

NOMINEES FOR EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND COURT OF ADJUDICATION ANNOUNCED

The NALC Nominating Committee has announced nominees for positions to be elected by the 2020 NALC Convocation Aug. 6-7 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Three pastors and one lay person have been nominated for the NALC Executive Council. The convocation will elect one pastor and one lay person to four-year terms on the council.



Susan Fox



Franklin Gore



Carl Rasmussen

Lynn Kickingbird, a member of Peace Lutheran Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, has been nominated for the lay position. She is currently serving on the Executive Council.

Nominees for the clergy position are the Rev. Susan Fox of First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ridgway, Pennsylvania; the Rev. Dr. Franklin Gore of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Pensacola, Florida; and the Rev. Carl Rasmussen of First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Illinois.

The Executive Council oversees the work and policies of the NALC, acting as the church's board of directors.



Lynn Kickingbird



Samuel Duncomb

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NOMINATIONS ARE NEEDED FOR NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY BOARD OF REGENTS

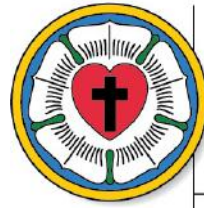
Nominations are needed for the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) Board of Regents.

The 2020 NALC Convocation, Aug. 6-7 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, will elect three members of the seminary board for six-year terms.

No nominations for the NALS Board of Regents had been received by May 5 when the Nominating Committee released its interim report.

The Board of Regents oversees the operation of the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Any delegate to the convocation may make a nomination. Delegates are encouraged to submit nominations as soon as possible to allow the nominees time to submit the required biographical information to the Nominating Committee.



NALS
North American Lutheran Seminary

Nominations must be submitted by June 19. For more information, visit thenalc.org/nominate.

When submitting nominations for NALS Board of Regents positions, please consider that current needs of the seminary board include expertise in legal affairs, academia, policy development, grant writing/submission, development and fundraising.

Questions may be addressed to the Nominating Committee at nominations@thenalc.org.

NOMINEES FOR EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, AND COURT OF ADJUDICATION

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Mr. Samuel Duncomb, a member of Peace Lutheran Church in Northwood, Iowa, has been nominated for a four-year term on the NALC Court of Adjudication. One person will be elected.

The Court of Adjudication decides appeals from disciplinary decisions and questions regarding the interpretation of the NALC's governing documents.

Biographical information on the nominees is available at thenalc.org/2020nominations.

Additional nominations are possible for both Executive Council and Court of Adjudication. Any delegate to the convocation may make a nomination. Delegates are encouraged to submit nominations as soon as possible to allow the nominees time to submit the required biographical information to the Nominating Committee. Additional nominations must be submitted by June 19. For more information, visit thenalc.org/nominate.

Questions may be addressed to the Nominating Committee at nominations@thenalc.org.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL PROPOSES AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION

PROPOSAL MOVES FROM ANNUAL TO BIENNIAL CONVOCATIONS

The Executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church has proposed amendments to the NALC Constitution that would move the NALC from meeting annually for its convocation to meeting every other year. The convocation is the annual business meeting and gathering of the NALC.

The Executive Council approved the proposed amendments at an April 28-29 online meeting.

The main reason the council is proposing a shift to biennial convocations is the substantial costs for having annual convocations — both to congregations and to the NALC general fund budget. Congregations incur expenses to send delegates each year, but registration fees cover only about 60 percent of the expenses of a convocation. The remainder of the cost of the annual meetings comes from the NALC general fund.

The constitution mentions “annual” convocations in many places, so many of the proposed amendments delete the word “annual” and replace it with the word “biennial.”

The constitution will continue to provide for “special convocations” to be called if necessary.

The election cycle for members of the Executive Council and Court of Adjudication is tied to annual convocations, so there are proposed amendments to move to biennial elections and adding flexibility during the transition concerning the timing of elections.

In addition to changing the frequency of convocations, proposed amendments also clarify the process by which the Executive Council apportions additional lay delegates to the convocation so that there is approximately an equal number of lay and clergy delegates.

The constitution states that “Delegates with voting privileges at a convocation shall be the ordained ministers of the NALC and at least an equal number of laypersons.”

The constitution specifies that congregations receive additional lay delegates for every 750 baptized members and then states: “In the event that the total number of lay delegates elected pursuant to the preceding sentence is less than the total number of ordained ministers, the Executive Council shall apportion additional lay delegates based on the relative size of the congregations of the NALC.”

Rather than set a specific number in the constitution, the proposed amendment would allow for the Executive Council to use a number based on the current membership of congregations to apportion delegates to congregations prior to a convocation.

Proposed amendments also add the term “Mission Districts” to constitutional language referring to regional subdivisions of the NALC. Mission Districts has been the language used for the NALC’s regional subdivisions since they were created almost a decade ago, but the language in the constitution has not been changed.

Constitutional amendments proposed by the Executive Council require a two-thirds majority vote of delegates present at the convocation. Any amendments approved by the convocation must be ratified within six months of the conclusion of the convocation by a two-thirds majority of NALC congregations voting on the amendments. At least half of NALC congregations must vote on whether or not to ratify the amendments for the ratification vote to be valid.

