His first followers and gave His life for them. They gave up possessions as a way to care for the needs of fellow disciples. They cared so much that they shared everything, every care, every concern, every joy, every sorrow — everything. Have we become so independent that we have no clue what is happening in the lives of those around us? How can we become more caring?

5. They gathered together regularly. They worshiped together daily. They had a mutual sense of obligation to be together to support one another and to share their faith in Jesus. The average active Christian only attends worship about two times per month. The result is that spiritual gifts are not being put to use to

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build up the entire Body. We attend to see what we can get, not what we can give.

6. Their love and commitment spread from the worship center into their homes. They manifested the love they experienced in Christ through the love they had for one another. Their community was marked with joy and sincerity in their hearts. What are the marks of Christian faith being lived out in our homes? How are parents discipling their children and witnessing to others in their neighborhoods?

7. The world was watching how they lived and treated one another, and Christian community became a witness that captivated many others. The way they lived in community with each other drew people to Christ. What is our witness to others? Do they sense bitterness and anger, resentment? How would they interpret our resistance to reconciliation with Christ and one another?

The disciples had experienced this love and community as they followed Jesus. Christianity is not just a statement of faith, a body of knowledge, an experience. It is not a matter of being a member of an organization or institution. It is more than theologies, liturgies and vestments or strategies, structures and constitutions. It is about one thing, rather one person, Jesus Christ. It is about following Christ, believing in Christ, serving others in Christ and living in Christ.

Martin Luther's commentary on this text from Acts, as you can imagine, affirms that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. It is not by works or through the law. Like those who first heard Peter's preaching Luther says, "We must fall upon this Gospel and be broken to pieces and in deep consciousness lie prostrate, like a man that is powerless, unable to move hand or foot. Here all men must confess their incapacity and inability to do the good. We lose faith in ourselves, confess our sins, admit that our sentence of condemnation is just and simply trust, believe and cling to this divine grace that is ours through Christ. It is Christ who has taken that first step in our direction, accomplished it all for us and makes His abundant grace so readily available to all who believe. Once we come to Christ and the

foundation of faith is laid within us then we are to grow in the knowledge of God, His will and be filled with spiritual wisdom, pleasing God, walking worthy, bearing fruit in every good work."

Of course, Luther does not miss the opportunity to challenge pastors to preach as Peter preached, both Law and Gospel. First, he tells us that we are nothing, a displeasing abomination because of our sin. "Then the preacher offers us grace; that is, he tells us that God will not utterly condemn and reject us, but will receive us in His beloved Son, and not merely receive us, but make us heirs of His kingdom, lords over all that is in heaven and upon earth. The first makes us fearful and restless so the Gospel must come quickly so that we do not despair forever. We must preach the Gospel to him and lead him to Christ that he should be saved out of the pure grace and mercy of Christ. The heart rejoices at this word and runs to such grace as a thirsty deer runs to the water."

Luther continues by reminding us that what follows Peter's preaching is the proof that we have faith in Jesus in the treatment of our neighbor. Christ's love comes through us. We find pleasure and joy in serving our neighbor. Those who follow Jesus see the world from a different perspective, not obsessed with what the world values. Luther says, "With Christ the root and sap are good for He has grafted us onto a rich and fruitful vine, therefore, such fruits must come forth."

The disciples remained with those who had come to believe in Jesus. The design of this community, the New Testament Church, bears the same marks that the disciples experienced with Jesus. They want the new believers to be as intimate with Jesus as they were. They want them to experience His powerful presence. They want them to know and love Jesus as they did, to understand who He is and the nature of His kingdom. They want them to understand that they too are on a journey of following Jesus.

The invitation is simple, "Come and follow me!" He is the Gospel. He is the singular object of our faith. He is eternal life, and there is no life apart from Him. He is all there is. In Him, the whole world holds together. This is the content of faith and the only source of

NALC DISASTER RESPONSE

On Memorial Day (May 27), western Ohio was devastated by 18 tornadoes; three EF-3 tornadoes touched down, killing one person and destroying over 200 homes.

All six NALC congregations in the area have responded by setting up donation centers, providing volunteers to distribute emergency relief supplies, and sending lots of prayers.

Pastor Brian McGee of St. John Lutheran Church in Greenville, Ohio, is onsite, ministering to the many families and volunteers.



