



AREA ASSISTANTS TO THE BISHOP ARE APPOINTED BY BISHOP SELBO

Five area assistants to the bishop have been appointed by NALC Bishop Dan Selbo. The primary role of these new assistants to the bishop is to provide discipling and pastoral care for the deans, pastors and mission districts in five geographic areas of the North American Lutheran Church.

The new assistants to the bishop are the Rev. Dr. Jesse Abbott of Loveland, Ohio; the Rev. Mark Braaten of Bullard, Texas; the Rev. Marvin Combs of Huntington Beach, California, the Rev. Kevin Ree of Bentley, Alberta; and the Rev. William "Bill" White of Lexington, South Carolina.

The positions were created in response to an action of the 2021 NALC Mission Convocation. These part-time positions (10 hours per week) begin in May and will be responsible and accountable to the bishop.

The convocation's decision came after several years of study and planning by the NALC Executive Council and in response to one of the commitments made in the NALC's 2020 Vision.

The new positions are designed to be an extension and evidence of our denominational commitment to discipleship and a model of the kind of discipling relationships the NALC seeks to have among our pastors and congregational members throughout the NALC.



Jesse Abbott



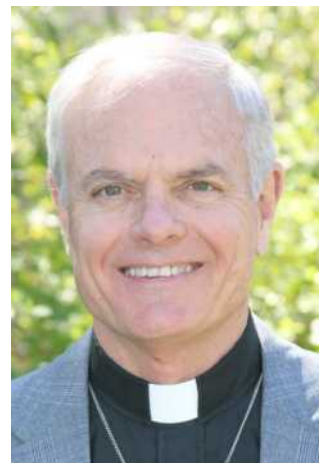
Mark Braaten



Marvin Combs



Kevin Ree



Bill White

The five area assistants were chosen by Bishop Selbo from a list of nominees provided by mission districts. The selections were confirmed by the Executive Council at its

Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

January meeting. The pastors were installed in their new positions on Feb. 16 during a worship service at the NALC Pastors' Conference in Orlando, Florida.

Two of the five assistants will serve two-year terms, with the other three serving for three years. After the initial staggered terms, which are renewable, all future appointments will be for three years.

The original intent was to divide the NALC into four geographic areas, with one assistant per area. The areas were created based upon the number of mission districts in each geographic area, with no more than 12 mission districts assigned to each area assistant.



The new area assistants to the bishop were installed by Bishop Dan Selbo at the 2022 NALC Pastors' Conference in Orlando, Florida.

However, with the majority of NALC congregations and mission districts in the midwestern, southern and eastern areas of the United States, the original western area — which included the western half of the United States as well as all of Canada — was so vast and diverse that it was decided to divide that geographic area into two areas. Thus, the NALC begins with five areas and area assistants instead of the originally suggested four.

A map and listing of the five areas — Eastern, Midwestern, Northern, Southern and Western — with their respective mission districts, can be found on the NALC website.

“As the NALC continues to grow numerically, it is essential that we stay connected and continue to grow in the support and discipling relationships we provide,” said Bishop Selbo. “The connections offered through the area assistants will enhance the communication and support we offer to our pastors and deans, and strengthen our commitment to the Great Commission we have been given by our Lord Jesus” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The assistants to the bishop provided the following biographical information for the NALC News:

REV. MARVIN COMBS WESTERN

Pastor Marv and Linda Combs have been married 37 years and have two adult sons. He is a native Southern Californian and serves as associate pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Huntington Beach, California.

Pastor Marv holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Organizational Leadership from Biola University and Master of Arts in Theology from Concordia University, Irvine, California. For many years he served the Pacifica Synod of the ELCA and then as dean of the Southwest Pacific Mission District of the NALC, as well as pastor for various local congregations. Pastor Marv now serves at Grace as the pastor for congregational care.

His passion is disciple-making through mentoring, educating and sending God's people into the world. When his busy schedule allows, Pastor Marv can be found fishing in the local waters searching for the catch of a lifetime.

REV. JESSE ABBOTT MIDWESTERN

Pastor Abbott lives in Loveland, Ohio, near Cincinnati, with his wife Cindy. They have three adult sons and two granddaughters. He and Cindy were born in Coldwater, Michigan, and have been joyfully married for more than 39 years. His interests and hobbies include stained glass, mosaic work and he considers himself an amateur archaeologist with a focus on the Holy Land.

Pastor Abbott serves as interim pastor at First Lutheran Church in Troy, Ohio, and served as interim at St. John Lutheran Church in Greenville, Ohio, 2020-2021. He served as pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1999 to 2015. He was the director of parish operations responsible for all finance and facilities as well as discipleship, adult education and men's ministries.

He has served as an ordained pastor in seven congregations over 33 years while concurrently serving in the U.S. Army Reserve — retiring from the Reserve in 2020.

Pastor Jess received his Bachelors of Business Administration degree from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan; his Masters of Divinity degree from Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota; and his Doctor of Ministry degree from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College where he earned his Master of Strategic Studies degree.

Pastor Abbott served as an Army Chaplain and was deployed to support Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004 serving as the Installation Chaplain for Army Central Command responsible for land forces in the nations of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. He was also deployed to Iraq in 2011. He functioned as the Division-level Command Chaplain responsible for overseeing Garrison Religious Support at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, and the withdrawal of religious supplies

and equipment from Iraq. He finished his military career by serving on active duty as the Deputy Command Chaplain of U.S. Central Command from 2015-2020, serving as religious affairs special staff for three four-star commanders and their staffs. His awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal and the Korea Defense Service Medal.

REV. BILL WHITE EASTERN

Pastor Bill is passionate about discipleship! His ministry has evolved around striving to live out Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission.

He has been an ordained parish pastor for more than 36 years, having served five congregations in Florida, Tennessee and South Carolina.

His undergraduate degree was earned in Business Administration from Mississippi State University. He attended Christ Seminary-Seminex for two years, transferring to Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary where he received his Master of Divinity degree in 1985. He earned his Doctor of Ministry degree in 2003 from Memphis Theological Seminary.

Pastor Bill was approved for the roster of the NALC by Bishop Paull Spring in March of 2011. He has served the NALC as a dean and presently serves on the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Team.

Family is of utmost importance to Pastor Bill. He has been married to Cheryl Denley White since 1979. They have a son and a daughter, both of whom are happily married and have gifted them with four grandsons, ages four and under. He and Cheryl are enjoying intentional Christian grandparenting and are looking forward to enthusiastically devoting even more time to this calling.

Pastor Bill is excited and eager to serve our Lord Jesus Christ through this new position in the NALC.

REV. KEVIN REE

NORTHERN

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and greetings from Green Glen Farm. My name is Kevin Ree and I have been appointed as the area assistant to the bishop for the northern area of the NALC. Shelly and I have recently moved to the farm where I grew up, following my father's passing in 2019. Shelly is a teacher, and we are busy renovating the farmhouse and raising cattle. I run a small herd of 65 purebred Murray Grey cattle on 400 acres. I currently serve as the chair of the Canada Section of the NALC as well as the president of the Canadian Murray Grey Association.

Prior to our move to central Alberta, I served St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Barrhead, Alberta, where I served for 12 wonderful years. We raised our three children there as well — at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Millet, Alberta, where I also served for 12 years.

Our oldest daughter, Anna, is a veterinarian who has recently accepted a new position in Penticton, British Columbia. Marta, our second daughter, lives with her husband, Brian, in Burnaby, British Columbia, where she is working on her Ph.D. at Simon Fraser University in fisheries. Brian is completing his doctorate through the University of Alaska. Our son Jacob, our youngest, has just completed his Masters in Occupational Therapy and lives with his wife, Raeliene, in Edmonton, Alberta. Raeliene is a music teacher and also grew up in Barrhead.

I was ordained in 1991 and have thoroughly enjoyed rural ministry over the past 30 years of serving in the Lutheran Church. I look forward to relating to, encouraging and supporting deans and congregations from Minnesota (where my father was born) throughout the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana, and, of course, all of Canada. It is an exciting time to be a part of such a vibrant and growing Lutheran body.

Over the years Shelly and I have been very involved in youth ministry. We organised the first two youth

gatherings for the Canadian Mission District and participated in many national gatherings over the years. We have been quite involved in outdoor ministry. I served on the Board of Mulhurst Lutheran Camp for several years and our children have all spent several years on staff at both Wilderness Ranch and Mulhurst. If you ever get an opportunity to spend a week at Wilderness during the summer, riding or packing, it is an iconic "northern" ranchlands experience! One of my goals is to get Bishop Selbo on a horse up in the Porcupine Hills. (We succeeded with Bishop John!)

