



## NALC DISASTER RESPONSE IS HELPING AFTER HURRICANES, WILDFIRES, WIND STORMS

NALC Disaster Response is responding to recent hurricanes, wildfires and wind storms.

Hurricane Sally was a tropical storm which became a Category 2 hurricane when it made landfall on Sept. 16. Pensacola, Florida, took a direct hit, causing power outages for over a million people.

St. Paul Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Pensacola, had its church roof damaged, and its pastor's home was damaged. More than 30 members of the congregation have had damage to their homes from winds and flooding.

NALC Disaster Response has delivered two truckloads of emergency relief supplies including flood buckets, Bibles and kits. It was a severe storm and your help is needed.

A derecho – a hurricane-strength wind storm – struck Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in August. NALC Disaster Response is working with the Iowa Mission District and Servants of Christ Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Robins, Iowa, to respond to damage from the storm.



**Damage from Hurricane Sally in Pensacola, Florida**

NALC Disaster Response is working with the Central Pacific Mission District in response to the wildfires on the West Coast of the United States. Fires are causing billions of dollars in damage and leaving families homeless and hopeless. By providing your support, you are providing a message of hope through our congregations.

To assist our congregations in their response to each of these devastating disasters, your prayers and help



# EXECUTIVE COUNCIL APPOINTS MICHAEL JOHNSON AS TREASURER

The NALC Executive Council has appointed Michael Johnson to a four-year term as treasurer of the NALC.

“With more than 40 years of professional experience in the financial sector, Mike Johnson comes to us as an answer to prayer. His background and qualifications, his involvement in and commitment to the NALC, and his deep and sincere love for the Lord are among the many gifts he brings into his new role,” said Bishop Dan Selbo.

“I look forward to working with him as we move into this next decade as a church body. His passion for using his God-given gifts and his heart for serving the Lord Jesus and His Church will only serve to enhance and strengthen his work as NALC treasurer. I thank God for raising up such a gifted person to serve in such an important role,” Bishop Selbo said.

Johnson has investment and financial planning experience as a wealth advisor to individuals, families and small businesses. His company, Wealth Planning Corporation, was started in 1984 and is based in Cincinnati, Ohio. He now works remotely part time and periodically commutes to Cincinnati to consult with clients and the company.

Johnson is a member of the NALC Living and Giving Stewardship Team and has a passion for using his financial experience to equip others and serve the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. He is married to Pastor Dona Johnson. They live in Sedona, Arizona, where they have begun a mission-start house church, Grace Pointe of Sedona.

The treasurer is the chief financial officer of the NALC, overseeing the receiving and disbursing of all funds and keeping accurate accounts of all transactions. The treasurer also provides complete



**Michael Johnson**

and accurate reports for review by all members.

Johnson will replace Ryan Schwarz who has served in that position for 10 years.

“From the beginning of the North American Lutheran Church, Ryan Schwarz has generously and tirelessly given his time, his gifts and his expertise. His wisdom and grace, along with his faith and devotion to Jesus Christ and His Church have been gifts to our church body from the start,” Bishop Selbo said. “For the past 10 years, we have been blessed by his

service, not only in areas of finance, but as one of the members of our legal team upon which we depend when needs arise.

“I want to personally thank Ryan Schwarz for all he has done for us and for the NALC in the past 10 years. He has been a trusted partner in ministry. He has become a dear and valued friend, and he will always and forever be a brother in Jesus Christ. His position as our treasurer has now been filled, but his place in our hearts will remain only for him. Thank you, Ryan, for giving us and our Lord Jesus your best,” Bishop Selbo said.

The Executive Council approved Johnson’s appointment to the position on Sept. 18 in an online meeting. Johnson’s term as NALC treasurer began on Oct. 1.

The Executive Council has decided not to meet in person for the rest of the year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

At the Sept. 18 meeting, the council also approved a resolution providing guidance concerning meetings of NALC entities during the pandemic. This guidance will be publicized widely and revisited regularly.



# NALC CONGREGATIONS TO CONSIDER WHETHER TO RATIFY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

The congregations of the North American Lutheran Church are considering whether to ratify amendments to the NALC Constitution that were approved by the 2020 NALC Mission Convocation.

“One of the NALC’s four Core Values is Congregationally Focused. Congregational participation is a cornerstone of the North American Lutheran Church’s governance. By requiring congregational ratification of certain key decisions, the NALC ensures that its members are aware of and broadly support those decisions. Participation in the ratification process is an important right and responsibility,” the Executive Council states in a letter to congregations on the ratification process.

Amendments approved by a 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 deadline for voting on ratification is Feb. 8, 2021 – six months after the convocation. However, the Executive Council is encouraging congregations “to vote on ratification as soon as possible, perhaps at a brief, specially called meeting. Congregations are asked to vote on ratification prior to December 31, 2020,” the Executive Council stated in a letter to congregations.

The proposed amendments to the NALC Constitution would move the North American Lutheran Church from meeting annually for its convocation to meeting every other year. The proposed amendments also direct the Executive Council to provide quarterly updates to pastors and congregations.

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 Executive Council proposed the shift to biennial convocations to be able to focus the time and resources of NALC staff, mission districts and congregations on achieving the NALC’s 2020 *Vision* goals for renewal and growth.

