



Update on 2020 Vision efforts

By *Bishop Dan Selbo*

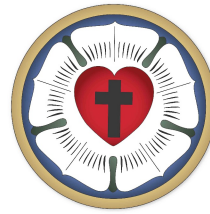
No matter what line of work you're in, it's not enough to have a plan unless there's a process that carries it to completion. It's not enough to know what to do, if there's not a structure and a strategy to make it work.

In business, owners tell their workers they need to perform. In sports, coaches tell their players they need to execute on what they know. No matter what the organization might be, the goals of any concerted effort, without a process in place and a structure and a strategy to follow it through, even the best laid plans come up short.

The Church is not a business. It's a body. It's not an organization with a marketing plan, but a living organism with a mission given to it by its Lord. But as it is in the business and organizational world, so it is in the Church. Congregations and church bodies need to have a process for implementing their plans. They need to have a structure and a strategy for executing on the ideas set forth.

Three years ago, with those principles in mind, the North American Lutheran Church adopted a vision for its future. Based upon the Great Commandments we have from our Lord Jesus (Matthew 22:37-39), the Great Commission He gave to "go into the world and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20), and the four Core Values that have been at the heart of our existence from the start, a 10-point strategic plan was put in place.

Since that time, we have been working to implement that strategy, to execute on the commitments we made, and to develop a process



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that will carry it to its completion. At this point, we are not yet there. There is a lot of work still to be done. But progress has been made and follow-through has taken place. As a result, we are moving forward with the strategic plan, trusting that God will continue to guide and lead our efforts.

Some of the more significant steps we are taking are worth highlighting. In addressing the shortage of clergy and the increasing need to fill vacant pulpits, we have already done several things to address this ongoing challenge:

We have added to our seminary staff a director of vocational discernment. Pastor Jeff Morlock has been working tirelessly to find and encourage future pastors to begin their seminary training and to develop a pipeline for raising up the next generation of pastoral candidates. Although too early to project any concrete numbers for the upcoming year, all indications are that we will have our largest incoming class of seminarians ever.

We have also begun implementing a process to ordain pastors who are being called to serve in some of our smaller and more remote congregations. Ordination Under Special Circumstances (OUSC) involves an abbreviated approach to training prior to ordination, with a commitment to further training and mentoring in the years that follow. Already we

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have filled four vacant pulpits with this approach that would not have otherwise been filled.

In terms of the ongoing need for congregational renewal, good progress is being made in this area as well. Pastor Brad Hales is offering online renewal classes and has made himself available for visits to mission districts and regions.

Pastor David Wendel continues to offer Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits to any congregation, regardless of size, interested in strengthening its outreach and renewing its God-given mission. More than 20 summits took place last year, with at least as many scheduled for the coming months.

On the global mission front, we are taking faith steps to walk through doors that we believe will strengthen and expand our global witness. Pastor Carol Fryer was added to our staff, working to enhance and coordinate the Mission-Driven focus we share. Pastor Gemechis Buba is now serving as deployed staff, stationed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to increase the witness and impact we are already having in that part of the world. This six-month trial will be assessed as we seek the Lord's guidance for how his gifts and passions for the Gospel of Jesus Christ might be best used.

In terms of discipleship, we are gaining increased traction with individuals and congregations making use of the *NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship* manual. At the same time, under the leadership of Pastor Dave Keener, we are working on the next phase of our discipleship commitment with the development of materials that will guide congregations in creating their own disciple-making cultures. Until our Lord returns, our commitment to this central discipleship element of our work will continue.

The impact of our support for Youth and Family Ministry is growing. Pastor Teresa Peters is leading the effort to support and strengthen congregational ministries with, for and among our youth. The first — of what we hope will be several — Faith Formation Festivals was held earlier this month in the Carolinas Mission Region. Although adjustments will be made as opportunities arise, we pray that this

will become a template for deepening the commitment we have to our families and youth.

Other important developments include the move toward a more centralized NALC office and staff, the addition of five area assistants to the bishop, and a unified approach in our NALC and NALS communication.

These, among other steps we are taking, are to ensure that we provide strong support for our congregations, ongoing encouragement to our pastors and mission district deans. We hope that this work will communicate a consistent, cohesive and Christ-honoring word to a world that needs to hear and know the love of God for them in Jesus.