If you are ever up for the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference in Canmore (an awesome NALC study event), we would love to have you join us at the farm. The coffee is always on, and we would love to show you around. More importantly, I hope to hear about your joys as well as your struggles in ministry as together we are called to partnership in the Gospel, being and making disciples in the gracious presence of Christ Jesus.

REV. MARK BRAATEN

SOUTHERN

Pastor Mark Braaten is a retired pastor in Bullard, Texas. He has served in parish ministry for 40 years, with calls in Kentucky, Colorado, New Mexico, Minnesota and the last 17 years at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Tyler, Texas.

He is a graduate of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, with both his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry coming from Luther. One of Mark's favorite areas of study is the book of Revelation, which was the topic of his D.Min. work. He is the author of a number of books and articles.

Mark is married to Karen, and they have three children — Amber, with fiancé Luke, Christopher and spouse, Rachel, and Cassaundra. Mark is also dean of the North Texas Mission District and has served on the NALC Executive Council. He is using retirement to focus on his swimming and fishing abilities, and he is looking forward to this new service in the NALC.

SPIRITUAL ORPHANS NETWORK IS HELPING TO SERVE THOSE IMPACTED BY WAR IN UKRAINE

By Pastor David Breidenbach

In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

— 2 Corinthians 8:2-5 ESV

Early in the evening on Feb. 24, during an exchange with one of our closest Ukrainian friends and partners in ministry, I received the following message of assurance: “Don’t worry, there is no way there will be war with Russia.”



Convey of vehicles helping refugees to leave Ukraine coordinated by Spiritual Orphans Network partners.

Four hours later, Russian troops began to invade Ukraine at its eastern border.

How I wish his words would have borne true. Of course, the world now knows that the seemingly unthinkable has happened. Forty-four million Ukrainian souls have been shaken to their core — their way of life and very livelihoods now in jeopardy because of the war inflicted on Ukraine by Russia.

Only the Lord could have prepared us for what happened next.

Spiritual Orphans Network (SON) is a relational ministry. Over the last 30 years, we have worked to connect North American congregations with the remnants of the Lutheran church in former communist and Soviet bloc nations.

Most people who are familiar with SON know us by the many short-term summer mission teams we take



Pastor Scott and Lena Yount, SON missionaries to the Kiev region of Ukraine, were welcomed as refugees in Slovakia. They are now welcoming other refugees from Ukraine.

Continued on Page 6

overseas to host English Bible camps for children and life and adventure retreats for teens in countries like Albania, Estonia, Ethiopia, Latvia, Mongolia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

What many may not realize is that SON also works, year in and year out, alongside our overseas partners in ministry. SON regularly hosts conferences and retreats that provide much needed spiritual care for strengthening, teaching, training and discipling international leaders for ministry and outreach in the context of their own communities.

A truly healthy network flows in both directions, and through the work of SON Network, God has built strong relationships which have strengthened ministries, *both* in former communist and Soviet bloc countries, as well as here in North America. The result is a vast and robust network within the Church Militant, connecting spiritual orphans to the global family of Christ.

Never in our 30-year history has this been more apparent than now. Several weeks prior to the start of the war — when we were hearing only rumblings — we contacted our long-time partners in Slovakia to ask refuge for Pastor Scott and Lena Yount, SON missionaries to the Kiev region of Ukraine. We immediately received confirmation in the affirmative.

On Feb. 26, Pastor Scott and Lena were received, with open arms, at the Ichthus International Lutheran Youth Center in Velky Slavkov, Slovakia, by Vlado and Monika Mataš.



Pastor Scott Yount leading worship for refugees from Ukraine.



Pastors from Ukraine pose with Pastor David Breidenbach of Spiritual Orphans Network, Pastor Gemechis Buba, NALC assistant to the bishop for missions, and NALC Bishop John Bradosky at a pastors' conference in Ukraine in 2019.

Additionally, within 24 hours of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, SON was asked to start a Ukraine Relief Fund. The response has been both inspiring and humbling, with over \$80,000 contributed within the first two weeks.

This immediate and generous response from North American congregations and individuals has allowed us to respond quickly to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

Some would perhaps say that SON has suddenly become a social — rather than a relational — ministry. Every ministry finds itself in different seasons and, for SON, this is a time where we have been called to respond to the acute needs in Ukraine.

It is only through the long-term relationships, with so many gifted people of God, where we find the hands, the feet, and the voices that He prepared beforehand to render aid and lend comfort to those in need. It seems that we were being prepared, all along, for “such a time as this.”

Funds from the SON Ukraine Relief Fund have first gone directly to Ukraine to purchase petrol for convoys (many of them arranged and driven by Ukrainian Lutheran pastors) transporting women and children, the elderly and disabled, and international students to safer borders.

Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6

Also, funds have been used to purchase food, medicine and other necessary supplies for delivery to shut-ins and those otherwise unable to leave the country. By the third week of the war, donations received through the SON Ukraine Relief Fund have been used to evacuate more than 700 people and have fed thousands.



2021 Special Needs Bible Camp in Ukraine sponsored by Spiritual Orphans Network.

Second, funds have gone to Slovakia where, through the efforts of Pastor Scott and the youth center in Velky Slavkov, more than 350 refugees have been

What does the future hold? Only God knows, but we will continue to work to meet the immediate needs of those displaced and uprooted by the war in Ukraine, and are prepared to respond as longer-term solutions reveal themselves — up to and including relocating Ukrainian refugees to North America.



Students at SON Bible camp in Albania

At the same time, we are training six different teams to serve alongside our overseas ministry partners this summer, hosting Bible camps and retreats for children and teens. These will almost certainly include some newly relocated Ukrainian students.

No matter the mode or method of ministry, SON is in mission to connect spiritual orphans to the global family of Christ. To God be the glory! Amen.

If you would like to learn more about SON and how you can join a future short-term mission team visit the Spiritual Orphans Network website at SONetwork.org.

received, clothed, fed and housed. To help assuage feelings of anxiety and loneliness, regular worship and fellowship opportunities have been provided. In cases where refugees have plans to move further into Europe, help is being offered to work out the details of travel, including a small stipend to help with costs.

Similar aid is being extended, to Ukrainian refugees, through SON ministry partners in Austria, Czechia, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Moldova and Poland. We believe that support funds will be needed in these countries as well and are monitoring the situation closely.



Spiritual Orphans Network teenage Bible camp in Slovakia

LETTER FROM BISHOP SELBO ON WAR IN UKRAINE

Dear Pastors, Congregations, Partners in Ministry,
Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Russia has invaded Ukraine and is working to remove its government from power to replace it with its own. The actions of the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, are unprovoked, the conflict is bloody, and the hostile takeover is one being protested by many nations throughout Europe and the entire world.

As a church body, the North American Lutheran Church is in strong opposition to this war and is urging its pastors and congregations to be praying for an end to this senseless conflict. The NALC also has strong ties to the Ukrainian people through one of our partner ministries, the Spiritual Orphans Network (SON Network). Formerly EEMN, the SON Network, led by Executive Director Pastor David Breidenbach, serves people in parts of the world that are often overlooked as a mission field. They excel at reaching spiritual orphans in the unique context of former communist nations. In this case, they are actively involved in supporting missionaries in Ukraine, as well as providing humanitarian support to the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing that country in the war.

As you consider how to support the people of Ukraine, know that the SON Network is an official partner ministry of the North American Lutheran Church and that their work amidst this devastating conflict is being done openly in the name of Jesus Christ.

We encourage you to be praying for the people in Ukraine, for the families torn apart by the war, for the humanitarian efforts that will be needed for some time, as well as for the hearts of the leaders of Russia and Ukraine to find ways to bring this conflict to an end, to move forward in ways that would lead to peace, and that people would be drawn to the One in whom all lasting peace is found, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following prayer is offered for your use, individually, as families and in your congregations:

Gracious God, we come to You as people who know we have fallen short of Your call, who are in daily need of Your forgiveness and grace, and who have no lasting hope apart from the promises we have in Jesus. And yet we come with thankful and expectant hearts, knowing that You have promised to hear and to answer prayer.