Many NALC congregations have reached out to the Ohio Mission Region, offering support and volunteers. Currently more than 30 NALC volunteers are serving. To volunteer, contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response Coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or disasterresponse@thenalc.org.

There is currently a need for health kits. Instructions for the kits is available online at thenalc.org/nalc-disaster-response.

Send donations of health care kits to: NALC Disaster Response Warehouse, 810 Main St., Caldwell, OH 43724.

Financial gifts may be given online at thenalc.org/donate or sent to the NALC, P.O. Box 860565, Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565, clearly marked "NALC Disaster Response."

You can learn more about NALC Disaster Response and see updates on current disasters at thenalc.org/nalc-disaster-response.

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salvation. He is who He claims to be – the way, the truth and the life.

It is by following Jesus as His disciples that we grow in our faith and are involved in ministry that offers care and consolation to our neighbor. It is following Jesus that transforms our lives. It is following Jesus that becomes our witness. It is in following Jesus that we lead others to hear both Law and Gospel and believe in Him and, through that faith, to respond obediently as His disciples. This is the heart of what it

means to be Mission Driven and to engage in Life-to-Life Discipleship. The faithful transmission of this message through Word and Sacrament ministry is the legacy and heritage that has been passed on to us, not to simply embrace, but to share broadly. It is the life we are called to live.

It is easy to get stuck at the place where we keep saying, "This has been a tough journey, and we are still a persecuted remnant." Instead of lives overflowing with thanksgiving, we live in fear. Instead of trusting, we live in doubt. **I tell you we cannot proclaim what we have not claimed as ours in Christ.** We must lay claim to the fact that we have

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FRIENDSHIP, FELLOWSHIP AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING: LASTING JOYS OF RESIDENTIAL SEMINARY EDUCATION

By Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin
President
North American Lutheran Seminary

There is something about certain anniversaries that stops us in our tracks. Sometimes they bring tears as we relive moments of grief and sorrow. Sometimes they bring laughter as we recall a moment of silliness and utter frivolity. Sometimes they bring a beautiful kaleidoscope of successes and failures, of the bonding that comes from hard tasks completed together, and of the bittersweetness that comes, when for good reasons we remember how we needed to move on to new callings in new places and knew that in this life we would never again be with these people day after day, month after month.

Something good happens when people live together in community. This is especially true for those who study, pray, share meals, play pick-up games of volleyball, and come to the table of the Lord — hands and hearts open to receive the living Lord.

Residential seminary education includes all these things and more. One can learn content online and establish digital communication and friendships, but the lasting relationships that sustain us come from time spent together and form us in the ways that we will serve the congregations into which we are called. By such formation we are given eyes to see and ears to hear how we can help our congregations to desire the lasting bonds that come from such a holy love, so that we all care for each other seven days a week, not just on Sunday mornings.

At the North American Lutheran Seminary, which resides on the campus on Trinity School for Ministry,



the residential requirement is that one academic year (two-consecutive semesters) be taken on campus in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

In the academic world, one year does not equal 52 weeks, but two 12-week semesters. Many of our students come to campus for all three years of study, but there are some who start their seminary education online and then come for their final year or two.

I believe that a minimum of one residential year is crucial to a student's pastoral formation, for in that year they gather for daily prayer, weekly Eucharist, 80 to 90 classroom hours — and by my best guess, for over 300 coffee breaks or meals with classmates, faculty and staff.

They talk about life, faith and theological issues. They help one another with Hebrew and Greek verb forms,

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and with the nuances of our confessional writings. They find out how they can be a comfort to classmates and families who are in distress, and how important constancy in prayer really is. **They become a community, bound together in Christ's love, not just for the time they are here, but for the rest of their lives.**

That's why I've been thinking about the importance of such time together, because I had an anniversary this month — the 35th anniversary of my ordination into the holy ministry. And I was thinking about all those friends with whom I graduated, and those with whom I only spent a year, because they were a year ahead of me or a year behind me. Many of us are still friends and some of us are still very close friends.

We have supported each other, even long-distance, through all the ups and downs of parish life or graduate school. We forged bonds of trust, because we were together and got to know one another through the time we spent in seminary together. We learned great things in the classroom, but what we learned from one another was just as important in our pastoral formation. And thanks be to God, we still love one another.