In order to provide the funding needed to ensure the implementation of our vision and to expand our witness, we also launched our “Today, Tomorrow & Forever” initiative in August of last year. The financial goal of this initiative is to raise \$5 million over three years (August 2022 through August 2025). More than \$1 million in commitments have already been made.

The more important goal is to provide the necessary support for the ministry and mission work to which we have been called. Still on the front end, we are already investing in an increased global witness, experiencing an expanding domestic impact, and offering more localized support for congregations and ministries within our church body.

As we move into a new calendar year and as we continue to face and address the challenges and opportunities we have, we do so with the faith and assurance that we are not alone (Matthew 1:23) and that our efforts will be used for God's purposes (Ephesians 3:30). It is with that confidence and conviction that we will continue to implement a strategy to faithfully execute the vision we believe God has set before us for the coming year.

I ask you to join me in praying for the year ahead, to offer your financial support to our efforts, and to continue to seek God's will as we find new ways in an ever-changing world to be faithful to our calling that will never change. To learn more about the NALC's 2020 Vision, visit thenalc.org/vision.

James Nestingen, significant NALC theologian, dies

By Bishop Dan Selbo

On Saturday, December 31, 2022, we received the sad news that the Rev. Dr. Jim Nestingen died suddenly from a heart attack in his home in St. Paul, Minnesota. This news was shocking, not only because it happened so suddenly but because Jim was one of those pillars of the faith that had been so instrumental in the establishment and continued development and strength of the North American Lutheran Church. He was also, for those who knew him, a model of the faith to which many of us aspired.

His professional involvement in the NALC included being a regular presenter at the Braaten-Benne Lectures, preaching and teaching at Mission Convocations, Pastors' Conferences and Mission District events, serving on the Commission for Theology and Doctrine, contributing to the work of the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum, presenting at the DiscipleLife 2020 gathering, and representing the NALC in ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada.

Prior to his involvement in the NALC, he served as an instructor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul 1976-78. After serving two years as assistant pastor at St. Ansgar Lutheran Church in Toronto, Canada, he returned to Luther Seminary as assistant professor of church history in 1980. He was named professor of church history in 1992 and professor emeritus of church history in 2006. Throughout his years of service, he had become one of the world's leading Reformation history scholars.

On a personal level Jim was a humble man, a model and contender of the faith, and a devoted follower of Jesus Christ who loved his family, loved his Church, and had fallen deeply in love with his Lord. I was always struck by the clarity and accessibility of his preaching and teaching, the humorous and



The Rev. Dr. Jim Nestingen speaking at the 2021 NALC Pastors' Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

down-to-earth way he communicated, as well as by his uncompromising commitment to the Gospel truth of Jesus Christ as the "sole name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). His stance for "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) and his willingness to stand firm against any and all "false gospels" (Galatians 1:6-9) in this world came at a cost. But the cost was nothing to Jim, in light of the saving cost offered to him and to us and to the entire world in Jesus Christ. Jim Nestingen will be missed. His eternal gain is our temporal loss. Thanks be to God that we will see him and be with him again, as we place our faith and our trust in Jesus.

James Nestingen 1945-2022

James Arne Nestingen, 77, returned to Christ Jesus on December 31, 2022. He died of a heart attack while at home in Roseville, Minnesota.

James Nestingen was a Norwegian-American child of the prairie, born November 21, 1945, of a storytelling tradition that he lived out throughout his life, doing so with joy, skill, and a fair dose of humor. In his profession as a pastor, author, speaker, teacher and professor of church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, as well as with his family and friends, he enjoyed nothing more than trading stories and laughter — with a rare off-color joke thrown in.

The central story of his life was his belief in Christ's promise that through the grace of God we, though by nature sinful, confess, are forgiven and welcomed into new and eternal life. It is this story that inspired a life of study, teaching, scholarship and service, following his father Joyce Nestingen and father-in-law Olaf K. Storaasli. In this vocation, he took great joy in the colleagues, friends, trouble-makers and sinners that he met, and with whom he shared a common faith.

Jim graduated from Concordia College, Moorhead (1967), and earned an M.Div. from Luther Seminary (1971). He served as intern pastor in Spokane, Washington, as well as pastor in Coquille, Oregon, and Toronto, Ontario. He received his Th.D. from the University of Toronto (1984).

He was the author of hundreds of popular and scholarly articles, as well as the books *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord* (with Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, 2012), *Martin Luther: A Life* (2009), *Martin Luther: His Life and His Teachings* (2004), *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (with Robert Kolb, 2001),



Manger in the Mountains (2000), *The Faith We Hold* (1983), *Roots of Our Faith* (1978), and *Free to Be* (with Gerhard Forde, 1975).