We pray for You to be working in the hearts and the lives of the people in Russia and the Ukraine who are caught in this senseless war and whose lives are being torn apart because of the conflict. We pray for the families who have been separated from their loved ones, for those who have been physically hurt as a result of the fighting, and for those lives that have been lost. We pray, Lord, that You would open doors for peace talks and negotiations to happen that would bring an end to the war and that would save the lives of many for whom our Lord Jesus died.

Work through the nations of our world, through their governments, the United Nations, and through those leaders who have authority and opportunity to influence and impact what is happening in Christ-honoring ways. Be with our missionaries and mission agencies – that their work would be a witness to the love You have for all people, and to the desire You have for Your world that we would live in peace.

Help us to never lose sight of the promises we have in Jesus and to never lose hope in the One who, through His cross and resurrection from the dead, has overcome the world. In His most holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” –John 16:33 NIV

Bishop Dan Selbo
North American Lutheran Church

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR POSITIONS TO BE ELECTED AT 2022 CONVOCAATION

The NALC Nominating Committee is seeking the names of candidates for nomination to serve in positions to be elected at the 2022 NALC Mission Convocation to be held online Aug. 5-6.

The convocation will elect one lay person and one pastor to the NALC Executive Council and two members of the Court of Adjudication — all to three-year terms.

The convocation will also elect three members of the Board of Regents for the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) to five-year terms.

The term lengths — three years instead of four for Executive Council and Court of Adjudication and five years instead of six for the Board of Regents — were changed as a part of the NALC's transition to having in-person convocations every other year.

The Executive Council functions as the board of directors for the NALC, providing leadership for the church between annual convocations. The council normally meets in person on a quarterly basis.

The Court of Adjudication hears appeals from disciplinary decisions; resolves questions of interpretation of NALC governing documents; and decides claims that a person or entity has violated these governing documents. Both pastors and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication.

The Board of Regents is made up of nine members (clergy or lay), the bishop and the seminary president. Its chief responsibilities are to provide oversight, supervision and direction for the NALS Network and president, including fiscal plans, new programs and initiatives, resolution of disputes and fund raising.

Congregations are encouraged to nominate individuals for any of the open positions. Please confirm that individuals are willing and able to serve prior to submitting their names.

Those who feel called to serve in any of these positions are asked to contact the leaders of their congregation to inform them of their openness to serving.

All nominations should be submitted by April 27. This will give the committee the time necessary to compile biographical information on the candidates and comply with the constitutional requirements to provide this information to NALC members.

Nominees will be asked to complete the Nominee Biographical Form and to provide a photo for publication with the biographical information.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position and nomination and biographical forms are available at thenalc.org/nominate.

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

CONGREGATIONAL ANNUAL REPORTS

Congregational leaders and pastors are reminded to complete their annual reports to the NALC.

Information for completing the annual congregational reports for 2021 was sent to all pastors and congregations in mid-January.

Information gleaned from the reports is very helpful for the NALC's long-range planning and for how best to support congregations in their ministries.

It will work best to print and answer all the questions by hand before you begin filling in the online form. You can download the preview version and complete the report at thenalc.org/congregationalreport.

MEKANE YESUS SEMINARY BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE

By Pastor Mark Braaten

The North American Lutheran Church is in a full-communion relationship with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). It is the largest and fastest growing Lutheran church body in the world.

The Holy Spirit is doing incredible things in Ethiopia and the church is growing at an astonishing rate! The NALC has been particularly attentive to work that is going on at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa. Here are some updates:

First, an update on flood relief work. As you may remember, last August the seminary was hit with a severe and unexpected flood. Eight people lost their lives, numerous buildings, especially faculty housing, were destroyed.

The seminary faces a huge rebuilding and redevelopment challenge. Numerous ministries and church bodies, including the NALC, are helping with donations and prayers.

The plans at this time are to build two new buildings to replace those that were destroyed. The first of these buildings has been designed and plans are to break ground for it in early April.

The second building is taking longer. The seminary is looking to secure some land from the Ethiopian government for the second building. In addition, the government will need to approve all of the designs and plans. The hope is that groundbreaking for the second building will happen this fall.

Both of these buildings will be multipurpose. The upper floors will provide housing for faculty and be



Construction continues on a new building for the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia.

used in other ways by the seminary. The lower floors will be rented out to commercial businesses to provide income for the seminary.

One of the goals of the seminary is to become financially self-sufficient. Adding buildings that generate income will help tremendously toward this goal. Much of the anticipated income will be used for student scholarships and support.

The NALC continues to be involved with this. Pastor Gemechis Buba, assistant to the bishop for missions, has made a number of trips to Ethiopia to see and discuss this work firsthand. Many congregations, groups and individuals in the NALC, continue with financial support.

The NALC has a fund set up for the Mekane Yesus Seminary Flood Relief. Donations may be sent to: North American Lutheran Church; P.O. Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please indicate EECMY on the memo line of your check.

Continued on Page 11

Continued from Page 10

Please continue this great work! And please pray for the seminary as it continues to rebuild.

It is miraculous, the seminary is using this tragedy of the flood to move into more financial stability. It is a long and challenging journey, but the hand of our Lord is at work.

And a second announcement: Last year, people and congregations in the NALC were donating for another building that is being built on the seminary campus. This building will house space for the seminary, for Lutheran Bible Translators, and will also have business space to rent for income.

The funds for this original project have all been promised, and the work is getting close to completion. The hope is to have a service of dedication for this building this June.

Please do celebrate and thank the Lord for this exciting work. Thank you again for your support! Our God is good! Even in disaster and challenges, He leads His people onward in mission and ministry.

For more information about the work at the EECMY seminary, please contact Pastor Gemechis Buba at



Another view of construction of a new building for the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia.

gbuba@thenalc.org or Pastor John Conrad at jtcswede@gmail.com.

HOW TO HELP UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Lutheran World Relief, an NALC ministry partner, is providing emergency cash support and delivering food and personal care items to Ukrainian refugees in Poland. LWR has provided essential supplies including milk, energy biscuits, personal hygiene products and room partition panels to the Evangelical-Augsburg Church of St. Martin in Krakow, Poland, which has established a hostel for Ukrainian women and children.

LWR is shipping and distributing LWR quilts and personal care kits in partnership with Polish Humanitarian Action. The initial distribution includes 8,000 care kits and 7,400 quilts. You can learn more about LWR's response at lwr.org.

Spiritual Orphans Network, an NALC ministry partner, works with Christians in former communist and Soviet bloc nations including Ukraine. They have been supporting the ministry of Ukrainian pastors and those serving refugees. You can learn more about their ministry and Ukraine Special Fund at SONetwork.org. (Also see article on Pages 5-7.)

Water Mission, an NALC recognized ministry, is working with local churches and civic groups to help with evacuations and meet physical and emotional needs for refugees and people still in Ukraine. Water Mission focuses on providing safe water in crisis situations. You can learn more about Water Mission's response at watermission.org.

THE ATTRACTION OF THE CROSS

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” – John 12:32 ESV

Last month, just prior to this season of Lent, more than 200 pastors and leaders from throughout the North American Lutheran Church gathered in Orlando, Florida, for our annual Pastors’ Conference. The theme for the gathering was as engaging as it was relevant: “Always Be Ready: Apologetics in Real Life.”

This month we find ourselves in the season of Lent — 40 days in which we focus our attention on Jesus, as we walk together through some of the final events of our Lord’s life, and as we come face-to-face with the reason Jesus had to die, because of our sin.

As I consider the topic of last month’s conference to “Always Be Ready,” and as I reflect on the season of Lent and its implications for our lives, I am struck by how our calling in life, as disciples of Jesus, is intimately connected to the promise we have in Him: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

When Jesus first spoke those words, He wasn’t talking about His resurrection, even though He would soon be lifted up from the grave. He wasn’t talking about His ascension, even though 40 days after His resurrection He would be lifted up into heaven. He was talking about His death. He was talking about the day He would offer His life. He was talking about how, when He would go to the cross, He would draw all people to Himself.

What is it about the death of Jesus that continues to attract people today? What is it about the death of Jesus on the cross that continues to draw people to who He is and to what He has done? I believe it is fair to say that the cross, in itself, does not have an inherent attraction. In fact, it’s probably fair to say that most people are repelled by the cross, rather than drawn to it.