I've long said that seminary *prepared* me to be a pastor, but my first parish *turned* me into one. By that I mean, that the combination of what I learned in the classroom and out of the classroom opened my life to learning from my parishioners — from the white-haired saints to the little children who invited me to their tea parties. I learned that learning happens relationally. I also learned that there was no need to be a "lone ranger" in ministry, because I could go to my neighboring pastoral colleagues and ask for their counsel. Through it all, I stayed in touch with seminary friends and was delighted when I moved to a new call if one of them happened to be a neighbor.

It would be a mistake to only offer online courses, not only for the immediate event of pastoral formation, but for the lifelong one. We know that the world has changed these last 35 years and that our new pastors, as confessing Christians, may not find a hearty welcome into this world to which they are sent. The friends that they make in seminary will be

an essential resource for their sustenance and faithful obedience. I want them to look back on their 25th, or 35th, or 50th anniversary and know such joy. I hope you want that for them, too.

To learn more about the North American Lutheran Seminary or to partner with them in ministry, please visit thenals.org.

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it all in Christ. We are not those who are starving, we are feasting at the banquet. We are those who have abandoned the values of the world. We are those who have resolved that we cannot be a part of a church body that compromises the Gospel for the sake of accommodating the world — that would only make us as spiritually famished as they are. Instead we live as those whose only mission is to lead those who are starving spiritually to the only bread of life, Jesus Christ.

Discipleship can only exist and flourish in a community that nurtures disciples. Caring for one another is indispensable for growing and making disciples. When our faith is in Christ and when we are living that faith by following Him, we have everything we need to accomplish the work God has called us to do, to proclaim Christ in word and deed until the entire world knows.

If God is going to use us for His redemptive purposes, our goal is not to emulate other church bodies and desire what they have (fancy offices with highly centralized structure). Every asset we have is for one purpose, to equip every part of the Body to boldly proclaim the Gospel and grow disciples until they are mature spiritual leaders in the church capable of discipling others. It is not your size, scope of ministry, your building or your budget that matters, it is only one thing — your faith in Christ and your commitment to follow Him within His Body, the Church.

To that end let us press on.

PASTOR DIDI AND SERAFINA PANZO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

By Pastor Didi Panzo

We are in our fourth year of our mission assignment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We see the hands of God operating in different ways.

We are working in four areas of mission:

1. Evangelism through social ministry to women, orphans, farmers and elders.
2. Church development, including capacity building, generating income and management.
3. Leadership training, church administration, theological education and trade skills.
4. Counseling abused women, children and victims of human trafficking.

We are making good progress in each of these four areas and are so thankful to God who is inspiring this work. We are also thankful for churches and individuals who pray and contribute to this cause.

We are accomplishing one of our main goals: to build a dormitory that will allow at least 50 theological students to be housed on the campus. Our goal is for the dormitory to be operational for the 2019-2020 academic year. Construction has already started and very soon will be completed by God's grace. Please ask God to continue to provide financially for this and the other remaining projects.

Uganda trip

Through the invitation of the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, NALC assistant to the bishop for missions, we had a short meeting in Kampala, Uganda, to reflect together about the mission work in the DRC. Since the NALC is approaching its 2019 Convocation, Pastor Buba is consulting with all who are involved in global mission – to be informed of our progress, but also our weaknesses as we plan for the future.



Pastor Gemechis Buba, assistant to the bishop for missions, meets with Pastor Didi Panzo.

Our meeting was very fruitful as Pastor Buba vowed that in all we do may souls be saved and God's kingdom be lifted up. Pastor Buba promised that the NALC will support any valuable project that is for the benefit of God's people.

Chikungunya epidemic in the DRC

After an attack by the Ebola virus that resulted in the loss of many lives on the eastern side of the DRC, another kind of disease, similar to Malaria, made its appearance, also on the eastern side of the country, but now spreading all over the country. The disease is called Chikungunya. It causes intense fever, articulation pains, headaches and weakness of the body. The disease is spread by a mosquito similar to anopheles (the mosquito that causes Malaria).

The disease is attacking entire households and the recovery can take a long time. The good news is that it is not a deadly disease, but it comes with some side effects. No prevention has yet been found. Hold us and the entire country in prayer.

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DAKOTA BOYS AND GIRLS RANCH HELPS HURTING CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

"I don't even want to think about what would have happened if I wouldn't have come to the Ranch. I would probably be dead."

These words are from Adam, one of the six high school seniors who graduated in May from Dakota Memorial School (DMS), the on-campus school of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch.