Annual convocations create substantial expenses each year both for congregations and for the NALC Operating Budget. Congregations incur both registration and travel expenses to send delegates. The NALC has significant costs in planning a convocation and subsidizing registration fees.

The constitution mentions “annual” convocations in many places, so many of the proposed amendments delete the word “annual.” The word “annual” is sometimes replaced with the word “biennial.”

The constitution will continue to allow “special convocations” to be called if necessary. A special convocation could be called if an additional meeting of the NALC were needed at any time.

The election cycle for members of the Executive Council and Court of Adjudication is tied to annual convocations, so there are proposed amendments to add flexibility to elections.

Information on the ratification process – including the exact text of the proposed amendments – is available at [thenalc.org/ratificationprocess](https://thenalc.org/ratificationprocess).



# A PECULIAR APPROACH TO THE PANDEMIC

The events of the past several months have caused all of us to take a step back from what we had normally done in our churches in the past, and rethink and reprioritize our ministry efforts moving forward. To say that this year has been unusual is an understatement. The only predictable thing about 2020 has been the fact that it has been unpredictable. The only normal things about this year are the changes that are causing us to prepare for what many are calling the “new normal.”

Since the convocation in August, I have resumed some of my travels, as well as spent some productive time online with our mission district deans. The challenges throughout the NALC are many and varied, as are the opportunities for reaching people that otherwise might not have been reached.

The pandemic has forced us to let go of things we have done for many years and to take hold of things we may not have otherwise considered. Our pastors have been stretched. Our ministries have been challenged. Our use of technology and other resources have reached new heights.

Throughout it all, God has been faithful. His promises remain true. In Christ and His cross and resurrection, we find our hope.

Several recurring themes have been shared by our pastors and deans as our congregations that had been closed are beginning to reopen. One of the themes has been the simple fact that reopening is not the right language. We are not reopening what was there in the past. We are entering a new chapter.

New chapters bring new possibilities, and with new possibilities come renewed and renewing hope. As we enter this new chapter, we need to be ready for new possibilities and be open to new ways in which God will work.



## FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO  
BISHOP

---

The language of “stopping” and “starting” has also been shared by many. Because we have been forced to stop our old ways and start new approaches, we need to be careful and deliberate with what we choose to do moving ahead.

Before simply “restarting” old patterns and habits, be sure that the things you restart are the ones worth restarting. Just because something was done in the past does not mean that it is worth doing forever. Some things may need to stop in order that other things can start and/or continue.

One of the blessings of the pandemic might well be the opportunity to do the “stopping” and “starting” in our churches that is overdue.

In one of the recent mission district gatherings, it was suggested that we need to function like the first-century Church in a 21st-century world. The culture is changing. The mission field is becoming greater by the day. No longer in the majority as Christians, our strategies and approaches need to be different.

In the first century, 90 percent of what the Church did was outside of its buildings. Only 10 percent happened while they were meeting together. Since that time, the percentages have shifted – almost to the point of becoming the opposite. Prior to the pandemic, in many of our churches, 90 percent of our

*Continued on Page 5*



## *Continued from Page 4*

ministry happened in our buildings. Only 10 percent happened outside the church walls.

Now that we have been forced to move “outside” of our buildings with much of what we do, even as we move back together, let us be careful that we do so with intentionality, never losing sight of our calling to reach those not found within our walls.

The world we are called to reach is not coming to our buildings. As the Church, we need to meet them where they are. Perhaps an intentional “staying outside” approach needs to become a greater priority, even when it is no longer a required necessity.

It was also shared that if not a first-century approach to reaching the world, perhaps a fifth-century approach is even more fitting. In the first century, Christianity was new. People had not heard about Jesus. The challenge was to speak His name and to let them know. By the fifth century, people had already heard about Jesus. Many had come to faith, but the culture had changed. Rather than being open to the new message of the Gospel, the culture was becoming closed and hostile to a message it did not want to hear. As a result, the Christians needed to rethink their strategies in order to avoid reflecting, in themselves and their own actions, the hostility they were experiencing.

At a recent gathering of pastors in the Texas Mission Region, I was privileged to lead a study on the First Letter of Peter. The theme verse around which we focused was 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

One translation (KJV) reads, “a peculiar people.” The word “peculiar” means “strange or odd, unusual, bizarre, weird, puzzling, abnormal.” In most situations, I do not like being considered or thought of as being peculiar. Most of us like to fit in and not, because of our peculiarity, to stand out.

Having said that, as I consider the past several months, the challenges and opportunities we have

and we now face, I cannot think of a better word to describe what we now have a chance to be and to become. In a world that is confused and afraid, in a culture that is divided and torn apart and in a time in our history when the name of Jesus is not winning many friends, we have an opportunity to stand out as a peculiar people.

We can be filled with hope and with joy because we have been called and claimed by Christ. We can be positive and upbeat, even as we address the not-so-positive and less-than-upbeat things that are happening. And we can be confident in standing out as a “strange and odd, unusual, bizarre, weird, puzzling, abnormal” group of believers because our faith and our belief are in the One alone who gives and offers life.

Let us not lose faith. Let us not lose hope. And let us never forget that our Lord died for all people – including the ones who are hostile toward Him; including those who nailed Him to the cross; including sinners like you and like me, called and chosen as we are to reflect His heart in peculiar ways.