His life and work was much enriched by his wife, Carolyn Nestingen. They were happily married for 54 years, sharing travel and adventure grounded in their faith. Since 2006, Jim had taken particular joy in his eight grandchildren, Ella, Willa, Ansel, Alida, Harriet, Thore, Caia, and Lilja. He loved spending time with them.

Throughout his life, Jim was an avid collector of music with a soft-spot for Ellington, Bach, Coltrane, Mingus and Sun-Ra. He was also a reader, tool collector, periodic woodworker, fisher and hunter. Always, he was a hockey and baseball fan — passions dating to North Dakota pond hockey and radio broadcasts of his childhood. Characterized by an adventurous spirit, with a mischievousness as a storyteller, he was often willing to indulge in a bit of hyperbole; he was not always patient, was at times bullish, and was consistently and deeply a loving family man.

He is survived by his wife Carolyn Storaasli Nestingen, brother Rolf Nestingen, sisters Mary Nestingen and Janann Sims, sons Andrew Nestingen (Karen Baker), Peder Nestingen (Sarah Horstmann), Jacob Ole Nestingen (Sonja Nestingen), and his eight grandchildren. His loss is equally mourned by his loving mother-in-law and extended family of nieces, nephews, cousins and other cherished relatives.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Joyce and Ruth Vinge Nestingen.

A funeral service was held Friday, January 6, at St. James Lutheran Church in West St Paul, Minnesota. A live-stream video of the service is available on the church's YouTube site.

Memorials are preferred to Lutheran World Relief.

Bishop Bradosky comments on the death of James Nestingen

Following are comments from the Rev. John Bradosky, bishop of the NALC 2011-2019, on the death of the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen.

This past week the North American Lutheran Church faced the tragic loss of a preeminent theologian. I am personally dealing with the loss of a dear friend, teacher and mentor. Because of that relationship, I am compelled to offer a few words expressing my affection and deep respect for the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen.

Dr. Nestingen was an insightful theologian who encouraged all of us to plumb the depths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the best of our Reformational theology and tradition. He did so always with the heart of a pastor who treasured relationships with the people he served throughout his life. No matter how complex the theological issue may seem, Jim had a way of explaining it through both his words and pastoral examples that made the Gospel and our theology clear and accessible.

In his simple, yet profound, understandings Jim was teaching all of us how to present our Lutheran confessional faith to the laity in our congregations and to all with whom we have the opportunity to share the Gospel. Jim wanted to make sure the pure Gospel was available to all who heard our teaching and proclamation. The illustrations he used from his life were as earthy as they were profound. While he was in an elite class of theologians, Jim never thought the Gospel was for the theological elite, but for every common, ordinary person.

I was always inspired by his passion for Jesus Christ and His body the Church. Jim offered his constant encouragement during my term serving as bishop of the NALC. I encouraged Jim to video tape as much of his teaching as he could because we knew this day would eventually come. I wanted to preserve for our future pastors his teaching and methods for

passing on the “goods.” (I still have the VHS tape of the series he crafted on the Lord’s Prayer at the inception of the ELCA.)

There was never a time when we were together that he failed to ask about my family and share the latest news regarding Carolyn and his family. While we met together many times over the course of these past 10 years, we always found time to enjoy some excellent wine together while discussing our theology, experiences and our future together in the NALC.

While so much more could be shared giving thanks to God for Jim’s life, faith and pastoral heart, I conclude by simply saying that I look forward to sharing another glass of wine with him at the Wedding Feast in heaven that will have no end.

May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, bring consolation to all who mourn and the assurance of the Resurrection to eternal life in Christ Jesus for our beloved Rev. Dr. James Nestingen.

Nestingen DVDs

A DVD study led by the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen is available from the NALC.

This 12-part DVD on Lutheran theology as explained in the Lutheran Confessions and Martin Luther’s Small Catechism is an excellent resource for adult studies.

The DVD series, with individual sessions of 35-60 minutes each, was produced by St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and funded, in part, by a grant from the North American Lutheran Church.

Contact the NALC office for ordering information.