These six young men and women had been called "stupid," "unteachable," "unruly," and "trouble-makers," at every school they attended before arriving at Dakota Memorial School.

At the Ranch, they learned new words and phrases to describe themselves – "hardworking," "doesn't give up," "mentor for the younger children," and "straight-A student." They found people who believed in them and pushed them to do their very best. They experienced, most for the first time, the satisfaction and joy that comes from earning something through hard work and determination.

One of our graduates, a lovely young woman who loves to read and draw, said, "I would like to thank the Boys and Girls Ranch for taking me in and allowing me to graduate. In the [time] I've been here, I have seen a change in myself. The Ranch has helped me to grow up quickly. I, truly with all my heart, appreciate everyone in this school. If it weren't for here, I fear I wouldn't be able to graduate."



Children who come to the Ranch are deeply wounded. They have suffered unimaginable traumas or have mental health issues that make them believe they are not good enough, that they are unworthy of anyone's love, that life is not worth living.

At the Ranch, teachers and program staff recognize the unique challenges of every student, encourage them, and inspire them to discover what they can be. With the right people surrounding them, and in the right environment, even a deeply wounded boy or girl can achieve academic success.

Because children can be successful at Dakota Memorial School, and there are so many on the waiting list, DMS is expanding to accept more middle



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school students in fall 2019. We are excited to give more young men and women the chance to experience true success — to open doors and end the cycle of generational poverty, addiction and despair.

We have hired a new middle school teacher and will rearrange offices and spaces over the summer to make room for a new group of middle school students. We are outfitting the new classrooms with the special equipment, lighting and tools so important to our children's success.



DMS started incorporating Balanced Learning Environments into classrooms in 2015 and has been able to equip all classrooms with specialized workstations, special lighting and sensory equipment. When added to a group of professionals with a great deal of expertise and compassion, these special classrooms help kids feel safe, prime their brains for learning, self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, and stay physically present and mentally engaged in the classroom.

Our classrooms provide a calming environment for an anxious child, a structured environment for a child who craves routine, and a safe and welcoming space for a child who is used to being pushed aside. We give the power of hope to children and their families.

Thank you for your partnership in prayer and ministry with Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch. We are blessed to have the North American Lutheran Church on our team!

Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch is an NALC Recognized Ministry. To learn more about their work or to partner with them in ministry, please visit dakotaranch.org.

PASTOR DIDI AND SERAFINA PANZO

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Prayer Requests

- Pray for our orphan children who are taking exams to finish high school.
- Pray for those infected with Chikungunya disease.
- Pray for the new DRC government.
- Pray for us; for strength and provision.

Pastor Didi Panzo is an NALC Global Worker in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To learn more about the Panzo family or to partner with them in ministry, please visit thenalc.org/pastor-didi-panzo.

AWAKENING LIVES TO WORLD MISSIONS

By Pastor Matt Shields

Greetings in the name of Christ!

My name is Pastor Matt Shields. I am currently serving St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Flanagan, Illinois, an NALC-LCMC congregation. I grew up at American Lutheran Church (NALC) in Rantoul, Illinois, and First Lutheran Church (NALC) in Pontiac, Illinois. In 2008, these two congregations, as well as St. Mark Lutheran Church (LCMC), sent my wife and me to South Africa to participate in a mission program for young adults.

In July of 2018, I joined the ministry of Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM), an NALC Ministry Partner, in order to develop an international mission program that would engage and serve young adults (ages 19-25) in NALC and LCMC congregations.

We are currently developing relationships with people and ministries in Vietnam, Cambodia and South Africa where young people will have the opportunity to live and serve.

One of the main goals of this program is for young adults to grow in Christian faith through cross-cultural experiences.



When my wife and I served in South Africa in 2008-2009 we were far from our friends and family. Living in a different culture, where people spoke a different language and ate different foods, was mentally and emotionally difficult. We had lots of fun serving the children at the Lutheran daycare center and seeing elephants in the wild! But, we also had tough times where we questioned why we had come and what God was doing in and through us. We learned a lot about South Africa, but even more importantly we learned a lot about God and grew in our faith.

Another goal of this program is for young adults to grow as future mission-minded leaders of the church who will possibly pursue a vocation as a missionary or pastor.

In college, my wife and I thought God was calling us to be long-term missionaries. The time we spent in South Africa helped clarify my calling that God actually wanted me as a pastor here in the United States. However, my time in South Africa has helped me be a "missionary" pastor who always seeks to understand the culture of the people that I serve and build relationships of trust that lead to discipleship in the Gospel.