The proposed amendments to the NALC Constitution are available at thenalc.org/2020proposedamendments.

WAITING AND PRAYING

Over the past few months, as we all know, our world has been in turmoil over the sudden and unforeseen appearance of the coronavirus. In our society, it has led to lockdowns and restrictions and shelter-in-place guidelines and requests. Jobs have been lost. Businesses have closed. Life, as we have known it, at least for a time, has been turned upside down and placed on hold — to say nothing of the toll it has taken on our health care workers, first-responders and those who are rightly being referred to as the “true heroes” of our day. Our prayers go out to those who are serving on the front lines, to those who have contracted the virus, as well as to those individuals and families who have lost loved ones to this awful and costly pandemic.

In our churches, we have all been forced to adjust how we do ministry. Perhaps the most difficult part has been the fact that it came on so quickly. One week, everything seemed fine and normal. The next week, it all started to change. A week later, we all began scrambling to figure out what to do next — on the NALC staffing level, among our leadership teams, in our congregational settings and ministries, let alone in our own lives.

I will tell you that I wondered how this would all work with each of our pastors and congregations. I will also tell you, without exception, that I have been impressed. What our pastors and churches are doing in their own settings is unique to their settings, but they are being creative and faithful and, as a result, people and families and congregations are being blessed.

This whole online form of “doing church,” in the midst of this crisis, is something we are adjusting to and learning as we go. But the calling we have to “be the Church,” no matter what crisis we are facing, is no different today than it was before this pandemic started.

Being the Church is tied to our identity, and our identity is tied to the calling God has placed on us in His Son. And the calling He has placed on us in His



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

Son is only possible when the Holy Spirit is at work in us.

In my devotional life, I have been spending time recently in the Book of Acts. I love the Book of Acts. It is a natural follow-up to Lent and to Holy Week and to our Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday. Forty days after Easter, Jesus ascended into heaven. The disciples were told to go into Jerusalem and to wait — wait for the promised gift, wait for the One who was soon to come, wait for the power they would need from the One Jesus would send. And then watch out and see what happens, and know and experience the change in their own lives.

For you preachers, there is a sermon in there somewhere — a series of sermons. For all of us, there are many lessons we can learn and apply. The disciples went into Jerusalem to wait. And while they waited, they prayed. And while they were praying, God was at work to prepare them for what was soon to come.

As I think about all of the “waiting” we are doing during this pandemic, I have to at least wonder if we are spending enough time in prayer? There is value in waiting — when the waiting is on God. There is virtue in waiting — when the waiting we are doing is on the Lord.

We are not very good at waiting in our world today. Maybe you have noticed that? We want it all now. We want it right away. Where I live, everyone is in a hurry. This “shelter-in-place” and “stay-at-home”

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restriction is tough. Everyone is feeling stuck. No one wants to wait. No one does — except for God.

Have you ever noticed that? God is never in a hurry, and He is never hurried by the things that catch us off guard and seem so pressing in our lives. “Go into Jerusalem and wait.” Wait for the Holy Spirit. Wait for the Promised One to show up. Wait for God’s timing in your life. And while you are waiting, it is not a bad idea to be spending time in prayer.

Waiting and praying. It is a recurring theme in the Book of Acts. The early Church knew what it meant to wait, and they waited on the Lord every step of the way. We can learn from the early Church. They were not perfect, but they trusted in the One who is. They were not always patient, but they were prayerful and persistent and, as a result, they found power and were at peace.

One of my favorite Holy Spirit verses in the Bible is found near the end of the 15th chapter of Acts where the Jerusalem Council was trying to figure out what to say to the new Gentile converts and to some of the pre-conversion practices with which they were still involved. In Acts 15:28 NIV, it says, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

How will we ever know what the Spirit wants, if we are not listening? And how can we truly be listening, if we are not making time? And how will we ever make time if we are not praying, and if we keep on thinking we need to stay so fast-paced and busy, as if it all depends on us?

I love what the creeds and the Lutheran Confessions tell us about God — One God, three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I also love what Martin Luther tells us about the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives and why it is so desperately needed in what we do. He says, “I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and keeps all of us, together, sanctified and united in the Christian Church.”

***There is value in waiting —
when the waiting is on God.***

***There is virtue in waiting —
when the waiting we are
doing is on the Lord.***

“I believe that I cannot — but the Holy Spirit can.” I believe that I, in myself, do not have what it takes. But the Holy Spirit does. And He gives it to us. And He will continue giving it to us, as long as we keep our eyes on Christ.

Over the past several weeks, we have been challenged by the closing of our church doors and being forced to adapt to a “new norm” for our ministries and our lives. It has not been easy for any of us, and it is not over. We still do not yet know how long this pandemic will last. We do know that God knows and that God cares. We also know that He has promised to lead us and guide us as we place our trust in Him.

In the coming weeks, we pray that our church doors will soon be able to reopen. In some places throughout the NALC, it is already beginning to happen. As it happens, I encourage you to be safe. I encourage you to be wise. Start in small ways and expand slowly and carefully. Instead of one service with 100 people, consider four services of 25. You decide. Use your best judgment. Make smart and faith-filled decisions in what you do.