In many of the so-called “modern churches” these days, with some of the more 21st-century ways of



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

approaching Jesus, you won’t find a cross. You’ll find flowers. You’ll find rainbows. You’ll find waterfalls and things pleasant. You might even find an empty tomb or something to indicate that God is alive and well in the world, which He is. But, in many churches today, the cross has been left out.

How come? Because it’s offensive. Because it was an instrument of torture and punishment. Because, if we want to attract people to the church (or so the argument goes), then let’s not put anything in the way that would cause an offense. But the cross is offensive. It always has been. It always will be.

The apostle Paul spoke of the cross as a “stumbling block.” He said it was “foolishness” to the outside world. He said it would cause people to trip up and to stumble and to fall. And it did. And it still does. There’s something about the cross that repels more than attracts. Nonetheless, Paul also said, “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentile world ... but to those who are called and who are being saved, the power and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The cross, in itself, has no attraction. There’s nothing about the cross, by itself, that draws people. But when Jesus is on the cross it does. When there’s a deeper meaning attached, then it will.

I still remember some of the basic experiments we did in science classes with magnets. We were trying to determine the attraction to different elements that each one had. And they were all different. Depending upon the size and the shape and the

Continued on Page 13

magnetic pull, as well as the elements themselves, the attraction was more or less. The one consistency was that the closer the elements came to the magnet, the stronger the attraction became. The closer they were placed to the magnet itself, the greater the effect of the magnetic pull.

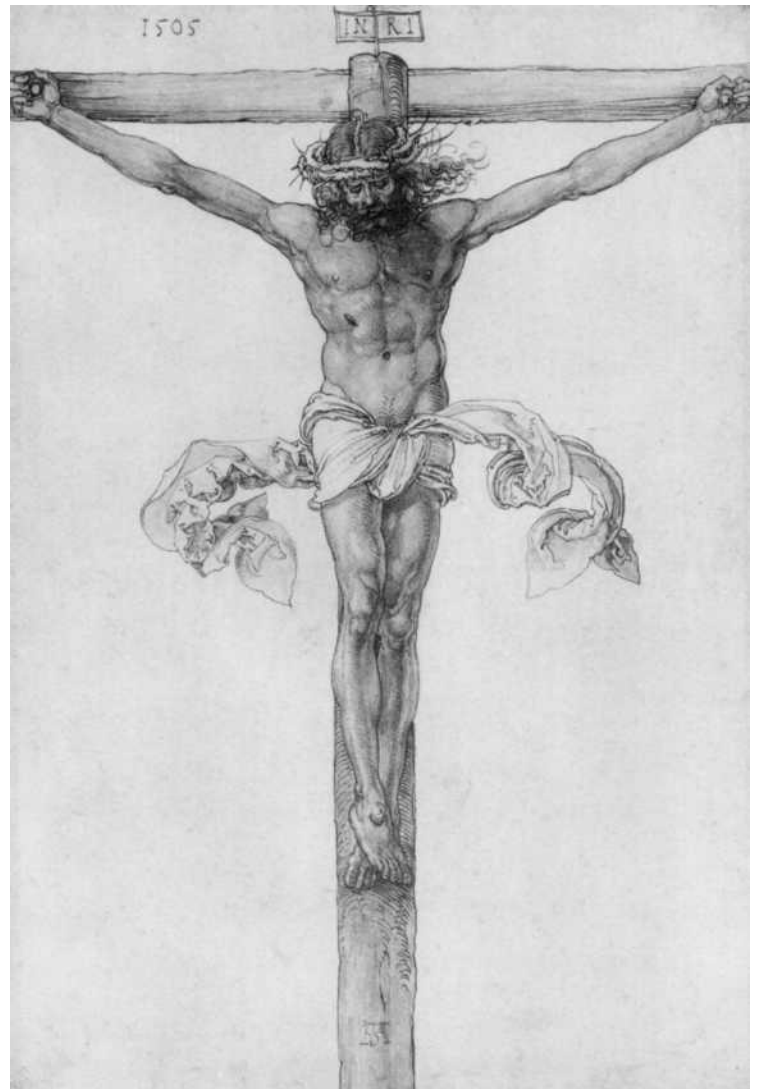
The same is true when it comes to Jesus. The same is true when it comes to the Christian faith and the cross of Christ. I can't tell you how many people I've watched over the years who have placed themselves outside of the Church, who've chosen to live at arm's length or greater from the things offered to us in Jesus. As a result, their faith has not grown stronger, but weaker. The attraction is still there. The drawing power of Jesus has not changed. But the closer you get to the power, the stronger the attraction. The further away you move in your life from the cross and from Christ, the less powerful the pull.

Just prior to our Lord's words about drawing all people to himself, John tells us that a voice came from heaven and that when the crowd heard it, some said "it was thunder." Others said, "an angel had spoken to Him." Do you remember what Jesus said? He said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine" (John 12:29-30).

How true that was — not only of the voice the people heard but of everything Jesus did. Everything Jesus did in His life was for our benefit, and not for His. Everything He endured as He made His way to the cross was so that you and I could have life, even as His was being given up.

That's the attraction of the cross. The cross attracts because it was the Son of God, giving up His life for the sake of the world. The cross continues to attract because the Creator of this world was stepping aside and going to His death so that you and I could have life.

The cross does attract when it's connected to Jesus. Not inherently in itself, but when tied together with Christ, it has a draw like no other. It's the innocent for the guilty. It's the sinless for the sin-filled. It's the Creator for the creation. In place of condemnation, it



Christ on the Cross by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

sets free. In place of punishment and death, it offers forgiveness and life.

And so, how do we approach the topic of apologetics, finding ourselves as we do in a culture that is moving further away from Jesus by the day. And what does it mean for the calling we have been given in Christ, to "always be ready to speak of the reason for the hope we have?" The answer to both questions is found in the promise Jesus made before He died.

"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will offer an attraction to anyone and everyone who is willing to listen and respond to My voice."

Continued on Page 14

CONGREGATIONS RATIFY NALC CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

The congregations of the North American Lutheran Church have voted to ratify amendments to the NALC Constitution that were approved by the 2021 NALC Mission Convocation.

The amendments to the constitution officially name regional subdivisions within the NALC as “mission districts” and “mission regions.” An amendment also adds constitutional language allowing mission districts to form mission regions.

These amendments reflect the current practice of the NALC and its mission districts and mission regions. They update constitutional language to reflect this practice.

Congregations voted 234-3 in favor of amendments to the constitution that move the North American Lutheran Church from meeting annually for its convocation to meeting every other year. These amendments also direct the Executive Council to provide quarterly updates to pastors and congregations.

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 the 454 NALC congregations at the time of the convocation needed to submit votes for the ratification process to be successful. A total of 237 congregations submitted votes — 10 more than the 227 congregations needed to vote a quorum.

“One of the NALC’s Core Values is ‘Congregationally Focused.’ Congregational participation is a foundational principle of our church body’s governance. By requiring congregational ratification of certain key decisions, the NALC ensures that its members are aware of and broadly supportive of those decisions,” the Executive Council stated in a letter to congregations on the ratification process.

Information on the ratification process — including the exact text of the proposed amendments — is available at thenalc.org/ratificationprocess.

The NALC constitution may be accessed online at thenalc.org/nalc-constitution.

FROM THE BISHOP

Continued from Page 13

It speaks to the man in prison who finally realizes that his life is going nowhere fast. It speaks to the person who seemingly has it all together, but whose values and priorities go no farther than the things of this world. It speaks to the young men and young women who are trying to put it all together and figure it all out. It speaks to those who are sick and facing the last days of their lives and who need to know that there’s a word of hope. And it speaks to the scholar and to the well-to-do and to those in this life who are down-and-out. And it speaks to you and to me no matter where we are or what we have done.

Don’t shortchange your witness by offering something that appears to be more appealing. And don’t shortchange the message of the Gospel by speaking of anything apart from that alone which saves. The cross continues to speak to a world and a culture that is searching for answers in places where they ultimately will never be found.

No one is left out when it comes to God’s love in Christ. And no one will be left out when it comes to the attraction of the cross. So it was for the people of Jesus’ day when He willingly gave His life. And so it is for you and for me today, as we are drawn in faith to Him.

PASTOR SHELLY SCHULTZ IS NAMED NALC CALL PROCESS COORDINATOR

The Rev. Shelly Schultz of Jackson Center, Ohio, has been named NALC call process coordinator. Her role includes helping congregations and pastors in the call process.