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As the missionary to India and missiologist, Lesslie Newbigin wrote: “The traditional sending agencies have, in general, totally failed to recognize that the most urgent contemporary mission field is to be found in their own traditional heartlands” (The Open Secret). In other words, North America is a mission field, and we need the next generation of leaders in our church to have that mindset.

We have two requests to make of you. Please pray for this program and all of the ministries of ALWM. We need all the prayers we can get!

Also, please share this information with young people in your congregation and your youth leaders. Share this with high school students who are nearing graduation. Share this with college students and recent graduates. Share this with young people whether they are interested in going into ministry or not! We need your help spreading the word about this opportunity.

There are two versions of the program that we are working on. A short-term version will be in South Africa, partnering with a Bible institute. This shorter



trip will start in June of 2020. Young adults will stay in South Africa for four to six weeks, serving in various ministries near the institute and sitting in on a class about engaging the Muslim community in South Africa with the Gospel. This is a great opportunity for young people to have a more in-depth experience in a new culture over their summer break. English is widely spoken, so learning a new language will not be necessary.

The long-term program (10-12 months) will be in partnership with current ALWM ministries in Vietnam and Cambodia. Young adults will live in Ho Chi Minh City where they will work with the Vital Links for Humanity Clinic with Dr. Hang, the Gospel Kids Orphanage. They will also have an opportunity to help with the annual Lutheran youth retreat in Cambodia with the Rev. Sam Chim.

You can find more information on our website at alwm.org/young-adult-missionary-internship or can contact me at pastormatt@alwm.org.

Awakening Lives to World Mission is an NALC Ministry Partner. To learn more about their work or to partner with them in ministry, please visit alwm.org.



MISSION TRIP TO HAITI

Seventeen members from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Troutman, North Carolina, one guest, and two students from the North American Lutheran Seminary went on a mission trip to Haiti with Sundouloi Ministries (SMI Haiti).



Following are some reflections on the experience:

Taylor Rister

I was a bundle of nerves and apprehension walking into this trip, which in some ways, was a normal reaction. What I didn't realize is that Haiti would be such a blessing to my ministry. In the week that I spent on that little island, a lot happened. I made new friends, tried new foods and learned new customs. But at the same time that I was enjoying the genuine kindness and love of the Haitian people, I was forced to look poverty, suffering and evil in the eye. In the face of such darkness, it would be easy to lose hope. The world has already lost hope for Haiti. It's classified as a "fourth world country," a country with no hope of recovery. I'm here to tell you that isn't true. There is hope for Haiti, it's just not found in policy, foreign aid or a new election. It's found in God. God has not abandoned Haiti but has poured out His spirit on the people that live there.

There are hungry bellies, but there are also Christians praying over the rice and beans that they will deliver to villages. There are abandoned children, but there are also Christians opening up their homes to the smallest among us. There are Voodoo temples, but there are also Christians praying away evil with musical voices as soldiers of God. The Haitian Christians have not lost hope because they know that their hope is found in God.

While I have always known God's mercy and goodness to be true, I didn't learn its full extent in a Sunday school class or a seminary text book. (Though those things are important!) I learned it from Haitian brothers and sisters, who know fully that no matter how bleak and exhausting and overwhelming tomorrow may seem, we can rejoice alongside our lamentation because God's got this, and His love for His children knows no bounds.



Jodi Barkley

In the days leading up to our departure, I was burdened with worry. Was I prepared for what I was about to see and do? I browsed through photos taken last year. I studied the language. I prayed. Yet, my heart was anxious. That first evening, I watched the

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hours go by as I sat up in my bed listening to the metal roof clamor in the evening heat. I was desperate for some sleep knowing that the next day would be busy and hot. I prayed that God would give me the strength and energy to do what I was called there to do. It was after that first day that I realized that God had indeed equipped me to be a light in a dark situation and He would not let me grow weary. I spent the rest of my time following God. I had decided that my “Aha” moments would come later – days, weeks or even months later after returning home.