Bishop Dan

---

## DISASTER RESPONSE

### *Continued from Page 1*

are needed. See [thenalc.org/disasterresponse](https://thenalc.org/disasterresponse) for the lists of quilts, Bibles, flood buckets and kits that are needed. Your donations of material goods are needed. Volunteers are needed for debris removal and long-term rebuilding.

For more information, or to schedule a volunteer team, please contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or [disasterresponse@thenalc.org](mailto:disasterresponse@thenalc.org).

Monetary donations to NALC Disaster Response may be given online at [thenalc.org/donate](https://thenalc.org/donate) or mailed to NALC Disaster Response; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112.



# PRAY, CONFESS, LISTEN, SPEAK UP, LOVE DEFEND GOD'S GIFT OF LIFE

*The Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch was an NALC pastor. She died on Sept. 10. She wrote this article about a month before her death.*

It was Sunday afternoon, a couple of days before a planning session for the upcoming 2021 NALC Life Conference and the National March for Life. I couldn't help but catch this headline in the opinion-editorial section of my local Sunday paper: "Spiritual warfare: Standing with those demanding racial justice, equality is the Bible playing out in real life and real time" (*The Journal Gazette*, Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 28, 2020).

The article praised churches, particularly denominations, that the author saw leading "the swelling movement" of protests these days, organizing marches and strategizing for legislative change. Those remaining silent? They're primarily evangelicals, acting out of loyalty to a particular political party and "comfort with the status quo," the author opined.

The author's assumption and opinion begs a deeper look at how Christians, including those of us in the NALC, approach ministry in the public square. During that recent meeting of the NALC Life Ministries Team, we found ourselves reflecting on how our "Congregationally Focused" approach equips us to bring God's Word to bear in public life.

In the NALC, Congregationally Focused ministries and wise counsel from our bishop and Commission on Theology and Doctrine (CTD) equip God's people to apply Scripture to situations of our day, wherever we live, serve and have influence. While this approach doesn't generate huge headlines for the NALC, it does foster lasting, significant change in the character and behavior of individuals, congregations and, through our witness, in society as a whole.

Unlike some other church bodies, the NALC does not issue social justice statements. Instead, our bishop



and the Commission on Theology and Doctrine lead and guide our church body in discerning and applying what God's Word has to say. If a teaching statement is called for, it requires the approval of our bishop, the CTD, Executive Council, the convocation of clergy and lay voting delegates, and ratification by NALC congregations. In other cases, educational resources and pastoral letters to the church bring needed guidance via the bishop, CTD and Executive Council.

Then, our NALC congregations equip us to apply God's Word to the circumstances in which we live, be they major issues or decisions of daily living, or anything in between. And we, the baptized, carry out our ministries in daily lives as God's Word leads us to do – sometimes individually, other times by participating in wider initiatives consistent with our biblical, creedal and confessional stance.

In other words, it all begins with God's Word to us, not our word to God. Which brings me back to that recent meeting of the NALC Life Ministries Team.

Friends, the NALC is no newcomer to upholding life, as God-given treasure, from conception to death.

*Continued on Page 7*



**Continued from Page 6**

Concern for life emerged as an issue in 2010 when the NALC's constituting convocation called on the church to address the subject of abortion. The result was *"The Lord Is With You" – A Word of Counsel to the Church on the Sanctity of Nascent Life*, which laid out the biblical, creedal and confessional understanding of God's gift of human life from conception to death. Nor are the elderly and the infirm forgotten as we address the rising tide of physician-assisted suicide.

This resolution and these resources have borne fruit in the NALC Life Ministries Team, made up of clergy and laity whose passion for life puts the church's beliefs into action. The team leads an annual one-day conference prior to the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. Each year, NALC Life Conference speakers focus on topics: putting a stop to the tragedy of abortion and physician-assisted suicide, highlighting ministries that serve people throughout life and equip disciples to speak godly truth to a culture of death.

The next day, Life Conference participants and others bear the NALC banner in the annual March for Life, marking the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* and the legalization of abortion in the United States. The day begins with an ecumenical prayer service in the heart of the Capitol District, including leadership by NALC Life Team members. Then, we who are able march with thousands more witnesses for life, from the base of the Washington Monument to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Year round, we spread God's word concerning life in our congregations, in cooperation with like-minded faith-based organizations, such as Lutherans for Life, and in raising awareness through social media. In 2021, we'll do it again, for as long as it takes to replace the culture of death with respect for life at all ages and stages of development.

Which brings us back to the questions and perceptions which prompted this article.

Let no one mistake the NALC's way of acting on the Gospel as "doing nothing!" We can and do make a difference by living lives conformed to the Gospel, lives that connect our voices and actions to God's



Word, whether or not the words "North American Lutheran Church" ever appear in a news story.

At the same time, God's people can no longer assume, as the song goes, that folks will necessarily "Know we are Christians by our love." We as Christians do have a word to speak to the world. Our words and actions reflect on Christ and His Church. As God's people of the North American Lutheran Church, we have the privilege, opportunity and calling to connect our faith to both our words and actions towards our neighbors.