Pastor David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism, previously worked with the call process. He is now focusing his time on leading renewal workshops for congregations and other areas of ministry and ecumenism.

Introducing herself, Pastor Schultz said, "I am a child of God, a wife, mother of one, co-pastor with my husband Bert at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jackson Center, Ohio, and, as of January 1, the call process coordinator for the NALC. When asked how I went from being a home economics teacher to being a pastor, I commented that I now serve at the Lord's Table and have been for the past 25-plus years.

"Knowing that it is the Lord who is directing my life for His purposes, I can say that formerly I was a home economics teacher, nanny, college campus minister and print production line worker. In my spare time, I enjoy hiking in the Ohio nature preserves, sampling foreign cuisines, knitting stranded color work, and visiting with our college-aged son," she said.

"Thank you for the encouragement in this position. I am enjoying the coordination of the many pieces to the call process and praying through the challenges. I will encourage you to

also be in prayer for more pastors to fill the number of vacancies that we are experiencing right now," she said.

There are now more than 70 pastoral vacancies in the NALC. You can view the list of vacancies and on the NALC website at thenalc.org/call-process.

"Consider in your own congregation whom the Lord might be calling into Word and Sacrament ministry and ask them the question, 'Have you considered being a pastor in Christ's Church?'" she said. "Let me know if I can assist you in any way."

Congregations and pastors in the call process should be in regular contact



Shelly Schultz

with Pastor Schultz. She may be reached at callprocess@thenalc.org.

RETREAT FOR VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT AT TSM

"The Call" is a retreat for young adults who are listening for the call of the Lord and considering whether that vocation might be to full-time ministry. It will be held July 23-26 at Trinity School for Ministry (TSM) in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

The weekend will include talks on what a vocation is, how to discern God's call, what formation for ministry looks like, the cultivation of the spiritual life, and participating in the mission of God. Registration is free and includes housing.

NALC members who are exploring the possibility of ordained ministry are welcome to attend. Trinity School for Ministry hosts the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) Center. The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, president emeritus of the NALS, and a faculty member of TSM, is one of the presenters for the retreat.

For more information or to register go to tsm.edu/thecall.

NALC EXECUTIVE COUNCIL UPDATE

The Executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church met in Irving, Texas, on March 10-11. The meeting was opened by Pastor Amy Little with a devotion on Ephesians 6 and Chapter 2 of C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*.

Among the main items discussed at the March meeting were: the vision of the North American Lutheran Seminary, an upcoming joint retreat in May for the Executive Council and the Board of Regents,

revisions to the candidacy manual, approval of a diaconate proposal that was presented to the council by the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, a review of the 2022 Pastors' Conference in Orlando, Florida, and the approval by NALC congregations of the constitutional amendments approved by the 2021 NALC Mission Convocation.

The Executive Council's next in-person meeting will be July 13-14 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

LIVING AND GIVING STEWARDSHIP TEAM MEETS TO PLAN RESOURCES

The Living and Giving Stewardship Team gathered at Spirit of the Desert Retreat Center in Carefree, Arizona, in March. The team spent time in prayer and Scripture reflection as well as honing and shaping their goals for NALC stewardship.

The team members are the Rev. Dona Johnson, Chair, Michael Johnson, the Rev. Eugene Grimm, the Rev. Taylor Stempniak, the Rev. Carl Johnson and the Rev. Amy Little.

The team will be offering several opportunities for congregations to engage in discussions around stewardship and generosity.

One will be an online course on *Stewards of God's Influence*. It will be a four-session study on the topics of time, talent, treasure and testimony.

They also have plans for the next stewardship booklet which will be focused on the joy of giving.

Another opportunity will be Facebook Live sessions where you and your congregation can interact with the team on topics such as planned giving, how to run a stewardship campaign, how to create a culture of giving, learning your story with money, and more.

You can find all of the NALC's stewardship resources on our website at thenalc.org/stewardship.

Online resources available to congregations include:

- + *Reset*
- + *Stewards of God's Influence*
- + *Duty and Delight*
- + *Overflowing Generosity*

Let's keep in touch

Rev. Dr. David J. Baer, *editor*
North American Lutheran Church
2655 Innsbruck Drive, Suite A
New Brighton, MN 55112-9304
+1-651-633-6004 | news@thenalc.org



NALC
North American Lutheran Church

Please copy and share this newsletter widely.

2020 VISION FURTHER EXEMPLIFIES CONGREGATIONALLY FOCUSED CORE VALUE

As we progress with the spiritual and financial plan that is the NALC's *2020 Vision*, we're taking this time during Lent to pray for all of the components and goals that it entails. We pray that it enables us to ensure a legacy of faith today, tomorrow and forever for all of the nearly 470 congregations in the North American Lutheran Church.

At their core, each of the four key components of the *2020 Vision* — Grow, Serve, Renew and Fulfill — are designed to help congregations more fully utilize the resources available to them through the NALC and tap into what it truly means to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

Being Congregationally Focused is at the forefront of our identity in the NALC and it is also intentionally built into every aspect of the *2020 Vision*. The congregation is the foundation for our mission and

ministry. As interdependent partners we strengthen every local congregation to make it the most effective instrument possible to fulfill Christ's purpose.

2020 Vision is for every congregational pastor, leader, family and individual member. It is our roadmap to where we are going as a denomination — our values, our programs and the plans for growth and renewal that were developed through input from laity, pastors, deans and church leaders.

This year as additional elements of the *2020 Vision* are rolled out, please take the time to listen and learn the full scope of its impact. We will be presenting it through a wide number of mediums to ensure every congregation is able to embrace the plan and its impact on our future as a network of congregations united in our faith and values in the NALC.

SMALL AND RURAL CHURCH MINISTRY COURSE IS OFFERED ONLINE

The small and rural church is the "bread and butter" of the North American Lutheran Church. Whether these congregations are located in farmlands, suburbs, towns or even in cities, these churches are vital in building relationships, connecting with communities and making disciples.

In order to strengthen these parishes for mission, the National Renewal Team of the NALC has developed a "live version" of the Small and Rural Church Ministry course. The purpose of this class is to assist our faith communities to renew, and grow more effective in their ministry.

This live version, which will be held April 21, May 19 and June 16, will focus on four vital topics: specific issues facing the small and rural church, the importance of relationships and equipping, being and making disciples, and the use of digital and technology.

The course will be held on Zoom from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. ET. Teams from congregations are encouraged to attending together. If you have questions, please contact the Rev. Brad Hales, the NALC's director of renewal ministries, at 540-270-1026 or bhales@thenalc.org.

NALC LIFE-TO-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP

AN EXPERIENCE IN INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP FOR CONGREGATIONS

By Pastor Dave Keener

In order to encourage congregations to be more intentional in living out the Great Commission, the North American Lutheran Church has introduced the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Experience.

An important part of this initiative is engaging congregational leadership in learning how to have discipling conversations with others in ways that are faithful and natural.

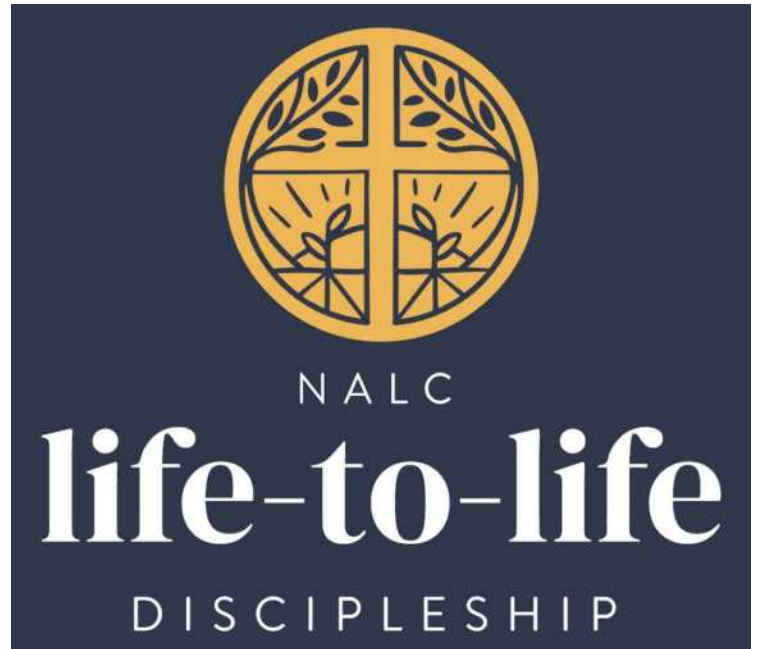
Discipleship, however, is about more than simply learning techniques or offering conversation starters. Though we can teach someone how to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, we cannot implant the desire to share the Gospel with others. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

For this reason, this manual for the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Experience is intended to be an experience rather than a course. Yes, it will engage the mind in sound learning, but the ultimate goal is to change hearts and implant a deep desire to live out the Great Commission in personal and congregational lives.