But no matter what you do and when you are able to do it, in your congregations as well as in your own lives, do not be in a hurry. Spend time in prayer. Listen to the Lord. Pay attention to what the authorities have to say and to what the Holy Spirit is saying. And then, “when it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to you,” move forward in faith. Speak the name of Jesus. Share the love of Christ. Live the life God has given you in His Son. It is the calling we have

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BISHOP AND COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND DOCTRINE ADDRESS COMMUNION DURING PANDEMIC

Bishop Dan Selbo has affirmed his request that pastors and congregations not offer “distance” or “virtual” Holy Communion as a part of their attempts to minister to their congregations during the current coronavirus pandemic.

Bishop Selbo had sent an initial request to pastors and congregations in an April 7 letter, stating that he would consult with the NALC’s Commission on Theology and Doctrine and offer further guidance. After meeting with the commission and further consideration, Bishop Selbo sent a second letter to pastors and congregations on May 6.

“With a significant majority of our Commission on Theology and Doctrine, along with the majority of the Christian community throughout the world, not able to find sufficient biblical support for a distance approach to Holy Communion, I request that the current distance-Communion moratorium remain in effect throughout the NALC,” Bishop Selbo wrote.

“I also recognize that there are some members of our Commission, along with many of our NALC pastors, who, in light of the current pandemic, make faithful, biblical and confessional arguments in favor of distance Communion. As a result, I am not willing to make my ‘request’ for a continued moratorium during this pandemic a required ‘mandate’ for our church body,” Bishop Selbo added.

The Commission on Theology and Doctrine has been discussing Holy Communion in response to Bishop Selbo’s request for input.

To facilitate the discussion, two position papers were prepared by commission members around the question of whether a distance (tele-Communion) approach to the Lord’s Supper is faithful to the command of Jesus to share the Sacrament in the context of community.

The Rev. Dr. Nathan H. Yoder, pastor of St. Martin’s Lutheran Church in Maiden, North Carolina, and Dr. David S. Yeago, professor of systematic theology and ethics at the North American Lutheran Seminary in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, wrote a paper entitled, “‘Social Distancing’ and the Means of Grace.”

The Rev. Dr. Steve Turnbull, pastor of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, and the Rev. Dr. Roy A. Harrisville III, pastor of New Life Lutheran Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin, wrote a paper entitled, “Why and How to Share Communion in the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Bishop Selbo has also asked the Commission on Theology and Doctrine of the North American Lutheran Church to develop a statement on the theology of Holy Communion.

The statement will provide guidance to pastors and congregations as they celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The statement and the NALC’s practice of sharing the Sacrament will be a focus of study and discussion at the 2021 Pastor’s Conference.

Bishop Selbo’s letters and the papers from the commission are available at thenalc.org.

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been given. It is the identity we will always have. Jesus was right. It is to your advantage that He has gone away. He has given us His Holy Spirit. We are a body together in the Church. Even while we are now separated and apart from one another, we are never separated, and we are never apart from Christ.

God’s richest blessings to each of you as we wait and we pray together, on the Lord.

DISASTER RESPONSE WAREHOUSE COMPLETED, SUPPLIES ARE NEEDED

A new NALC Disaster Response national warehouse for the United States has been completed. The warehouse is also located in Caldwell, Ohio, site of the previous warehouse.

Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response coordinator, reports that supplies are needed to stock the warehouse in preparation for upcoming disasters.

“As the states allow us to get back to work, disasters continue to occur. Hurricane season is projected to be severe, tornadoes and storms continue striking the South each week,” Bates said.

“I am scheduling volunteers and trucks to pick up donations of Bibles, quilts, health kits, school kits, layettes and flood buckets. Will your congregation develop a plan to collect these items?” she said.

“If each family puts together their own and then leave them at the church, everything can be done with no contact — something to think about in these trying times,” she added.

Bates reported that she is tracking states to see when they will allow disaster response volunteers



into their state. She is especially focused on Tennessee where they had devastating tornados.

Bates suggested that those who are compiling flood buckets not purchase face masks and sanitizers at this time because of shortages resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. NALC Disaster Response will add those items to the flood buckets as they become available.

The new warehouse address is: NALC Disaster Response, 16500 Noble Ave., Caldwell, OH 43724. Kits may be shipped or delivered to that address.

You can learn more about NALC Disaster Response and how to make disaster kits at thenalc.org/nalc-disaster-response.

Donations of money may be made online at thenalc.org/donate or mailed to: North American Lutheran Church; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112-2202 (Please note “Disaster Response” on the check memo line).

Contact Mary Bates at 740-509-1132 or disasterresponse@thenalc.org for more information.



E-LEARNING FRIENDSHIP ENGLISH CONVERSATION AWAKENING LIVES TO WORLD MISSION

Would you like to turn your unexpected free time into an opportunity to help others as we adjust to “self-isolation” or “shelter-at-home”?

Are you doing some reevaluation of your life and priorities as the sometimes frenetic pace of life has come to a screeching halt?

Are you interested in supporting global mission but not able to travel overseas?