Every day, I journaled what I was feeling, what I saw, smelled, heard, touched, tasted and what new Haitian Creole words I learned. When I close my eyes, I can smell the burning of garbage, I can feel the touch of a child’s hand, hear the sound of the girls singing, “Mwen Pa Esklav Anko” (“I’m no longer a slave to fear”), see the early morning sun coming over the mountain and taste the sweet juicy mangos. I felt God’s presence in each moment, even when at times it might have looked like we had been defeated by the devil. I stepped out of my comfort zone and prayed over those that we delivered rice and beans to. I watched as children got excited over crayons that were handed out. I saw the desperation in young mothers’ eyes as they talked about their fear of voodoo and the need for financial support. I laughed alongside Wilnes, a young boy, as we made fun of my nose and teeth. I held a young girl, Belle, in my arms as she fell asleep while standing in the salty water at Wahoo Bay. I befriended a young mother, Mari, whose son has swelling on his brain causing blindness and tremors. So, was I prepared for any of this? Absolutely not, but God was. Would I go back knowing what I know now? In a heartbeat.



Pastor Heidi Punt

Vacation Bible school is an illusion of controlled chaos at best, no matter the cultural and geographical boundaries we may draw around it. Children are children! After successfully completing VBS in Guilton, the day before, few of us expected it to be any different in Kamitan. We arrived in the village with materials and a plan in hand. With more than just a little motivation, we finally got the children sitting in a circle. It was almost immediate that I began to feel a sense of restlessness or perhaps it was urgency. It seemed I could not get our wonderful volunteers focused, needless to say, the children seemed fidgety. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, there was a moment when God’s Word broke through the turmoil. Three young men walked into the space, and I felt like I had physically hit a solid wall of water. With all that was in me, I could not fight through the spirit of darkness that was brought into the space by those three men. Almost spontaneously and definitely simultaneously everyone in our group reacted differently; some of us had severe headaches, others felt sick to the stomach or felt like they needed to be on defense, while some even started organizing stuff.

Fortunately, Jeff Dahl with SMI Haiti evaluated the situation rather quickly and removed us from the space and piled us back into the bus. Something

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happened that day! It was only later that night, during our devotion time, that we realized what had happened. We had experienced spiritual warfare. You see the village is not Christian yet, and while there had been people there to help build things and play with the children, they had not gone with the sole purpose to evangelize the little children. The devil did not like it! He was not going to have us bring the love of Jesus to those children, so, through the silent presence of those three young men, he brought in a cloud of darkness and disruption!

What a powerful lesson we learned from that encounter. We need to go more spiritually prepared and guarded. God is our armor and His Word our sword, prayer is our shield and the Holy Spirit our anchor. While we did not go back to do VBS, we did get to return and lead a women's conference the next day. That time we were prepared, and God overcame the darkness. Something happened that day!

Pastor Dieter Punt

You have received a small sample of what happened on our six days in Haiti. Days filled with joy, hope, anxiety and even fear, but in all those times and moments we learned to trust that God has our back. God has the promise of a new creation. We continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We continue to pray God's blessings on the people of Haiti. We continue to pray and work for God to do great and marvelous things in Haiti. God's got this.

SMI Haiti is an NALC Recognized Ministry. To learn more about their work or to partner with them in ministry, please visit smihaiti.org.

VENTURES IN YOUTH MINISTRY

By Gary and Laurie Pecuch

Join us Aug. 5-6 in Indianapolis, Indiana, for our third Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium. This is a time of gathering youth ministry folks together for learning, sharing and renewal.

We will meet that Monday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Tuesday from 9 a.m. to noon. We will have presentations and discussions around the topics of developing spiritual disciplines and ministry skills in young people and adult volunteers.

Registrants will be encouraged to bring and share best practices. We will also meet in affinity groups so you can meet peers from around the country who work in similar situations.

We are strongest when we learn from each other.



Registration fee of \$80 includes lunch on Monday. To register or for more information please visit lutheranweek.com.

We have recently added Bible stories from Joshua, Judges and Ruth from our monthly webinars to the faithwebbing.com website.

Hoping to connect with you soon.

Gary and Laurie Pecuch serve the NALC as youth ministry coaches. You may contact them at families@thenalc.org.

IT'S TIME TO GIVE!

This may be an unpopular “Ministry Matters” article. Still, this is an important consideration and the time seems right to assert and encourage: “It’s time to give!”