In pursuit of this goal, this experience will focus on three essential areas.

1. One with God. It is important to remember that we make disciples when we are disciples. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), Jesus sends His disciples to make disciples and promises to be with them forever. We cannot convince others of the importance of following Jesus if we are not doing so ourselves. For this reason, each participant will be asked to devote time each day in prayer, meditation, reflection on God's Word and in honest evaluation of their personal discipleship.

2. One with another. Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) states, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." At the heart of this NALC Life-to-Life



Discipleship Experience is learning how to engage others in faith conversations. Each participant will be asked to put what has been learned into practice by partnering with one or two others between each session for mutual support and conversation.

3. One Body in Christ Jesus. In His high priestly prayer Jesus prayed, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21). Participants will gather together either weekly or bi-weekly for learning, worship, prayer and mutual support.

Who is this resource for?

The NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Experience is both for everyone, and not for everyone. Jesus calls us to follow Him as His disciples (Matthew 4:19) and gives us a commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). This call and commission is for all followers of Christ by virtue of their Baptism. Yet, the

Continued on Page 19

Holy Scriptures remind us that not everyone whom Jesus called responded by following. The reasons were varied: one was not willing to give up his possessions (Matthew 19:20-21), others had family obligations that they held as a higher priority (Matthew 8:19-22), and still others just felt that the teachings of Jesus were too hard to follow (John 6:60, 66).

The real question of discipleship is not “who is called?” but rather “who will follow?” This NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Experience is not a program or course, but rather a call to fulfill our baptismal vocation to be and make disciples.

This call is extended to all, but it can only be answered by those who, like those early disciples, put following Jesus as their highest priority. It will require a high commitment from those who take part to spend time in prayer, study, personal reflection and encouraging others to walk more closely with Jesus.

This is why the resource is both for and not for everyone. The invitation to take part in this discipleship journey is extended to all, but it is intended only for those who are willing to take seriously Jesus’ call to follow.

We are pleased to announce that this new tool designed to help congregations become more intentional in their discipleship is now available online. The manual can be downloaded for free by clicking the “Getting Started” button on the bottom of the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship webpage, nalcifetolife.org.

Printed copies of the manual can be preordered at a cost of \$40 each. Please make checks payable to the North American Lutheran Church with “Discipleship book” in the memo line. Mail your check to NALC; PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Be sure to include your address for shipping. Our hope is that every congregation and member of the North American Lutheran Church will accept this call to intentional discipleship.

Grow Your Faith. Fulfill Your Candidacy Requirement. Continue Your Education.

The 2022 June InterTerm residential class at the North American Lutheran Seminary Center offers something for everyone.

Whether you’re a seminarian* seeking to fulfill your candidacy requirement, a pastor or a lay leader, the NALS 2022 June InterTerm residential class will strengthen worship, Catechesis, and discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition.

Join the Rev. Dr. Andrew Wiesner and the Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, who will discuss the centrality of worship and discipleship as God-given means of congregational renewal. Plus, don’t miss the breakout sessions led by a renowned team of pastors and theologians, followed by the All-Seminarian Retreat, June 17-18.

For more information email nals@tsm.edu or call 724-385-8000.

*For all candidates seeking ordination in the NALC, you are required to take two, one- week June residential intensive sessions as outlined in the, “Standards of Theological Education.” Pastors and lay leaders may audit the ATS-accredited InterTerm at a reduced rate.

**\$25 attendance fee. NALS students attending the June InterTerm, as well as Trinity School for Ministry students may attend for free.



Save The Date

On Friday, June 17 — Special Symposium & Retirement Celebration to honor the life-long career of Dr. David Yeago**

“Scripture, the Reformation, and the Catholic Tradition: Engaging the Work of Dr. David Yeago.”

The North American Lutheran Seminary
311 Eleventh St. Ambridge, PA 15003
nals@tsm.edu • 724-385-8000



NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
SEMINARY

NALC YOUTH SERVING IN LOVE

The North American Lutheran Church encouraged youth throughout the NALC to participate in a service event sometime during the month of February. Here are some of the photos that were shared from their service projects. Other photos are available on the NALC Youth Workers Facebook page.



Sixty youth from several congregations of the Piedmont-East Mission District in North Carolina helped their neighbors by packing food boxes.



Youth and young adults from St. John's Lutheran Church in North Woodbury, Ohio, held a free spaghetti dinner for the community. Money collected at the dinner will be used to restock the local food pantry. They served 75 meals and raised more than \$350.



Youth from St. James Lutheran Church in Llano, Texas, planted a tree at a local nursing and rehab facility. Our hope is that this tree will grow strong and full and one day people will rest and recuperate in its shade. The youth will help with the care of the tree, nurturing its development as it grows, as we ourselves grow and nurture our own faith and sense of community.



Youth from Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Charles, Minnesota, filled 39 "blessing bags" for a local nursing home and for shut-ins from our congregation. The youth collected coloring books, word finds, puzzles, snacks, kleenex, socks, colored pencils, pens, stuffed animals, candy, and more to bless our elderly. The youth filled the bags, prayed a blessing over the bags and the recipients, and then delivered the bags to the nursing home. A mini Bible study highlighting verses in the Bible about the wisdom of gray-haired people coincided with the service project.

WHERE IS GOD IN A DISASTER?

Spiritual Christian care is one of the core foundations of NALC Disaster Response.

Disasters significantly affect everyone and their communities, including the individuals and their families.

People who are impacted by a disaster will experience a range of emotional responses, of varying intensity and duration. Their emotional responses are influenced by a variety of factors, including degree of exposure, individual resilience and recovery environment.

All Christians do real ministry and provide a pastoral presence when they serve in Jesus' name. When NALC Spiritual Christian care volunteers are on a disaster site and meeting with families, the Word of God is our primary tool and God is present.

Often, as volunteers, we are asked "Where is God?" On the Sea of Galilee, Jesus calmed the storm. There are many examples in the Bible of storms and how we, as Christians, respond. God is with us always — in all that we do, in all that we say, and in all that we share with others.

Spiritual Christian care volunteer teams and worker volunteer teams are needed. For more information on how to help as a volunteer or about any disaster, please contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster



DISASTER RESPONSE

MARY BATES
NALC DISASTER RESPONSE
COORDINATOR

Response coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or disasterresponse@thenalc.org.

Update on active disasters:

- + One mission trip is scheduled in California for the Berry Creek wildfires to help families repair and rebuild their homes.
- + Two mission trips are scheduled in Louisiana for Hurricane Ida long-term recovery.
- + Six mission trips are scheduled to Kentucky for rebuilding homes due to the Dec. 10, 2021, tornadoes.
- + An EF-4 tornado struck the Des Moines and Winterset, Iowa, area on March 5. Eight people died. The extent of the damage was limited, with about 30 homes destroyed. A number of homes had minor damage. At this time, NALC Disaster Response is accepting donations to help pay for the funerals of six people from one family in the Winterset area.
- + Wildfires are currently burning in central Texas — the Carbon, Gorman, Eastland and Coryell County areas. NALC Disaster Response has delivered four truckloads of hay. Peace Lutheran Church in Clifton, Texas, is delivering feed and fencing. Thousands of cattle were turned loose to save them from the fires and they now need to be fed and fenced in again.

Monetary gifts to support NALC Disaster Response may be given online at thenalc.org/giving or mailed to: North American Lutheran Church; PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please make payable to the North American Lutheran Church and indicate Disaster Response on the memo line of your check.



Volunteers gather cattle feed for disaster in Texas.

2022 NALC PASTORS' CONFERENCE CONSIDERS REAL-LIFE APOLOGETICS

By Pastor David Wendel

The 2022 NALC Pastors' Conference was arguably the most well-received thus far. There was deep and meaningful theological content, while also providing "on the ground, real life" application.