Investing time in people and answering God’s call to the nations can be as simple and as profound as taking time to teach conversational English to someone from another country.

With our long-term connections and partnerships in Vietnam, we have begun a new ministry opportunity to work with our partners. We are looking for

volunteers who will invest an hour a week to build a cross-cultural relationship and friendship, sharing the love of Christ and your Christian faith, if and as the Lord gives opportunity.

One of our recent volunteers shared: “It has always been a wonderful opportunity to not only assist the women in improving their English language skills but to build some beautiful relationships with women from all over the world.”

For additional information go to alwm.org/efec.

Awakening Lives to World Mission is a Ministry Partner of the North American Lutheran Church. To partner with them or learn more, please visit alwm.org



THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT CHAINED

In these days when we have sheltered in place, we have been called for a season to remain behind closed doors for the love of our neighbor.

We dearly miss the opportunity to gather face-to-face and to have the gift of a building we can regularly use. It has been a profound challenge not to gather face-to-face in this season. It has renewed our gratitude for the abundance with which we have been blessed and strengthened our prayer for the persecuted Church around the world, for whom this is the norm.

As we enter this Resurrection season, we read how the disciples were challenged. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there was doubt and extreme fear. The disciples of Jesus had a good reason to be afraid; the Messiah had just been crucified. But Jesus broke into the room where the disciples were gathered and spoke the words: "Peace be with you!"



MISSIONS UPDATE

REV. DR. GEMECHIS BUBA
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP
FOR MISSIONS

In this Resurrection season, Jesus breaks into our homes, our fear, our anxiety, our sickness and our death. He says, "Peace be with you!" He rescues and redeems us. And we rejoice that the Word of God is not chained!

This year, as we take a unique journey to Pentecost, we would like to offer an opportunity for our leaders. Each week, we are gathering our pastors and lay

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NALS JUNE TERMS

North American Lutheran Seminary

www.thenals.org



CH 680 - Theology and Writings of Martin Luther *The Rev. Dr. Mark Mattes | June 1-5, 2020*

A seminar on the life, theology, ministry, and spirituality of Martin Luther. Primary focus will be upon the thematic reading, discussion, and evaluation of selected writings of Luther.



ST 550 - Lutheran Confessions *The Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee | June 1-12, 2020 (Half-Days)*

A close study of the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church as gathered in the Book of Concord. The course will focus on the role of the Confessions as public doctrine of the Lutheran Church. The major theological topics in the Confessions will be studied in relation to the wider Christian tradition with an eye to their ecumenical and pastoral implications. Classic and contemporary Lutheran theologians will be consulted for insight into what it means to be a "confessional Lutheran" in particular places and times.

All June Term courses are offered online. Auditing is available for a reduced rate.

NALC WELCOMES WILLIAM OBAGA AS GLOBAL WORKER

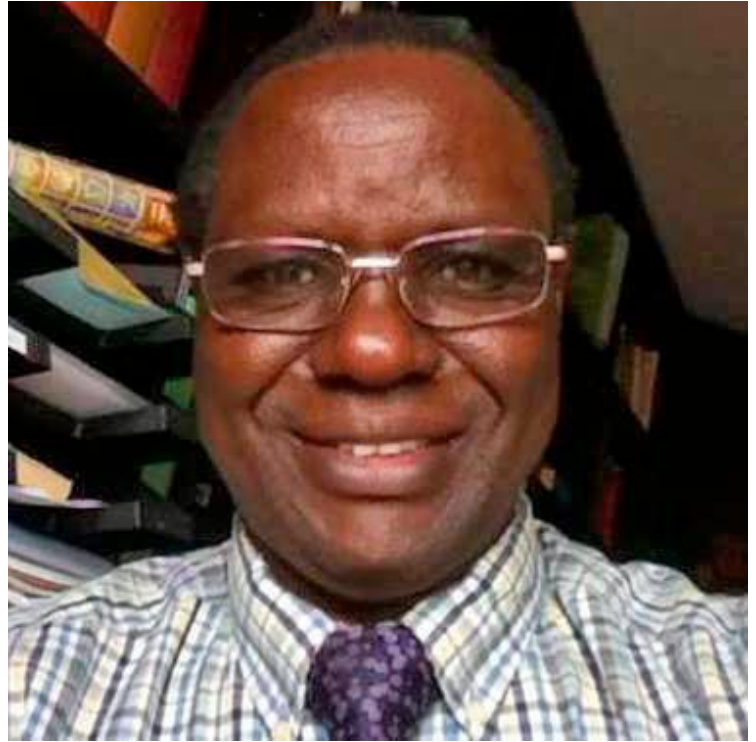
The North American Lutheran Church has received Dr. William Obaga, as a Global Worker through the World Mission Prayer League (WMPL).

William continues with his role in overseeing WMPL missionaries assigned to Africa, while also serving the NALC in building, forging, nurturing and promoting its growing partnerships in Africa, and specifically serving on the ground in Kenya.

The Rev. Dr. Margaret Obaga, his wife, now serves as a missionary in leadership training and support for the diaconal ministry of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, with a focus on teaching and capacity-building for God's mission in Africa. She also collaborates with other prayer league coworkers in Africa.