Here are just a few ways:

- + Focus your congregation on prayer for life during the upcoming seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, perhaps using the seven weeks of prayers prepared by the Life Ministries Team.
- + Be equipped as "Disciples For Life" at the NALC 2021 Life Ministries Conference. Join a national, state or local March for Life in January 2021.
- + Open your hearts and congregations' ministries to aid those who are faced with unplanned pregnancies or grieving the lives already lost to abortion. Support a local Christian ministry with the preborn and their parents.
- + Adopt a life-preserving ministry such as Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries, which uses free Christ-Centered counseling to combat the

**Continued on Page 8**



# UNVEILED

## THE GREAT COMMISSION SOCIETY

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

— 2 Corinthians 4:6 ESV

We all wear veils: veils we put on to hide ourselves, veils we allow others to put on us and veils to separate us.

Jesus' death tore the veil in two and granted us access to God the Father, welcoming us behind the veil. We are released and welcomed into a life of worship. Our response is to shine and share that light with others.

Join your brothers and sisters in Christ as we gather virtually to support missionaries serving in their homes and neighborhoods, in their congregations, nationally and internationally.

This conference, hosted by the Great Commission Society (GCS), will provide encouragement, tools and training, inspiration and connection to missionaries to be unashamed of the Gospel burning in our hearts, unleashed by the power of the Holy Spirit from the



*Shining  
light in the  
darkness*

veils that darken our sight, unrestricted to being the aroma of Christ, and *unveiled* to be and to make disciples and to shine light in the darkness.

Join us Nov. 4-6 for worship, keynote speakers, moments of mission and more. Because of varied schedules and time zones across the NALC, we will be hosting the conference live each day at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. ET. The same live content will be available at either time. Registration for the conference is required. For additional details, please visit [bit.ly/GCS-Unveiled](http://bit.ly/GCS-Unveiled).

---

### ***Continued from Page 7***

epidemic of military suicides brought about by post-traumatic stress, moral and spiritual injury.

The opportunities are countless. Already, more congregations and NALC disciples than we can count are bringing God's Word to life in these and other ways, day by day.

Regardless of the social issue or ministry opportunity, we do well to follow the model lifted up by Bishop Dan Selbo in his recent pastoral letter on another topic, racial tension. That five-word model —

Pray, Confess, Listen, Speak Up, Love — fits perfectly with the NALC Life Ministries Team's ongoing approach to speaking and acting for life.

Please, prayerfully consider taking part in the NALC's witness for life, and encourage your congregation to do likewise. Because, every life matters to our God.

**You can learn more about the NALC Life Ministries Team and find resources at [thenalc.org/lifeministries](http://thenalc.org/lifeministries).**

**Pastor Cathi Braasch's obituary is available at [nelsonbauerfh.com/obituary/rev-dr-cathi-braasch-sts](http://nelsonbauerfh.com/obituary/rev-dr-cathi-braasch-sts).**



# SOLA PUBLISHING RECEIVES CROSSWAYS INTERNATIONAL MATERIALS AND CONTENT

A new influx of material — including the well-known *Crossways* and *Divine Drama* Bible survey courses — has made its way to Sola Publishing. Sola Publishing was presented with an opportunity to acquire the inventory of Crossways International (CI) as it ends 40 years of faithful ministry.

This opportunity came about very quickly. The Rev. Dr. Steve King, managing editor of Sola Publishing worked closely with CI to make this transition a smooth one. “CI’s materials are unique and well-known,” said Pastor King. “We immediately saw this as an opportunity to extend the legacy of Crossways and its ministry of teaching the biblical Word.”

The Crossways materials will be organized and advertised via Sola Publishing’s website, starting in 2021.

This comes at a critical time when product sales have slowed, in large part because of the coronavirus pandemic. Revenue from sales of this material will help Sola Publishing remain a strong source for orthodox confessional educational materials for years to come.

“I am so grateful to see this transition of the materials owned by CI being conveyed to Sola Publishing. Sola is a perfect partner to extend the life and legacy of the message of Jesus, the Servant-Messiah-King,” the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, author and founder of CI said in a press release from Crossways International.

“We thank God for the incredible opportunity of ministry through Crossways International and its faithful staff, enabled by your prayers, partnership and support over 40 years,” Dr. Wendt said. “May we continue to teach and inspire, through the international network, the pan-cultural and denominational commitment of countless followers of Jesus through this website, and the gracious facility of the Sola partnership.”



**Materials from Crossways International are moved to Sola Publishing’s office in North Carolina.**

“We see this arrangement as a win-win for all parties,” said Tim Schmitt, CI’s board chairman. “What CI leaves behind will continue to benefit the Body of Christ.”

“The board members of Sola Publishing give thanks to God and are grateful to CI and Rev. Wendt for entrusting us with their product,” Sola Publishing said in a press release.

**Sola Publishing is a ministry partner of the North American Lutheran Church. To learn more about their ministry, please visit [solapublishing.com](http://solapublishing.com).**



# THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AMBRIDGE, PENNSYLVANIA

Ambridge, Pennsylvania, is a rustbelt community nestled along the north shore of the Ohio River. It is in Ambridge that my wife, Terry, and I have rented a modest apartment that sits within a comfortable walk to the seminary.

Ambridge was once a thriving small town, but now it is a struggling community. Hard times linger from the loss of the steel mills and other industries, but the strength and diversity born of thousands of immigrants who came to this town to fulfill dreams of freedom and work is still evident in the diversity of children who play together on the sidewalks along our street.