The theme for the conference, held Feb. 15-17 in Orlando, Florida, was "Always be Ready: Apologetics in Real Life," based on 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV): "... in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

Keynote speaker was the Rev. Dr. Mark Mattes, Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa, who regularly engages with college students — young people who present real and challenging questions about God, Jesus, faith and the Church.

After the keynote address, four pastor theologians of the NALC made presentations on the theme from their unique roles and ministries.

Pastor presenters were the Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee, former systematics professor at Westmont College and pastor of a small NALC mission congregation in Santa Barbara, California, and chair of the NALC



The Rev. Dr. Mark Mattes of Grand View University was the keynote speaker for the 2022 NALC Pastors' Conference.

Commission on Theology and Doctrine; the Rev. Dr. Dennis DiMauro, adjunct professor and successful NALC mission developer, and the Rev. Dr. Thomas Jacobson, parish pastor, seminary professor and father of young children.

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

For those not familiar with the term, "apologetics," the *Lutheran Cyclopedia* explains: "Apologetics concerns itself with errorists outside the Church ... the classical period of Christian apologetics is the second century, a period of widespread persecution of Christians by Romans. The apologists defended Christianity against various charges."

Continued on Page 23



Nearly 200 people attended the 2022 NALC Pastors' Conference.

In other words, “apologetics” has to do with always being ready to explain, defend and inform others about faith in God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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

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

The pastors’ conference provided presentations and panel discussions allowing for significant engagement with pastors who are regularly challenged to give reasoned, yet, gracious defense of the Christian faith, addressing questions such as: How is one always ready? How does one respond to youth and undergraduates in particular? What is most helpful in sharing the faith with unbelievers, atheists and secularists?

In addition to the four plenary sessions on the theme, opportunity was provided for one-on-one meetings with NALC staff, a presentation by Hahn Financial Group, opportunity for private confession and absolution, and the annual Holy Communion service which included the renewal of ordination vows and blessing of vials of oil which were distributed to pastors for use in local NALC congregations.

Thursday morning was the annual meeting of the NALC ministerium. During the meeting a major presentation was made by representatives of the Cramer Group, planning and administering the financial appeal portion of the *2020 Vision*.

One of the goals of the *2020 Vision* is to raise \$5 million to provide a legacy of faithfulness for mission and ministry now and into the future. Pastors have



Speakers at the NALC Pastors’ Conference take part in a panel discussion.

an important role supporting and encouraging the *2020 Vision* within local congregations.

In attendance at the 2022 Pastors’ Conference were 188 persons, which included 130 pastors, 32 spouses, seven non-NALC pastors and 19 others (seminarians, staff, etc.).

The NALC Pastors’ Conference is an important annual event gathering clergy from across North America. Pastors are educated, informed, encouraged and supported in the two-and-a-half day conference.

Even more, pastors are inspired and energized as they return to their congregations ready to enter into the season of Lent.

Participation is strongly encouraged for all NALC pastors. Congregational leaders are asked to include funding for their pastor’s participation in their congregation’s annual budget, as the conference benefits the congregation as well as the pastor. It is also helpful for congregational leaders and members to provide encouragement and an expectation that their pastor will attend — realizing the time and money will be well-spent.

Plan now for the 2023 NALC Pastors’ Conference which will be Feb. 7-9 at the Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas. The conference will be preceded by a pastor’s spouse gathering on Monday evening, Feb. 6.

REMEMBER THE PASTOR'S SPOUSE

When attending our son's graduation from U.S. Army Chaplain's School in December, I asked our daughter-in-law how the three days of Army chaplain's spouse on-boarding sessions had been?

After the Army puts new chaplains through three months of training, they provide significant time for new Army spouses to receive information, support and community as they step into their new role.

Our daughter-in-law said it had been a wonderful opportunity to meet and learn from Army personnel, as well as other spouses. She shared that she had never experienced such encouragement and connection as a pastor's spouse in the NALC, after serving four years in their first congregation.

This honest sharing was somewhat painful to hear as an assistant to the bishop in the NALC for 10 years now. It was convicting to realize we hadn't been offering anything — anything to support, encourage and build community within the "corps" of NALC pastor's spouses.

That led to phone calls to Bishop Selbo, General Secretary Amy Little, and the planning for a first ever "NALC Pastor's Spouse Gathering" on Monday evening, Feb. 14, at the annual NALC Pastors' Conference in Orlando, Florida. More information will be shared about the pastors' conference, but an important "Ministry Matter" in the NALC is: "Remember the pastor's spouse!"

This year, there were 32 pastor's spouses in attendance at the NALC Pastors' Conference. More than 20 attended the spouses gathering Monday evening, with a few pastors in attendance as well.

Devotions were offered by Pastor Amy Little, general secretary. Bishop Dan Selbo welcomed the group, expressing appreciation for the important role pastors' spouses serve. The agenda then turned to sharing of a few words of advice from spouses of our bishop and bishop emeritus and the executive staff present at the gathering.



MINISTRY MATTERS

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

Mary Selbo shared: "The call your husband/wife has received is of the Lord. However, it is a calling for you as well. It is a calling to embrace and love God's people as your pastor spouse does. Embrace this calling with humility ... at times, you may find yourself being/feeling alone and/or lonely. Please remember that in your loneliness, you are never truly alone. Our Lord is with you. Seek out a trusted pastor (other than your spouse) to go to should the need arise. Don't forget to take time for just the two of you — time to decompress, to refocus, to reset and to exhale."

Kristi Bradosky shared: "Put God first and model this for your children. Support your pastor/spouse. Be yourself. Make friendships with people in the church. Get involved in things that may interest you at the church. Communicate with your spouse (who is the pastor) when important events are scheduled in your family so he or she can be there to support the family to ensure that they don't disconnect. Maintain confidentiality. One call committee asked what my role was as the pastor's wife ... my answer ... to support my husband and to participate as anyone in the church should."

Jeff Little shared: "Trust the Holy Spirit. God has a plan for you, and you are in for some surprises. But even when it's tough, trust the Spirit. It's natural to want to defend your spouse when it seems like they are being attacked, but it's better to support them at home rather than interject yourself into the situation. They were called to that position in the church, your role is to support and encourage. Find your own place to fit into the congregation. Be part of the community, worship every week, find ways to

Continued on Page 25

serve the people there — mow the lawn, pull weeds, make the pancakes.”

Susan Riches-Wendel shared: “The pastor and family will find their schedule impacted by congregational members’ family emergencies, hospitalizations, deaths and funerals. Realize there will be unexpected schedule changes — and you will want to approach those with patience, love and grace. You will be invited to lots of members’ important family events. It’s a time to get to know people better and to be part of happy and joyful events. Pray everyday. Don’t be afraid to say “yes.” At the same time, don’t be afraid to say “no.” Do what you are passionate about, do what will give you joy and fulfillment, do what you believe will make a difference.”

Spouses were then asked to share joys and challenges, as well as issues pastors’ spouses face. In addition, what would they want to share with new pastors’ spouses?

Challenges and issues which were shared are loneliness and the sense of being alone and isolated, even within a congregation of believers; awareness that you are an “outsider”; the risk of being “triangulated” by parishioners trying to put the pastor or spouse in the middle of a conflict or disagreement; the pastor’s long hours away from home; the tension between the pastor/spouse not sharing about what’s happening in the congregation while needing to keep confidentiality; the unique and difficult role of being a pastor’s spouse while also a member of the congregation; the “games,” manipulation and “drama” which are often part of life in community; and then, the special dynamic when husband and wife are a “clergy couple.”

Alongside challenges and issues, spouses lifted up great joys: you are never alone; you are invited to everything; there is the opportunity to share personal family moments and experiences with parishioners; you are journeying alongside your spouse, the pastor; you are on your own faith



Participants in the Pastors’ Conference spouses gathering pose for a photo with Bishop Selbo.

journey. Spouses pointed out the value of also having friends and relationships outside the congregation, together with faith involvement outside the congregation — perhaps participation in an ecumenical Bible study or event, such as Via de Cristo.

It was clear that there is a need for the continuation of such pastors’ spouses gatherings in the future, and the format will probably be, again, the Monday evening of the annual NALC Pastors’ Conference.