Jacob Larry Yoder 1943-2022

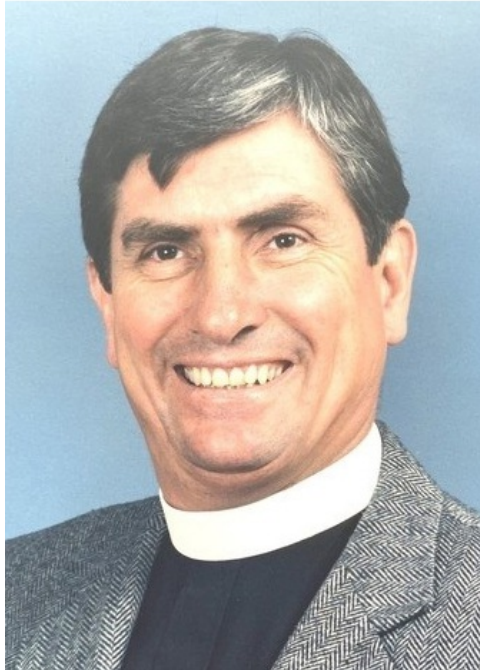
The Rev. Dr. Jacob Larry Yoder, 79, of Lincolnton, North Carolina, died Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2022, at his family home in Shepherd's Hill, North Carolina, after a long illness.

Larry was a dutiful son, a loving husband and father, a devoted pastor, an inspiring professor, a respected theologian of the Church, a born leader, a boisterous singer and an ardent lover of both farming and classical music.

Born May 26, 1943, Larry was the eldest son of Jacob Ralph and Mary Katheryn Miller Yoder. He was the brother of Wayne Miller Yoder (Jenice) and Mary Yoder Kaeser (Paul, recently deceased). Larry was a loving husband for 56 years to his "Anna," Marianne Howard Yoder. He was the father of Nathan (Rebecca) of Lincolnton, Joshua (Elisabeth) of Vilas and David (Kristin) of Pinehurst (all in North Carolina). He was "Grandpa Jake" to Marianne, Caroline, John David, Luke, Mary, Samuel and Jacob. An eighth grandchild is expected in February.

A diligent student and lifelong learner, Larry earned degrees from Lenoir-Rhyne College (AB), Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (M.Div.), and Duke University (Ph.D.). He was ordained into the ministry of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church through the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) in 1969. Larry served as pastor at Christ Lutheran Church Pacific Beach, San Diego, California; St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Durham, North Carolina; and Grace Lutheran Church in Newton, North Carolina. In 1977, the church called him to special service as chaplain of his alma mater, Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, North Carolina. The call was amended and extended when he joined the faculty as a full-time professor.

During his 36-year call to Lenoir-Rhyne, Larry served in many roles: chaplain, professor of religion,



chair for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and faculty senate chair, among others. He directed the Center for Theology, the Honors Program, and the Lineberger Center for Cultural and Educational Renewal. No matter the course, students in Dr. Yoder's classes knew to expect humor, vivacity and a ridiculously vast vocabulary. During one early homily, two fun-loving students famously sat in the front row with dictionaries in their laps, furiously and gleefully flipping the pages to keep up with their chaplain.

During many of his years at Lenoir-Rhyne, Larry served Lutheran parishes as supply or interim pastor. For 20 years, he served as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Newton.

While juggling the demands of these two full-time jobs (and raising three boys), his hobby was working on the family farm. A family tradition held that anyone could choose the family activities on his or her birthday. Every May 26, Marianne and the boys could count on spending the day planting pumpkins. Some more of Larry's favorite things included tilling the earth on his tractor, Dodgers baseball, Duke basketball, Anna's beef stroganoff, Anna's gingerbread, growing (and eating) silver queen corn, listening to WDAV Classical Radio, listening to Simon and Garfunkel, singing hymns as loudly as possible in his booming baritone and play-wrestling with his sons.

Larry's family will fondly remember his special talent for creating elaborately silly nicknames. Some greatest hits include "Narcus de Barfesoi" (Nathan), "Oshi-Nozzer Fah-Noozer Pooh" (Josh), "Dave-ah-Schrave-ah-Oct-oh-Rave-ah" (David) and "Wolfhart Katzenburg the Second" (Woofus the cat). He was an exceptionally playful father who would greet his

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Statement upon the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

“Rest eternal, grant him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.”

The Bishop of the North American Lutheran Church, the Rev. Dr. Dan Selbo, NALC Bishop Emeritus, the Rev. John Bradosky, together with our pastors and people, express our deepest sorrow and condolences to our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church, upon the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. We offer our prayers for comfort, grace and healing for Pope Francis, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, all bishops, priests and religious, and the more than 1.3 billion Roman Catholic faithful throughout the world.