Some of these children live in pleasant homes which are in good order, but other children live in houses that sit in disorder and disrepair where domestic strife is a familiar visitor. On the front porch of one such house sits a solitary and frightened little girl. She is forced to witness the arrival of the police who have come to deal with an altercation taking place inside. Not all is malevolent, but certainly not all is well. Terry saw all this and later wrote in her prayer journal:

*Here I am, across from an impoverished situation,  
a political banner cascading from the porch.  
A beautiful little blond girl riding her bike,  
Then shouted obscenities, police arriving and  
The beautiful little girl in the midst of it all.  
All I can do is pray.*

There are many churches in Ambridge. Next to our apartment sits the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of St. Vladimir. Amid the sounds of children playing and adults cursing, we also regularly hear the sound of church bells.

Though I could throw a stone from our apartment to the seminary, on the way I pass yet another church. This is a Coptic Orthodox Church which was



---

## SEMINARY UPDATE

REV. DR. ERIC RIESEN  
NALS PRESIDENT

---

consecrated by Pope Shenouda in 2007. Recently, I saw a wedding being held there and the street was brimming with Coptic clergy and laity celebrating the event.

This is a rich slice of America – I never imagined myself as part of such a community, but here I am. More importantly, here God is.

The seminary is a green space in the midst of this former industrial city – a city that is timeworn, but still vibrant.

The seminary has added to this vibrancy. There is morning prayer at 8:30 a.m., and students and faculty share lunch as a community. Theological conferences and guest speakers are a regular part of seminary life. Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Catholics and Christians of other traditions meet and converse. What makes us “one” in spite of our differences?

I believe that Lutheran students who study here will emerge with a greater appreciation both for what makes us distinct and what unifies us.

The North American Lutheran Seminary is a “system” of seminaries. Our location in Ambridge is the “hub” of theological education and pastoral formation. There are “spokes” in other places. Though not all of our students attend this campus, all of our seminarians will have opportunity to take two summer intensive courses here in Ambridge.

*Continued on Page 11*



*Continued from Page 10*

This is important for multiple reasons.

First, it will give our seminarians from different seminaries a chance to meet one another. Many of us have experienced first-hand the importance of friendships we developed when we were in seminary. These friendships often last a lifetime.

Second, as president of the seminary system, it will give me and other NALC leaders a chance to get to know our students. I want to know who they are and how I can pray for them individually.

Third, these residential experiences will help form pastors theologically within the Core Values of the NALC. It is essential, especially for our pastors, to share a “confessional cohesiveness” that unites us.

Finally, all of our students will experience the presence of God in a struggling and diverse community hugging the banks of the Ohio River.

I am grateful to you for your prayers and financial support as we persevere in this vision. We seek your prayers in support of our seminarians, staff, faculty and our ministry. I’m asking every congregation to include the seminary in your regular benevolence. Your financial support is vital in the continued development and expansion of this essential ministry of the North American Lutheran Church.

This fall we will be holding a seminary appeal, and I ask for each congregation to remember us in prayer and support the seminary financially.

Let me offer my thanks in advance for your prayers, funding and for the opportunity to serve as seminary president. It is our hope, prayer and goal to form the finest Lutheran theological system of education and formation in North America. With your help and God’s blessing, that goal is within reach as we trust that God will do “far more abundantly than all we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20 ESV).



# NALS

North American Lutheran Seminary

## *January 2021 Interterms*

JAN 4-8 WEEK 1 | JAN 11-15 WEEK 2

NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY | THENALS.ORG



### **JANUARY 4-8 | WEEK 1 CH670 MODERN CHURCH**

The Rev. Dr. Gordon Isaac

This course is designed to provide students with a working knowledge of the major themes, issues and personalities of modern church history and to help them make use of the rich resources of church history in their own practice of ministry.



### **JANUARY 11-15 | WEEK 2 ST550 LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS**

The Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee

A close study of the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church as gathered in the Book of Concord, focusing 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.

**CALL FOR INFO ABOUT ONLINE OFFERINGS | 724-385-8000 | AUDITING AVAILABLE FOR A REDUCED RATE**



# RESET IS NEW NALC STEWARDSHIP RESOURCE

*By the Rev. Dona Johnson*

The NALC Living and Giving Stewardship Team presents *RESET*, a new way to experience stewardship, or better yet, a new way to understand what it means to nurture a culture of giving and generosity in our congregations.

*RESET* is a new stewardship resource which is highly interactive and helps congregations reset their vision of stewardship. How is *RESET* different from other resources? First, this is not a study per se, but a journey. It is experiential and is very much dependent upon small-group participation and large-group sharing.

*RESET*'s primary focus is to help both leadership and lay leaders think more clearly about their own giving and what it means in God's economy to be generous. Foundational to all of Scripture is this one truth: God is both Creator and Owner of everything. We own nothing. In fact, God is the First Giver. We only know how to give and be generous because God, through Jesus, gave to us first and put a need within us to give. Thus, God, as Owner, entrusts everything He has created to our care – we are the managers.

While *RESET* just skims the surface of the complexities that surround giving and generosity, through self-discovery, it does provide a way for pastors and lay leaders to test their assumptions and misperceptions about giving.

It also provides a way for participants to explore how their family of origin and faith life have shaped their attitudes and beliefs about giving and generosity. You will be asked to write a spiritual autobiography about your relationship with money and possessions.

Knowing both your history and your congregation's history with money helps you to break through many



# RESET

of the taboos that still exist around the topic of money and finance. It is said, we carry the past with us. Both good and bad memories survive in different ways and help to form who we are.