Topics which were highlighted were: the difference between being married before a pastor enters ordained ministry vs. a spouse being called to ordained ministry after years of marriage; how to handle confidentiality; how close can/should relationships be with parishioners; the importance of clergy/spouse friends; how the NALC can help congregational leadership to understand the dynamics of pastor/spouse within the congregation; how to keep one’s own identity; how to set and keep boundaries; how to be a healthy pastor/spouse couple.

Summarizing what was heard at this first gathering: we offer these few words of advice and counsel to congregational leaders and members: remember your pastor’s spouse! Don’t assume everything you

Continued on Page 26

tell the pastor will be shared with the spouse. Foster an awareness and appreciation for the fact that you have called the pastor — not the spouse. Invite and encourage the pastor's spouse to be involved in those areas in which they are interested and passionate. Don't expect the spouse will be involved in everything, all the time. Always work to curtail rumors, gossip and innuendo — for the sake of the pastor's family and the congregation as a whole. Educate and inform the congregation regarding the dangers and disunity created by "triangulation" — a manipulative strategy to form alliances and relationships aimed at "dividing and conquering" to get what you want — playing one person against another.

Above all else, love your pastor's spouse, pray for your pastor's spouse, support and encourage your pastor's spouse! Remember they may often feel alone and isolated — even within a congregation of believers. So befriend and be friendly to your pastor's spouse, without agendas or drama or self-serving aims. By supporting and encouraging your pastor's spouse, you may be surprised to find how you are lifting up your pastor and building up your congregation at the same time.

Watch for more information announcing the 2023 Pastor's Spouse Gathering, tentatively scheduled for Monday, Feb. 6, 2023, in San Antonio, Texas.

Pastor David Wendel is the assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. You may contact him at dwendel@thenalc.org.

NEXUS INSTITUTE SEEKS TO RAISE UP A NEW GENERATION OF CHURCH LEADERS

The NALC presented a \$10,000 donation to the Rev. Russ Lackey, campus pastor of Grand View University as a sponsorship of the NEXUS Institute. The presentation was made at the 2022 NALC Pastors' Conference in Orlando, Florida.

NEXUS is a week-long, on-campus experience for high school students that is often described as "life-changing." Participants grow in their faith, dig into Scripture to better understand theology, and learn about different ways to serve in the Church. NEXUS provides opportunities for students to explore what it means to become a new generation of pastors and leaders.

The NEXUS Institute is made possible through generous grants and partnerships as part of the Lilly Endowment's High School Youth Theology Institute's initiative. The NALC has supported the program with funding and participants in recent years but is increasing support and involvement with this major sponsorship.

The NEXUS Institute for 2022 is June 12-18 and will focus on the theme, "One: Lord, Baptism, Body, Faith,

Hope." There are many ways our nations are divided right now. How quickly we forget that we are one in so many ways. In Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV) it reads "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

All applicants for NEXUS must be current high school students (Grades 9-12) who want to grow in their faith and understanding. Applicants who are interested in or open to working in ministry someday are given preference. Applicants should want to follow God's leading in their lives and have an interest in better understanding what a difference following Jesus makes in everyday life.

Cost is a \$25 registration fee, plus any costs for traveling to or from the NEXUS location at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. Meals, lodging and activities are covered through sponsors.

For more information go to thenalc.org/gallery/nexus-2022 or contact Kate Faas, NEXUS director, at kfaas@grandview.edu.

ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES NOTED AT PASTORS' CONFERENCE

65 years

The Rev. William Haggis

60 years

The Rev. Philip D. Anderson
The Rev. Marvin Hileman
The Rev. K. Glen Johnson
The Rev. Richard M. Kastner
The Rev. Melvin Kornfeld
The Rev. Paul V. Martinson

55 years

The Rev. M. David Hanes
The Rev. Richard A. Solberg

50 years

The Rev. Timothy L. Knauff
The Rev. Ronald A. Orovitz
The Rev. James R. Shears
The Rev. Warren Louis Smith
The Rev. William G. Wallace

45 years

The Rev. Bassam Abdallah
The Rev. George E. Black
The Rev. Gary Coble
The Rev. Raymond Dean Forsythe
The Rev. Victor F. Kolch
The Rev. Edward George Mitchler
The Rev. Gene R. Peterson
The Rev. Michael Pozzuto
The Rev. Leon A. Rawl
The Rev. Warren A. Reichert
The Rev. George L. Rhyne
The Rev. Jack L. Richards

40 years

The Rev. Charles M. Amdahl
The Rev. Timothy James Baglien
The Rev. Gary D. Blobaum
The Rev. Gail Burwa
The Rev. Alan J. Ford
The Rev. Paul A. Gruetter
The Rev. Carl M. Haynes
The Rev. David L. Hefner
The Rev. Kenneth D. Hohag
The Rev. Timothy D. Hubert
The Rev. Gary W. Jensen
The Rev. Scott Jurgens
The Rev. Darryl Landsverk
The Rev. Donald C. Lindner
The Rev. Richard D. Mark
The Rev. W. Cary Moorman
The Rev. Daryl Olson
The Rev. Steven D. Rice
The Rev. Carl W. Schwinck
The Rev. George Zornow

35 years

The Rev. Paul F. Breddin
The Rev. Mark C. Chavez
The Rev. Randall Mark Conley
The Rev. Tesfaye Waaqtolaa
Dinegdie
The Rev. J. George Gilbert
The Rev. William A. Hartfelder Jr.
The Rev. Rebecca M. M. Heber
The Rev. Larry D. Hood
The Rev. Carl A. Johnson
The Rev. Kenneth C. Kimball
The Rev. Paul Anthony Krueger
The Rev. Timothy W. Muehlbrad
The Rev. Ralph W. Reitmeyer Jr.
The Rev. James Milton Steen
The Rev. Robert M. Stevens
The Rev. Kim E. Thacker

30 years

The Rev. Dani Jo Bierwagen
The Rev. Alan Lee Daugherty
The Rev. W. Bennett Harris
The Rev. Douglas E. Hefner
The Rev. Jay Johnson
The Rev. Peter Lurvey
The Rev. Paul J. Mattson
The Rev. Bradley W. Miller
The Rev. Douglas J. Schoelles
The Rev. Richard R. Vonesh
The Rev. Solveig A. H. Zamzow

25 years

The Rev. Sandra Lee Bowen
The Rev. Jeffery Carpenter
The Rev. David G. Dahl
The Rev. Braxton East
The Rev. Phillip Edmond Gagnon
The Rev. Bjorn Lervik
The Rev. Frederick Luther Morck
The Rev. Jeffrey Teeples
The Rev. Claude Villemaire

20 years

The Rev. Malcolm de Waal
The Rev. Beverly Cardwell DeBord
The Rev. Waktola G. Dufera
The Rev. Maurice Frontz III
The Rev. Jennifer Kristine Gold
The Rev. Michael R. Greenler
The Rev. James David Lathrop
The Rev. David B. Letscher
The Rev. Amy C. Little
The Rev. Michael A. Matzek
The Rev. Donald P. Richmond

CONGREGATIONAL ANNIVERSARIES

225 years — 1797

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Newton, North Carolina

First Evangelical Lutheran Church
Ridgway, Pennsylvania

St. Paul Lutheran Church
Yorktown, Texas

175 years — 1847

Trinity Lutheran Church
Jeromesville, Ohio

125 years — 1897

St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church
Llano, Texas

150 years — 1872

Ullensvang Lutheran Church
Thor, Iowa

100 years — 1922

Christ Lutheran Church
Cullman, Alabama

Evangelical Lutheran Church
Mankato, Kansas

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Jackson Center, Ohio

Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Scandia, Kansas

Yeager Memorial Lutheran Church
Bedford, Pennsylvania

Evaline Lutheran Church
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

NALC SEEKS STAFF FOR TEXAS OFFICE

As the NALC works on establishing a continental office in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas, the church is looking for gifted people to serve in full-time positions. These positions will be in DFW and are full time with benefits.

The following positions are posted on the NALC website:

+ Missions Specialist (to work with our international, domestic, and renewal missions and ministries).

+ Communications Specialist (to add to our existing communications team).

+ Office Administrator/Human Resources Manager (to run the continental office).

+ Office Assistant (to assist in the many administrative functions of the church).

If you are interested, or you know someone who might be the right fit for our future office, please direct them to our website for job descriptions and contact information to submit a resume and cover letter.

If you're interested or simply want to know more, please contact Pastor Amy Little, general secretary, at alittle@thenalc.org.

The search for any positions not filled by April 30 will be extended beyond the NALC.