William and Margaret are grateful for the opportunity to use their God-given gifts to give back to the Church in Africa and overseas. Please pray that the Lord might raise more workers for Africa in many areas including witness, teaching and leadership development.

The Obagas have a long association with the World Mission Prayer League. They first came to know WMPL missionaries in Kenya in the early 1970s and



William Obaga

have served with the Prayer League in various capacities.

In 2005, William began a nearly decade long journey at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, culminating in two graduate degrees. William studied theology in the areas of church music and the history of Christianity, with a particular interest in the theory and history of missions. Margaret studied pastoral care and counseling with a specialization in addictions. During that time, both of them served on WMPL's Home Council, first Margaret for two years, and then William for six years, while Margaret completed her theological studies in the area of conflict transformation at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa.

In 2014 William was appointed as WMPL's associate director for Africa, while Margaret was

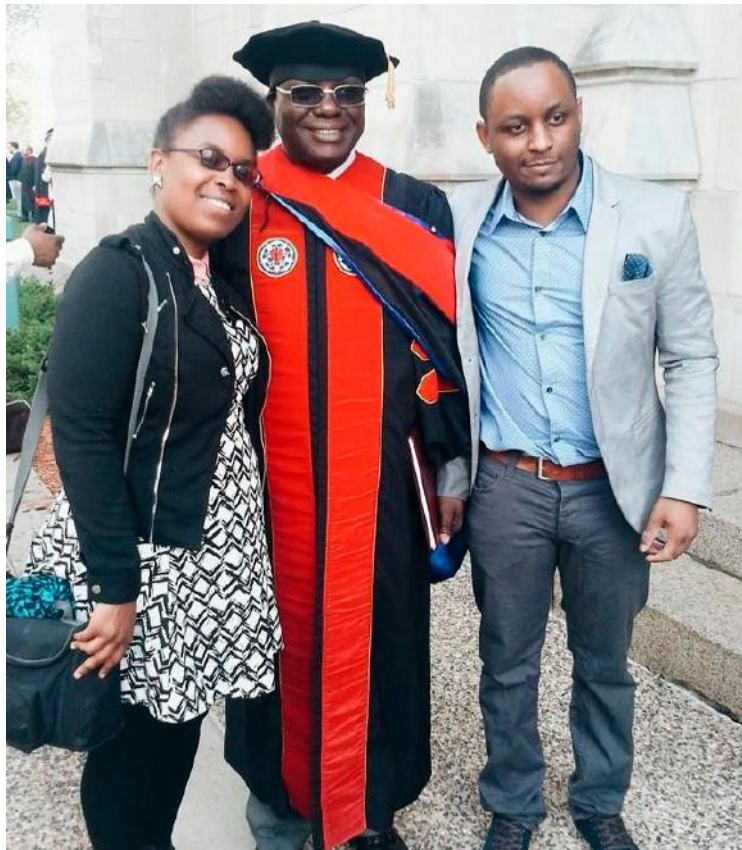


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simultaneously approved and commissioned by the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church as a missionary to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. She served as a lecturer, researcher, trainer, and pastor under *Mission EineWelt* (Mission OneWorld), the Bavarian church's global mission center in the city of Neuendettelsau, Germany.

Due to Margaret's position, the two of them were based in Germany, while William coordinated mission work in Africa. William also made voluntary contributions by teaching theology and church music as an adjunct professor at the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology (formerly, Hermannsburg Mission Seminary) in Lower Saxony. He also trained and led church choirs, as well as served as an accompanist in various churches in Bavaria, where Margaret preached. In December of 2019, they relocated to Nairobi, Kenya.

William and Margaret are blessed with three grown children. Monica, the eldest, lives and works in Washington, D.C., while Joshua and Robert live and work in Nairobi. Robert was well connected with WMPL while he lived for 12 years in Minnesota.



Dr. William Obaga, an NALC Global Worker, is serving in Kenya with the World Mission Prayer League. For additional information or to partner with their ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/william-obaga.

MISSIONS UPDATE

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leaders together for a Bible study hosted by our Missions Office staff. The Bible study is followed by a discussion connecting to the Mission-Driven identity of the North American Lutheran Church.

We invite you to join us each Thursday leading up to Pentecost at 11 a.m. EDT on the NALC Clergy Connect Facebook page at <https://bit.ly/3ePMj2n>. A recording of each week's study and discussion is available at www.missions.nalcnetwork.com.

I am also providing a daily exegetical lecture on the Book of Acts. Please join us and tens of thousands of others worldwide on Facebook at 12.30 p.m. EDT each weekday at facebook.com/thenalc or on Youtube at youtube.com/gemechisbuba. Join us in the Word, in fasting and in prayer, as we eagerly await the celebration of Pentecost again!

TRY GIVING MONEY AWAY!

TEXAS CONGREGATION LIVES OUT THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS FOR STEWARDSHIP EMPHASIS

By Pastor Mark Braaten

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Tyler, Texas, tried something different for a stewardship focus this winter. In the process we discovered that stewardship can be fun and faithful. (When was the last time you saw "stewardship" and "fun" in the same sentence?) This year, instead of asking for money, we gave money away. And the results astonished us.