Did you know that stewardship is more about your relationships than it is about money? Stewardship is about pastoral care. How are you caring for God's people? And this caring is not only the pastor's responsibility but everyone's responsibility. It's a proven fact that a congregation's giving declines when its members are disconnected from the mission and do not feel cared for. Generosity flows through congregations where members take care of and shepherd one another.

*RESET* addresses the new paradigm shift in giving. And that shift understands giving not only as a *transactional* practice but as a *transformational* one. In other words, we move away from the perception that stewardship is a way to "pay the bills" to recognize stewardship is a way to "share the vision."

***Continued on Page 13***



*Continued from Page 12*

Giving and generosity are seen as sources of change and ways to implement God's mission. As we embrace the Great Commission and the call to build disciple-making cultures in our congregations, let us not forget this: it takes all sorts of resources, spiritual gifts, human resources and financial capacity to carry out this commissioning.

*RESET* includes three sections: Section 1 provides a theological understanding of giving and generosity in both the Old and New Testaments. Section 2 provides a practicum to apply the theology learned in Section 1 and provides the lion's share of the learning experience. Here you are encouraged to invite your entire congregation to participate. Section 3 provides an outline of process and methods for implementing an annual stewardship campaign.

*RESET* was scheduled to be introduced at our August Convocation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing restrictions. *RESET* – with its small group emphasis – may be difficult for you to implement now, but not to worry, it will be offered

through 2022. You can download the materials from the NALC website and start planning now for the future.

I want to thank the Lilly School of Philanthropy and the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving for their resources and the seminar which I attended in Chicago in June of 2019.

We each have been given the responsibility of growing in our own relationships with money. As we grow, we will be able to build lasting cultures of generosity in our congregations. And, we will be clearer and calmer in our preaching, teaching and providing administrative leadership about finances.

If you have a question about *RESET*, you may email me at [revdonajohnson@gmail.com](mailto:revdonajohnson@gmail.com).

May each of us grow in wonder and amazement of what God, through Jesus Christ, has given us in this life!

*The Rev. Dona Johnson is chair of the NALC's Living and Giving Stewardship Team.*

# EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OFFERS GUIDANCE CONCERNING MEETINGS DURING PANDEMIC

The NALC Executive Council has approved a resolution providing guidance concerning meetings of NALC entities during the coronavirus pandemic. The council approved the resolution at its Sept. 18 online meeting. This guidance will be publicized widely and revisited regularly.

The following advice is offered to entities within the NALC making decisions whether or not to gather in person:

*+ Proceed with caution. Model Christ's love of and concern for the vulnerable.*

*+ Consider what you want to accomplish by coming together. Ask yourselves, "Can our main goals be accomplished effectively through video meeting platforms?"*

*+ Decide as a group by vote or consensus whether to: meet in person, use a hybrid model (some meet in person with others by a meeting platform) or meet entirely online.*

*+ No one should feel compelled to attend in person.*

*+ Bathe your decisions in prayer.*



# MISSION UPDATE FROM DIDI PANZO

During the month of August, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was in bad shape as it experienced multiple situations of unrest, robbery, kidnapping and killing. The home of a Lutheran pastor was stormed by insurgents, and the entire household was killed. Some church leaders suffered the same consequence.



**Pastor Didi Panzo**

The church reopened its doors for worship on Aug. 23, and the majority of members came back after a long break due to the coronavirus pandemic. The church lost a few members during the pandemic, but pastors praised God as doors opened for worship. Pastors are also conducting door-to-door visits for discipleship.

## **Theological college**

The dormitory of the theological college has been completed. Students aren't using the dormitory yet because it has not been furnished. The dormitory is in need of beds, mattress, linens, dining furniture and kitchen supplies. We hope that by the 2021-22 academic year, the dormitory will be in full use.

## **Women and orphans in our care**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, most of the women in our counseling and empowerment program stayed in their homes and didn't have an opportunity to gather and pray together as the lockdown was enforced in the country. But we have now learned that they are gathering again and sharing their experiences of being in lockdown. One of the women said that the lockdown time was the most dangerous of her life as her abusive husband was always present in the house, not for helping but for arguing and fighting. This situation may be the same for some of the others.

## **Preparation for returning to the DRC**

We had been in lockdown for almost five months before visiting some of our partner churches. During that time, most of our contact was through Zoom, email and phone calls. We had successful Zoom meetings with Peace Lutheran Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, and good responses through emails and phone calls.

Now we begin to move to a limited schedule. We visited Black Forest Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in late August, where we experienced good interaction and exchanges from the committee and church members. We are also visiting two church partners in Pennsylvania and the North American Lutheran Seminary.

## **Prayer requests**

- + Pray for the DRC government to provide for the security of its citizens.
- + Pray for the confessional Church leaders – that God may give them strength and vision in continuing to lead the Church in a good direction and that the Word be preached faithfully.
- + Pray for God's provision to help furnish the dormitory for future use by students.
- + Pray for God's provision as we plan to return to the DRC and while we are in the United States through the end of December.
- + Pray that we may fulfill the requirements for obtaining visas.
- + Pray that we may have good meetings with the churches that we will be visiting.