Pope Benedict XVI met with NALC leaders, from left, Pastor David Wendel, Bishop John Bradosky and Bishop Paull Spring in 2011 at the Vatican.

We were saddened to receive news of the end of Pope Benedict’s earthly pilgrimage, but joyful as he has now entered the Church Triumphant. We offer our sincere appreciation for his faithful preaching and teaching, especially with regard to the challenge of increasing secularism, his teaching against the “dictatorship of relativity,” the biblical institution of marriage and the sanctity of human life from birth to natural death. The whole Church of Jesus Christ in the world has benefited from Benedict’s commitment to a new form of ecumenism that is not based solely on theological similarities and differences, but founded on a mutual commitment to strengthen our witness to the world – a world that is pulling our people away from the Church with an enticing array of false gospels. Thankfully, his public witness will continue through his writings as a theologian, biblical scholar and pope.

The meeting of leaders of the North American Lutheran Church with Pope Benedict XVI in

September, 2011 was a significant occurrence in the life of the new North American Lutheran Church. NALC Bishop John Bradosky, Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring and ecumenical officer, Pastor David Wendel, had been invited to meet with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, but were also given the opportunity to be received by the Pope at his weekly Wednesday audience. He had just returned from his pilgrimage to Germany, the land of Luther, and spoke freely about his visit during his address. Being a German and a theologian with a deep appreciation for Luther and his theological understanding, during his pilgrimage to Germany, Pope Benedict said,

“For Luther theology was not mere academic pursuit, but the struggle for oneself, which in turn was a struggle for and with God. How do I receive the grace of God? The fact that this question was the driving force

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Benedict XVI

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of his whole life never ceases to make a deep impression on me. For who is actually concerned about this today – even among Christians.”

Benedict went on to point out that belief in a magnanimous God who cares nothing about sin and evil in our contemporary culture is working destruction in our world and watering down the faith of those in the Church. *“Luther’s burning question must once more become our question too,”* said Pope Benedict.

We also express our deep appreciation for his support for the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This Declaration, approved by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation, signed October 31, 1999, made a significant contribution toward resolving one of the most important issues between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities of faith. It is commonly understood that it was then Cardinal Ratzinger who was instrumental in completing the approval process for this joint document.

Though there are theological issues that continue to separate us, we are encouraged by the many ways in which we share in the creedal faith of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

We will miss this pope who, more than any other, has been a friend of Luther and Lutherans. We will miss the scholarly, yet clearly stated teaching and leadership of this priest, theologian and pope. His ability to hold fast to the truth and to communicate that truth in simple teaching able to be grasped by all will be a part of the legacy of this humble man.

The words of St. Paul surely describe the life and manner of Benedict’s life and serve as a call to we who continue on:

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord ... rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” – Romans 12:9-15

Larry Yoder

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three young “wookies” at the end of the workday by opening the front door and growling like a tiger, which would send the boys into squeals of joy.

Larry was an experienced though reluctant traveler. In his and Anna’s life together, they spent a few years in San Diego, a semester in the British Isles, and took trips to Europe, the Holy Land and Rome, but he was always happiest when he was back home on the Carolina soil. Larry’s favorite places were the family home at Shepherd’s Hill Farm, Wild Acres Retreat in the Blue Ridge Mountains and anywhere his Anna wanted to go.

Throughout his life, Larry stood up for those he thought were being treated unjustly: in the places he worked, in his community and in the world at large. He was a good man who fought for what he believed in and kept the faith. Well done, good and faithful servant. Rest in peace.

A funeral service for Pastor Yoder was held on Sunday, Dec. 11, at St. Martin’s Lutheran Church in Maiden, North Carolina, with the Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder and the Rev. Dr. Andrew Weisner officiating. Interment followed in Daniels Lutheran Church Cemetery in Lincolnton.

Memorials may be made to St. Martin’s Lutheran Church in Maiden or to The McDaniel-Yoder Center for Theology of the Carolinas Mission Region of the North American Lutheran Church.

Ordinations



Pastor Joseph Hill (third from left) was ordained on Oct. 23 at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, California, where he is called to serve as pastor.



Pastor Robert Syner (second from left) was ordained on Dec. 18 at Desert Springs Lutheran Church in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, where he is called to serve as pastor.