Please let me explain. We decided that our stewardship focus would center on Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-30. In the parable, Jesus talks about a master entrusting three stewards with varying amounts of money. We decided to "live out" this parable.

We told the congregation that on Sunday, Jan. 12, we would be giving out envelopes with money in them. Our hope was that congregational members would take an envelope and then use the money that was in it. They would have one month to use the money in any way that they chose. At the end of the month, we asked that people would tell us what they did with the money and return any profits they made.

We went to the bank and got a whole lot of \$5, \$10 and \$20 bills. We stuffed envelopes. Some had \$10, some had \$15, some had \$20. At worship on Sunday, Jan. 12, we told the congregation we would pass the offering plates twice. The first time they were to take money out, the second time they were to put money in. (You have to have some fun as you do this!)

For the first passing, the offering plates were full of the envelopes with the money in them. People were instructed to take out an envelope. Anyone who wanted to participate was encouraged to take an envelope. We also knew that some members didn't want to participate. We made a point of saying it was fine not to participate. All you needed to do was not take an envelope.

We passed the plates the first time and gave the money out. After that the ushers passed the plates a second time for the regular offering.

We also were careful to explain to the congregation what we were about. We had announcements and temple talks on the Sundays prior to Jan. 12. We had a newsletter article about it, and we explained everything again on Jan. 12.

We also told people that we hoped they would be creative in how they used the money. We told people that they could use the money to make more money for the congregation. Or we said it was also fine to use the money in any form of ministry or caring that would serve the kingdom of God. We wanted people to have the option to do either.

Most people took the money and went to work. In the Sundays that followed, all sorts of things began happening around the church. The church narthex on Sunday mornings became quite the place. Members made things and sold them — quilts, fudge, pies and pickled jalapenos peppers. Three women joined their resources and made jam. (They had way too much fun one Saturday in the church kitchen making the jam.) One gentleman bought ingredients for smoothies and sold fruit smoothies in the narthex for 50 cents each. (He ended up making over \$100 that he then donated to a children's charity in Kansas City.)

The church narthex was transformed into a sprawling entrepreneurial zone, with people selling, raffling, shopping and comparing notes on what they were doing. There was a wonderful energy about it all.

This happened for four Sundays. While this was going on, we also used the time to focus on topics of stewardship. I preached on Jan. 12 on the parable

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from Matthew 25 and how we are to use our God-given talents.

I preached two more Sundays on stewardship and emphasized that stewardship is not a code word for meeting the church budget. It is rather discipleship. It is seeing all of our life as a gift, and using the gifts that God has entrusted to us to serve Him and our neighbors.

We also had newsletter articles on stewardship, and sent out three letters to the congregation on stewardship themes. We lifted up tithing and growth giving; we handed out a time and talent sheet. We talked about ministries we are doing and also that we wanted to develop in the congregation. We talked about ministries in the NALC, particularly ones that we are involved in. We talked about and studied stewardship, and all the while had all the congregation's activities with their projects going on. The many projects set a wonderful, positive tone for the whole process.

On Feb. 16 we asked for an accounting of what had been done. We asked people to tell us what they had done and to return any profits they had made. We are keeping an on-going list of projects that were done, and we are sharing that list in celebration with the congregation.

When all the money was returned, we discovered we made a profit of over \$1,100. (Our church council needs to decide what to do with that, we are looking at giving it away as benevolence.) In addition, we learned that hundreds of dollars were raised and given away in ministry. Here are some of my favorites:

- + One family had two envelopes that totaled \$40. They used the money to buy groceries for a senior citizen neighbor that is on a limited income and also to buy supplies for the senior's garden. They planted the garden with the senior.
- + One family got \$10. The parents and children all matched the \$10, and they gave \$100 to a local food bank in honor of our congregation.



This sticker was one of many projects created and sold as part of a Parable of Talents stewardship emphasis at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Tyler, Texas.

- + A teacher bought supplies for a special needs child in her class.
- + Numerous people made and sold things outside of the congregation and used the sale as an opportunity to tell others about our congregation.
- + One woman made bumper stickers that read "I hope you follow Jesus this close." She sold them and made \$147.
- + One member bought the Alcoholics Anonymous big book for a friend with a drinking problem.
- + My personal favorite, one of our high school students wasn't sure what to do with his \$15. He ended up giving it to another student in his high school who usually doesn't have lunch money.

We had a marvelous experience. We talked and studied stewardship — we did stewardship! We're coming to see stewardship as discipleship. People had so much fun that they are asking to do it again.

I'd encourage you to give this a try. In fact, if you do, send me an email and I will send you all the information we used. I will send you the schedule we followed, the letters and newsletter articles we used, all the forms and paperwork. You can start with what we did and then move beyond that in creative ways for your congregation. I can be reached at mbraaten@oslctyler.org.

Stewardship — fun — celebration — discipleship!
They really do fit together!