***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/partners/didi-panzo](https://thenalc.org/partners/didi-panzo).***



# LWR QUILTS AND KITS THOUGHT DESTROYED IN BEIRUT, LEBANON, EXPLOSION ARE FOUND INTACT

Some good news from Beirut: Lutheran World Relief (LWR) reports that three 40-foot shipping containers filled with thousands of mission quilts and school kits, personal care kits and baby care kits, which reported as destroyed in the Aug. 4 explosions at the port of Beirut, Lebanon, have been found intact.

It took several weeks for Lutheran World Relief's partner to gain access to the port area where the containers were stored.

Digging through the piles of rubble in the city's destroyed port, local staff have been able to locate and extract a shipment of humanitarian supplies meant to help refugees and other vulnerable communities in Lebanon.

"We're still learning all we can, and it's like piecing together a complex puzzle," said Carrie Taneyhill, Lutheran World Relief's director of humanitarian response.

Taneyhill said staff from local partner, Anera, have been able to reach the scene of three damaged shipping containers holding more than \$600,000 worth of humanitarian supplies, including kits assembled to promote personal hygiene and bales of hand-sewn quilts from churches.

The goods had been reported as destroyed by the Aug. 4 ammonium nitrate blast that killed more than 180 people. The devastation forced more than 300,000 people from their homes. Destruction was so severe that the area around the port, where the shipping containers had been housed, has just now been able to be reached.

Lutheran World Relief staff have worked for weeks with Anera staff to gain access to the port to verify



## LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

the damage. It appeared at first glance that the three containers were behind a building, a spot which may have afforded the containers some small amount of protection from the blast. The containers were damaged – but not destroyed, as initially believed.

Distributing humanitarian supplies is only one component of the Lutheran World Relief response. The agency is also working to address immense shelter needs, helping poorer families to repair and return to their homes.

"While some of our partner's shipping containers were heavily damaged, it appears that the three containers containing the quilts and kits were stored behind a concrete block building, a spot that protected them from the blast," LWR announced. The quilts and kits have been transferred to a warehouse, from where they will be distributed to refugees living in Lebanon, principally from Syria and the Palestinian territories.

In addition to distributing the quilts and kits, Lutheran World Relief is also working to address immense shelter needs in the wake of the explosion, helping poorer families to repair and return to their homes.

***Lutheran World Relief is a ministry partner of the North American Lutheran Church. To partner with their ministry or learn more, please visit [lwr.org](http://lwr.org).***



# NO POLITICS IN CHURCH, PLEASE

*The congregation "is to approach the divine model, as the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16); without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Ephesians 5:27, Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:27; the Temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:17; 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22); a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) ... grounded on Christ and on His Word, which begets and nourishes true faith. That faith must condition the life of the individual and of the body. That Word must direct and regulate all the church's activities. Under it all must bow. That Word of salvation must beget a living experience, a fervent love, a loving service." – G. H. Gerberding, "The Lutheran Pastor," pages 217-218.*

Lord, please deliver us from this political season!

As we endure yet another presidential campaign season in the United States, it seems particularly testy and offensive, given COVID-19, protests, urban and racial tension and division. Even our Canadian NALC folks may be praying the same prayer of deliverance as U.S. politics can't be contained by a border! It seems so nasty and troublesome. We just wish it were over, and Nov. 3 can't come quickly enough.

As a long-time reader of presidential biographies, it may only seem that politics are in a downward spiral, but even George Washington had harsh and vile critics, as has every presidential candidate since. As many of us are now simply turning away from news – whether on TV, laptop or smartphone – sighing "enough is enough," you might think this Ministry Matters article is a plea, an exhortation to please keep political partisanship – whether right or left – out of the Church. And that's an appropriate message, to be sure.

The point here, however, is different. Inspired by what we see and hear, and are forced to tolerate in society, the plea here is to not allow political maneuvering to infect the Body of Christ. Whether the issues relate to congregational projects and expenditures, lay leadership positions within the congregation, or what color to paint the sanctuary,



---

## MINISTRY MATTERS

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

---

there are all too many instances of tension and conflict in our congregations as laity and pastors wrestle over power and control. First, we need to admit that political posturing and strategizing is present in the Body of Christ and then we need to name it so that we can remove it from the "Temple of the Lord," that, please God, our congregations may "approach the divine model of the Body of Christ."

The quote above is from *The Lutheran Pastor*, a book by the Rev. Dr. G. H. Gerberding, published in 1902. The book is intended to guide the formation of pastors as they prepare for and enter into ordained ministry within the Church. The wise counsel offered more than a century ago rings true today, and I wish copies were available for every NALC seminarian and newly ordained pastor.

While Pastor Gerberding is speaking of the model of the Church of Jesus Christ as being "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing," he is addressing the reality that every congregation is in danger of being twisted and tangled in such a way that it may not be recognizable as the Body of Christ. All too often, congregations struggle with power plays, grasping for authority, attempting to force one agenda or course of action on the body as a whole, introducing political maneuvering that is contrary to life in community "grounded on Christ and His Word." A few things may be said about such maneuvering.

1. When we engage in such activities, we may believe and claim to have the best intentions for the sake of, and sometimes the survival of, our beloved

*Continued on Page 17*



congregation. We may convince others that our actions are necessary and elicit support based on that premise. However, when we act outside of, or in opposition to, elected congregational leadership, sometimes contrary to the will of the congregation as a whole, such actions may not be grounded on Christ and His Word, but on the self-centeredness which causes us to believe we know better than everyone else, collectively, in the Body of Christ. When a person or group of people in a congregation attempts to manipulate the congregation as a whole to achieve their desired goals, it is sin – as it is divisive, destructive and introduces toxic evil into the congregation. Lay people and pastors are tempted to this kind of sin, as it is a refusal to “let God be God,” thinking oneself lord of the church. This is, indeed, the original sin of idolatry, seeking to replace God’s will and action through the congregation with one’s own.