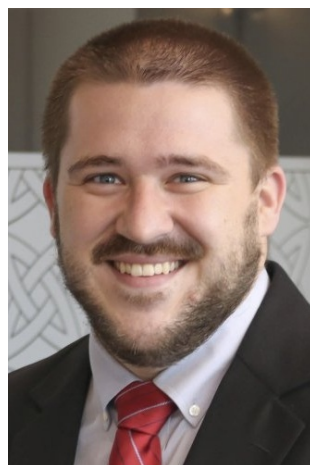
NALS special event planned for May 3

The North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) will host a special service marking a formal "affirmation of call" for the Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen as president of the NALS and the installation of Dr. David Luy and Dr. Alex Pierce as NALS professors.

The service is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 3, at Zion Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Bishop Dan Selbo will be presiding.



David Luy



Alex Pierce



Eric Riesen

Dr. Riesen has been the seminary president since 2020, but he was never formally installed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Luy and Dr. Pierce joined the seminary faculty in 2022. Both of them teach at the NALS Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, and are faculty of Trinity.

The NALS Network consists of the Seminary Center as well as Houses of Study at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama; Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta; Sioux Falls Seminary (Kairos University) in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and Houston, Texas. For more information go to thenals.org.

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference to focus on Giertz

The Canadian Rockies Theological Conference will be April 18-20 at the Coast Canmore Hotel and Conference Centre in Canmore, Alberta – just outside of beautiful Banff National Park.

The theme of this year's conference is "Fiction and Fact: The Writings of Bishop Bo Giertz." The conference will explore the theological approach of Bishop Bo Giertz, especially how historical novels can be used as a tool for teaching the faith.

Bo Giertz (1905-1998) was a Swedish Lutheran theologian and novelist. He served as bishop of the Gothenburg Lutheran Diocese 1949-1970. Giertz wrote more than 600 works but is known in the English-speaking world mostly for his book *The Hammer of God*. Giertz is often thought of as the "C.S. Lewis of Sweden."

The featured speaker for the conference will be the Rev. Bror Erickson. Pastor Erickson has translated numerous books and articles by Giertz and has contributed to the scholarship surrounding Giertz's life and work. His translations of Giertz include *To Live with Christ*, *Faith Alone: The Heart of Everything*, *The Knights of Rhodes*, *Then Fell the Lord's Fire*, *With My Own Eyes* and two volumes of *The New Testament Devotional Commentary*.

Pastor Erickson serves as pastor of Zion Evangelical Church, a congregation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Farmington, New Mexico. He graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 2004. He learned Swedish while so that he could translate Giertz's works.

In a brochure, organizers explain the goal of the conference: "Lutheran Churches are among those that describe themselves as being 'Confessional Churches.' That is to say that we think that doctrine



Bror Erickson



Bo Giertz

is important, despite any number of admonitions over the years to dispense with a doctrinal approach to preaching and catechesis. But taking that approach has led to churches being blown astray by the ever shifting Zeitgeist. We are convinced that we need more doctrine, not less, if we are to speak God's truth into a confused world.

"The problem is that doctrines can be both hard to understand, and harder apply to real world situations. The writings of Bishop Bo Giertz have proven themselves to be a useful tool in addressing this problem. Many people have found *The Hammer of God* to be indispensable in both understanding the doctrine of Law and Gospel, and of preaching accordingly. His novel *Faith Alone: The Heart Of Everything*, recently translated by Pastor Bror Erickson, does the same with the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms."

For more information on the conference go to thenalc.org/canadian-rockies or to the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference group on Facebook.

NALC Disaster Response update

By Mary Bates

NALC Disaster Response Coordinator

Alabama and Georgia were struck by 35 tornadoes the week of Jan. 10. From Selma, Alabama, to Griffins, Georgia, homes were devastated and families lost everything.

Members of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Georgia, lost their homes in Griffins and we are responding.

The first truckload of emergency relief supplies has been delivered.

Contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response Coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or disasterresponse@thenalc.org for more information as to how to help.

In 2023, NALC Disaster Response is also providing support and lifting up our congregations by:

- + Offering disaster preparedness training and emphasizing Life-to-Life Discipleship.
- + Scheduling Stuff the Truck events to help fill each of our regional warehouses around the United States in preparation for the next disasters.
- + Coordinating adult and youth volunteer teams on mission trips to disasters in California, Kentucky, Florida and Georgia.