YEARNING FOR CONGREGATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. — 1 John 1:1-3 RSV

During this time of “social distancing,” “self-quarantining” and, yes, isolation, we are uniquely aware of how this has affected our congregations and communal life together. Some of our congregations are not gathering at all. Some are gathering “virtually.” Some are gathering in the church parking lot, while still separated in cars. Pastoral visits are made from a distance, most often by phone or through the front door of the home keeping six feet apart. This is not how we do ministry and live together as the Body of Christ! And, yet, it has been our reality for the last couple of months.

There are those who have embraced these methods of being “church.” One news commentator reported that his mother loves “participating” in her Roman Catholic parish services online, as she can have a Bloody Mary during Mass!

Some have expressed concern that this may lead to a transformation of the essential and basic understanding of faith and the life of faith as we have been forced to worship online or at a distance.

Others have questioned why anyone would return to Sunday worship in the church sanctuary now that they are comfortable with easily accessible streamed services you can “watch” from the comfort of your own home in your PJs or loungewear?

The ultra-individualized North American experience of Christianity has already led to an understanding of



MINISTRY MATTERS

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“church” as consumer-driven and consumer-oriented — expected to meet my needs and preferences above all else — so that I am always comfortable and it is always convenient for me.

Online and distanced worship now, forced upon us, has the potential for reforming congregational life in the future — and not in a good way.

This possibility certainly has us considering what is missing from online and distanced worship? Why is worship in your car, in the church parking lot still odd and forced and lacking? Why isn't Sunday worship in your living room recliner, watching worship on your laptop equal to communal worship in the church sanctuary?

Of course, there are many differences which might be cited, and many arguments made. Apart from the obvious issues related to the Lord's Supper — receiving much study, prayer and discussion these days — I would suggest that what is significantly missing — and substantially different — is intimacy.

We use the words “community” and “communal” as descriptive of the congregation gathered on the Lord's Day for worship. This notion can be pushed, however, as one might ask why the congregation gathered for worship in the parking lot or within a virtual community online isn't also “communal?”

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What is missing from this is still intimacy — which includes closeness and connection physically, nearness, participation and interaction with one another reflecting trust and care.

It may be argued that there can be a certain level of intimacy shared virtually or from a distance, but speaking with a loved one on the phone, while there may be emotional intimacy expressed, is not the meaning of intimacy in relationships. It is also not the meaning of intimacy within the Body of Christ.

In the Scripture verses cited above, intimacy is an aspect of the fellowship we have with God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. It's unfortunate that this "fellowship" in the church is often thought of only as fellowship which is part of social gatherings and events aimed at involving new and nominal members. The Greek word *koinonia* — translated "fellowship" in 1 John 1 — is something more — something deeper and elemental than getting together for fun and food.

Koinonia with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit, has to do with intimacy, participation, familiarity and interaction with one another. God became flesh, in Jesus, to dwell among us, full of grace and truth. God became incarnate in His Son to be with us, physically, bodily in the Word and Sacrament, so that we could see Him, look upon Him and touch Him, as the Word of God is shared in our midst and the Lord's body and blood are broken and poured out for us.

God is Emmanuel — God with us! Jesus is with us always, even to the close of the age. He is with us where two or three are gathered in His name. There is — and God intends for there to be — intimacy in our relationships with Him, just as there is an intimacy intended for us in the Body of Christ — real intimacy, true participation with one another, interaction, trust, relationship, caring and, yes, touch!

I pray that, when we are able to gather together as the Body of Christ, in our churches and congregations, we will not be afraid to touch one another. Traditionally, the sharing of the peace as a

liturgical action happened often after the Body of Christ was broken, indicating not only Christ's body, broken on the cross, but also the reality of our brokenness because of our sin and disobedience. The host was broken and then the Body of Christ — the congregation — shared the peace in physical, intimate expressions (now, shaking hands), expressing and manifesting the reconciliation and peace we have with one another, through Christ.

We have *koinonia* — fellowship, intimacy — with each other because we have *koinonia* with the Father and the Son. I look forward to sharing the peace with you, again, in worship each Sunday, in this act of intimate *koinonia*.

All of this is to say that I hope you also are not satisfied with online or distance worship opportunities, which, while necessary, are also not sufficient. I hope we are all yearning for the intimacy of the Body of Christ which we experience and share as the gathered community of believers on Sunday morning. Let us pray, together, that soon and very soon we will be out of our homes and cars, out from in front of our laptops and TVs, receiving the Word of Life within our congregations — *"that our joy may be complete!"*

CONGREGATIONAL ANNUAL REPORTS

Congregations are reminded to complete their annual report to the NALC.

Congregations were sent an email with a link to an online form to report the status of the congregation as of Dec. 31, 2019.

Congregations are asked to complete the annual report by June 1. The report may be accessed online at thenalc.org/congregationalreport.

Please contact Anne Gleason at 651-633-6004 or agleason@thenalc.org with any questions about completing the report.

YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

By Laurie Pecuch

It's May. Hope you are staying safe and that your flowers are blooming!

How are you doing in ministering to young people and families in this new reality? Children's and youth ministry folks are super creative. Join the conversation by getting connected to the **NALC Youth Workers Facebook page**. Oodles of ideas continued to be shared.