On the one hand, it’s always a good time to give of ourselves – of our time, our energy and, yes, our financial resources. St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (RSV): “Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

God showers manifold gifts and blessings upon us, and we are called in Scripture to return to the Lord God tithes and offerings, the first fruits of what we have received. We read in Numbers 18:25-26, 28-29 (RSV):

And the LORD said to Moses, “Moreover you shall say to the Levites, ‘When you take from the people of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe. ... So shall you also present an offering to the LORD from all your tithes, which you receive from the people of Israel; and from it you shall give the LORD’s offering to Aaron the priest. Out of all the gifts to you, you shall present every offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, giving the hallowed part from them.’”

We read in Exodus 23:19 (RSV): “The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.”

We read in Nehemiah 10:35 (RSV): “We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD.”

In Scripture and in God’s kingdom, there is a giving structure – God gives to us and we respond to Him! There is never a time when God doesn’t give to us – and we are to always be returning to Him a portion of what we have received. This is God’s economy. This is how God shares with His creation and how He calls His people to respond, generously, freely, cheerfully.



MINISTRY MATTERS

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

The reality is that the world often dictates or at least impacts how we give. Right or wrong, when we are in strong economic times, giving increases. Christians are more likely to give when there is work, when wages are rising, when there is a positive financial future in sight. Again, right or wrong, whether from lack of faith or fear of being in want, there may be greater hesitation to give when the prevailing financial outlook is dark.

Working with congregations these last few years, it has been clear that many church leaders have hesitated to step out in faith, given the stagnant economy in North America and in many countries worldwide. Giving within many congregations has been flat. Some have been resistant to making large unnecessary expenditures, preferring to keep a cash reserve that might assist the congregation in getting through difficult times in the not too distant future. And, the compensation of church staff, including pastors’ salaries, has remained flat in most congregations since 2008.

While we might disagree with such actions and strategies, most of us Lutherans are realists, preferring to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves,” especially when it comes to church finances!

Without intending to wade into any kind of political discussion, realizing the economy throughout North America may not be humming along as is the economy in the United States, still, given the strong economic situation in America with low unemployment and

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rising wages, it would seem worthwhile to encourage our congregations and congregational leaders to acknowledge the positive outlook and prayerfully consider an increase in giving!

Now may be the time for individual members to prayerfully consider increasing their giving to their congregation. While there will always be some who are not in a positive financial situation, most members of NALC congregations are finding an improving economic situation within home and family.

It has been some time since this has been the case, but given the strong economy, it is worthwhile for individuals to at least consider whether it may be possible to increase giving to the congregation. An increase in giving of one percent of income per active household in a congregation can have a significant impact on mission and ministry! And what might the congregation do with such an increase?

It is always a good time to increase giving to local, regional and international mission! It's also always a good time to share such an increase with the larger Church, as the NALC seeks to address needs in domestic mission, Life-to-Life Discipleship and expanding structure.

Giving to the NALC has been faithful and strong, even during difficult economic times in recent years. For that, we all want to say, "Thank you," and even more, "Thanks be to God!" At the same time, we are committed to balancing budgeted annual expenses with regular congregational giving, not relying upon one-time gifts and cash reserves. When annual income balances with budgeted expenses, this allows special giving and bequests to be used to increase and grow our ministry in Jesus' name.

At the same time, let me also suggest that it may be time to prayerfully consider increasing your staff compensation, especially that of your pastor! When economies are stagnant and giving to the congregation isn't increasing, congregational budgets are often balanced by maintaining current staff compensation. Although some of our congregations regularly provide cost-of-living adjustments and merit-based increases to pastors and staff, many set compensation once, never revisiting or increasing it because income may be flat.

For pastors and staff who faithfully and reliably serve within the congregation, please consider an increase in compensation — at least providing a cost of living adjustment (2.8 percent for 2019).

There is no better way to keep your beloved pastor for a longer term than by offering regular compensation increases. And this is possible when giving to the congregation increases regularly as well!

As a pastor serving congregations, I have never hesitated to speak about, teach about, preach about stewardship as an integral aspect of discipleship and the call to follow Jesus. The same has been true as a pastor serving the North American Lutheran Church as assistant to the bishop.

We are Christians only because the Father sent His Son to be our Savior, giving His life for us on the cross to be raised for us, to give us the hope and promise of new life here and hereafter! It is that gift of Jesus Christ which moves us to respond with our hearts, lives and, yes, financial resources! Let us grow in our giving, especially now! And through our gifts, may God grow our mission and ministry — that we may support our pastors, our congregational staff, our congregations, the NALC, our global workers, and all for whom Christ died and was raised!

Let's keep in touch

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