2. Nothing drives members and visitors away from a congregation so powerfully as does politicking within the congregation. The test for such actions is whether they are fostering and encouraging peace, unity and “fervent love,” or division and disunity. As I was called to a congregation which had been fighting for 15 years and had “kicked out” six pastors, the few remaining members would ask me, “Pastor, people visit worship one Sunday, but they never come back. Why is that?” The answer was simple: No one wants to belong to a congregation which is divided and tense, with worldly politicking happening quite obviously before service, in the fellowship hall or parking lot. One-time visitors may not be able to put their finger on the tension, but one visit is enough to sense a community that is torn apart by agenda-driven maneuvering.

3. The turn to political manipulation in a congregation grows out of lack of faith in God and in the Body of Christ constituted by Christ Himself. That faith grounded on Christ and His Word “must condition the life of the individual and the body. That Word must direct and regulate all the church’s activities. Under it all must bow. That Word of salvation must beget a living experience, a fervent love, a loving service,” as Dr. Gerberding said.

4. When there are valid questions being raised in a congregation, whether related to pastoral or council leadership decisions, direction of the congregation, mission focus or other concerns, the proper strategy for addressing our questions is through appropriate channels in council and congregation, and through our Lord’s guidance in Matthew 18:15-17. Healthy congregations are those which address matters openly, honestly and in good order, for the sake of the whole. “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33 ESV). Sadly, it does need to be said: Being a pastor or lay member of a congregation does not come with a promise or expectation that we will always get what we want, always have our way or always have our personal needs met.

There are surely many reasons for the decline of Christianity in North America, evidenced by the decline in worship attendance in many congregations. Most every congregation is seeking renewal and restoration. Too many congregations have not yet come to acknowledge and confess that part of their struggle, surely, comes from the presence of politicking in the congregation, based on human desires for power, influence, control and getting our own way, no matter the cost.

As we strive to combat such evil when it creeps into our congregations, let us also commit ourselves to being the Body of Christ, a spiritual house, grounded on Christ and His Word. Let us respect and honor every member of the Body, listening as well as speaking, yielding to the whole for the sake of the whole, with all humility and gentleness, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2). And let us agree, please, there will be no politics in the Church!

***Pastor David Wendel is the assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. You may contact him at [dwendel@thenalc.org](mailto:dwendel@thenalc.org).***



**NALC**

North American Lutheran Church



# YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

By *Laurie Pecuch*

A few resources to share:

**COVID-19: To Form or Not To Form.** If your insurance company requires you to have a COVID-19 release form for your ministry to young people, by all means, use the form they have created. If they do not provide a form for you, we have developed a template. Zip us an email and we will send you what we created.

Also, our congregation has been doing monthly **Family Faith Boxes**. If you are interested in seeing an example, zip us an email.

The school year is upon us. Which means the **monthly webinars** have started. We are continuing our “trot” through the New Testament. The next is on Oct. 13 at 2 p.m. ET via Zoom and Facebook. Contact us to receive the Zoom link.

*Laurie Pecuch serves the NALC as a youth ministry coach. You may contact her at [families@thenalc.org](mailto:families@thenalc.org).*

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### Bishop

The Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo  
San Jose, California  
[dselbo@thenalc.org](mailto:dselbo@thenalc.org)

### General Secretary

The Rev. Mark C. Chavez  
Landisville, Pennsylvania  
[mchavez@thenalc.org](mailto:mchavez@thenalc.org)

### Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba  
Atlanta, Georgia  
[gbuba@thenalc.org](mailto:gbuba@thenalc.org)

### Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry & Ecumenism

The Rev. Dr. David Wendel  
Jacksonville, Florida  
[dwendel@thenalc.org](mailto:dwendel@thenalc.org)

### Assistant to the Bishop for Domestic Mission & Discipleship

The Rev. Phillip Gagnon  
St. Albert, Alberta  
[pgagnon@thenalc.org](mailto:pgagnon@thenalc.org)

### Let's keep in touch

The Rev. Dr. David J. Baer, *editor*  
Whitewood, South Dakota  
[news@thenalc.org](mailto:news@thenalc.org)

### Director of Communications

The Rev. Andrew S. Ames Fuller (ACNA)  
Ambridge, Pennsylvania  
[afuller@thenalc.org](mailto:afuller@thenalc.org)

### President, North American Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Eric Riesen  
Ashland, Ohio & Ambridge, Pennsylvania  
[eriesen@thenals.org](mailto:eriesen@thenals.org)

### Director for Aging Ministry & Congregational Renewal

The Rev. Brad Hales  
Culpeper, Virginia  
[bhales@thenalc.org](mailto:bhales@thenalc.org)

### Disaster Response Coordinator

Mary Bates  
Caldwell, Ohio  
[disasterresponse@thenalc.org](mailto:disasterresponse@thenalc.org)

### North American Lutheran Church

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220  
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202  
+1-651-633-6004

Please copy and share this newsletter widely.