Upcoming Webinar: We continue marching through the New Testament lessons. Click on the link below or catch us live on Facebook on Tuesday, May 12, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. EDT.

Here's the link that will get you to a sign in page which will take you to the registration page:
https://us04web.zoom.us/rec/share/18VsN4Pf1DNORpXp12_jdPchR4POeaa8gCkZ_PZZxEnjRpmim5hgCrmqWvW3qwf6



We started **online cluster meetings** on the second Wednesday of each month from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. EDT. Zoom Code: 822-2347-9039 PW: 436327. We are happy to offer cluster meetings at other times. Just ask.

The 2020 Nexus Institute is going virtual. The NALC week is July 12-17. This creates the opportunity for teens to attend without traveling to Iowa. Have questions or looking for details. For additional information go to nexusgv.org or grandview.edu/academics/other-programs/nexus. You may contact Kate Faas at kfaas@grandview.edu.

Laurie Pecuch serves the NALC as a youth ministry coach. You may contact her at families@thenalc.org.

COVID - 19 resources & encouragement

- Bishop Selbo's Pastoral Letter and Triduum Messages
- Information on the CARES Act and Latest COVID-19 Updates from the U.S. and Canadian Governments
- NALC Live Stream Listing and Creative Resource Sharing
- Worship Resources such as Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Compline, Family Resources, Prayers, and Resources for the Triduum
- Communication & Technology Resources such as Liturgy and Music Licensing, Website Creation, Worship Service Recording and Live-Streaming, Sermon Publishing, Online Financial Giving, Meeting Options, Text and Email Messaging

www.thenalc.org/coronavirus

STAY WITH US, LORD, EACH AND EVERY ONE

This devotion first appeared in the April 2020 issue of "Harvest News," the official newsletter of U.S. Custom Harvesters, Inc., and is reprinted here by permission.

By the Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch

"Stay with me, Lord!" A major collision interrupted the writing of this column, not to mention the rest of life as we know it at this time of year.

"Stay with us, Lord!" COVID-19 has run headlong into the intersection where trucks, trailers, bunkhouses and cook wagons were making their orderly annual passage toward early stops on Harvest Route 2020.

"Stay with us, Lord!" COVID-19 has collided with the caravans headed to sports events, state FFA delegations and competitions, not to mention school buses taking the kids to and from daily classes. And who knows how long school itself will be out — or if it's over for the year as some public officials are speculating on today's news. Who knows? Maybe some moms and dads will be homeschooling the kids while they're trying to keep up with the usual demands of harvest.

"Stay with me, Lord! Stay with my neighbors near and far!" That refrain won't leave my head as I write, as I juggle the

Stay With Me

You are everything I know
Whichever way I go
Forever stay with me
Venite angeli
Cantate domino
Laudate

You see me through
Whenever I'm afraid
However far away
Forever comfort me
Venite angeli
Cantate domino
Laudate

You're on my side
Whichever way I choose
In everything I do
Forever stay with me
Venite angeli
Cantate domino
Laudate

Venite angeli — Come, O angels
Cantate domino — Sing to the Lord
Laudate — Praise (Him)

To hear this song of hope and trust, sung by Libera, a boys acapella ensemble from London, go to youtube.com/watch?v=Hk10abgfi or simply enter the keywords "Libera" and "Stay with Me" in your internet search engine.

precautions of ministry in the time of plague, as I keep reminding myself and others that faith is fear that has said its prayers.

"Stay with us, Lord, each and every one!" Some life callings require men and women to run toward imminent danger, or near to it. Medical personnel in hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes come to mind, as do law enforcement officers and emergency responders. Where would we be without the folks who keep essential services — power, water, phone systems, mail, fuel pipelines, to name a few — up and running? How about factory workers and managers who will be pushing hard to fill orders for products essential to everyday living and emergencies beyond imagining? How about truckers, railroad engineers, pilots, warehouse staff and delivery drivers who keep the supply chain running, and retail workers who show up so we can find products on shelves and clerks at the cash registers? They need our prayers, not to mention our words of thanks for showing up to work.

"Stay with us, Lord, especially decision makers who will be second-guessed from all sides!" From the local mayor and school superintendent to various state

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and federal authorities, those who've stepped up to public service take a beating from constituents in emergencies. And can't we relate! We in agriculture know what it means to have consumers misunderstand and misrepresent our efforts to feed hungry folks in our country and around the world. Let's offer a "thanks for your service" to the decision makers, even as we would wish to be thanked. We haven't even talked about late winter and early spring weather yet, or toilet paper shortages, or feared disruption of supply chains for the goods we need to keep crews fed, equipment maintained and running, or whether harvest workers will make it into the U.S. due to travel restrictions or suspicious symptoms.

"Stay with us, Lord, each and every one!" We won't get through these times without the Lord and each other. We never have, and we never will. Together in Christ, we can be both prudent and unafraid. The song "Stay With Me" reminds me of Psalm 91. Meditate on the psalm, the words of the song, and the promise that the Lord indeed stays with us. Always.

The Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch, an NALC pastor, writes from Indiana, where she advises a congregation in formation between stints in her calling as an intentional interim pastor.

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Please copy and share this newsletter widely.