Schedule a trip to the national warehouse in Caldwell, Ohio, where we are building a new Volunteer Center. The Volunteer Center will provide housing, a full kitchen and chapel for youth and adults.

Mission trips for long term recovery are being scheduled now throughout the year. Eastern Kentucky was flooded in 2022 and over 25,000 families still need your help rebuilding their homes.



Hurricane Ian struck the Fort Myers, Florida, area and NALC Disaster Response has two volunteer sites established there: Pine Island and Port Charlotte.

Additionally, flooding, mudslides and 2022 wildfires have caused FEMA declarations in 41 of California's 58 counties, including the community of Forest Hill, California, where our NALC congregation New Hope Lutheran Church is located.

Your help is needed! Schedule a mission trip or Stuff the Truck or Disaster Response Sunday now to help NALC Disaster Response reach out to the many, many needs in our communities.

Disaster Preparedness Training is scheduled for St. John Hopewell Township in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on Feb. 10-11 and at Grace Lutheran Church in Thornville, Ohio, on March 10-11.

Donations for NALC Disaster Response may be mailed to North American Lutheran Church; PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565. Please indicate "disaster response" on your check. Go to thenalc.org for disaster updates or to give online.

Church foolishness and insanity

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:18 RSV

In the lectionary, we recently heard from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, where the apostle writes contrasting the wisdom of God and the foolishness of humanity.

The word of the cross speaks to us clearly, calling us to put to death sin, disobedience and foolishness, embracing God's truth – the word of the cross, which is Christ crucified and risen. If this says anything to us in the Church, it should free us to always be ready to die to ourselves and embrace new paths, new directions and new opportunities for mission and ministry.

And yet, our congregations often seem to be locked into patterns, programs and ways of being church that are leading to stagnation at best and, at worst, decline. Still, we keep doing the same things the same ways, expecting and hoping for different outcomes and results.

Albert Einstein is frequently quoted as saying, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results." While it seems that quote may not have originated with Einstein (some claim he never said it, but it comes from a work of fiction in 1983), still, it rings true. And nowhere is that more obvious than within congregational life in North American churches.

As I facilitate our Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits, I hear quite frequently, comments such as, "We are stuck!" "We are declining!" "We are having funeral after funeral, with no children or youth to take their place!" "We keep doing the same things we've always done, but we aren't growing!"

And that's the issue in many congregations. We keep doing what we've always done, expecting different results.



Ministry Matters

Rev. Dr. David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Often what we're doing or what we're perpetuating are practices and procedures based on the reality of the Church just after World War II. At that time, we had more families, children and youth than we could fit into our 20 classrooms, more volunteers than we could involve in our 20 committees and boards, and more visitors walking into worship each Sunday than we could connect with and welcome into membership.

That is not the reality for the Church of 2023. Continuing to function as we did in the 1950s is human foolishness which is leading many of our congregations into frustration and, yes, "churchly insanity."

Truly, Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever – and God's Word forever will abide. However, our understanding of our world, our mission context and our congregations must shift and change. We must have the courage to sometimes do things differently if we wish to stop the decline and stagnation and become truly, "Mission-Driven" congregations and people in the North American Lutheran Church.

The Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits are aimed at helping congregations to look honestly at themselves, assess their current capacity for mission and listen to the Holy Spirit who may be calling us to think and act differently in this 21st Century.

What have the 25 or so congregations which have now completed the process been discovering? I

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reported these conclusions to the NALC Executive Council recently:

+ Congregations have acknowledged that they are focused on themselves and those within the four walls of their church building, with no heart or passion for spreading the Gospel to those who are unchurched, religiously unaffiliated or in need outside of their church.

+ Congregations are coming to grips with the fact that they have no clear vision for mission and ministry, and they have no idea how to develop such a vision.

+ Congregations are waiting for visitors to walk in the doors of the church on Sunday morning. When they haven't had regular visitors for years, church leaders have no idea how to increase visibility and connection to their community and mission context.

+ Most members of our congregations have no idea how to share how God has been active in their lives. Similarly, most are completely uncomfortable with and unprepared for inviting others to visit their church, with no clear understanding why they might invite others to their church in the first place. They can't explain why the unchurched might be blessed in a Lutheran church and their local church. Instead, many are almost embarrassed to be Lutheran, as if upon meeting an unchurched person, one of our members are more likely to say, "You probably wouldn't want to come to our church – we're Lutheran," as if that's a bad thing.



Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit at Bethel Lutheran Church in Santa Maria, California.

+ Congregations which are participating in our Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits are discovering the value in being honest about their current reality, the strengths to build upon in their particular congregation and how they might go about reaching out and being mission oriented in what is an almost anti-Christian culture. The question congregations are asked, finally, is, "What does God want you to be and to do, to move into the future He intends for you?" And the answers are varied and unique to each congregation and ministry context – but the process leads congregations and leaders to be excited, encouraged and energized for the future.

For more information on how your congregation can participate in a Fresh Eyes for Mission Summit, contact Pastor David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism, at dwendel@thenalc.org.

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

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NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
CHURCH

Please copy and share this newsletter widely.

Newly-ordained pastors meet regularly via Zoom

For the past year our newly-ordained pastors (up to five years) have been meeting on Zoom to continue to learn some of the more practical aspects of being a pastor serving in a congregation.

When we first started, I asked our newest pastors, “What would you like to learn that they didn’t teach you in seminary?” This question is not a criticism of seminary at all, rather it’s a reality that seminary teaches the academic aspects of ministry, but real life presents its own challenges once we enter the parish.

For example, when I was a young pastor I had the challenge of dealing with my local government’s Planning Commission when we wanted to build a parking lot. I learned a lot about 100-year floods, zoning regulations, public hearings and how to deal with village leadership that wasn’t excited to make anything easy for us.

None of the new pastors asked for that topic, however, some of the ones we’ve covered at their request so far have been:

- + How to raise up leaders who will actually lead.
- + How to lead a staff.
- + Preaching in difficult circumstances.
- + How to teach stewardship to a congregation.
- + Life-to-Life Discipleship, spiritual direction and more.

These Zoom meetings are just one part of a new emphasis the NALC is putting on walking with new pastors as they enter the ministry. There are many challenges and opportunities to embrace, but sometimes we don’t know exactly how to do certain things until we face them ourselves.



From the
General Secretary

Rev. Dr. Amy Little
General Secretary

We have a wonderful cadre of new pastors in the NALC, all of whom need our sincere prayers and support. Pastoral ministry is not for the faint of heart – but it is a blessed vocation!

Congregational annual reports

Congregational leaders and pastors are encouraged to complete their annual congregational report to the North American Lutheran Church.

Information for completing the annual reports for 2022 was sent to all pastors and congregations in late January. Please complete the reports by February 28.

Contribution statements

Annual contribution statements for gifts to the NALC were sent by email to the email address on file for the donor. Those without an email address on file will receive a mailed copy.

Pastor Wendy Berthelson joins staff to work with pastors coming into NALC

The Rev. Wendy Berthelsen has joined the NALC staff at the office in Grapevine, Texas.

She will be working on a part-time basis, assisting Pastor Amy Little with the certification of pastors coming into the NALC from other church bodies. The new position was needed because of the significant number of new pastors coming to the NALC.

Pastor Wendy is a graduate of Gustavus Adolphus College and

Luther Seminary. She and her husband Joel serve as pastors of Hope Lutheran Church in Cedar Hill, Texas. Pastor Wendy works with a ministry called Call Inc. This ministry helps teach people to seek, discover, and incorporate Jesus' call into all of life. Call Inc. also trains others to mobilize people according to God's call.

If you know a pastor who wants to join the NALC, put them in contact with Pastor Wendy. She can be reached at certification@thenalc.org.



Wendy Berthelsen

Nominations sought for 2023 Mission Convocation

The NALC Nominating Committee is beginning the process of receiving the names of candidates for nomination to serve in positions to be elected at the 2023 NALC Mission Convocation Aug. 9-11 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The 2023 Mission Convocation will elect the NALC bishop as well as four members of the NALC Executive Council (two lay people and two pastors) – all to four-year terms.

Bishop Dan Selbo is eligible for reelection.

The Convocation will also elect members of the

Court of Adjudication and North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents. Both pastors and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication and Board of Regents.

Congregations will be emailed information about the nominating process and how to submit names. Watch the NALC website for more information.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position are available at thenalc.org/leadership.

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

Faith Formation Festival held in Carolinas Mission Region

The Carolinas Mission Region Faith Formation Festival – Everything you want to know about Youth and Family Ministry – was an amazing success.

Pastors, Christian education directors, youth leaders, and Sunday school teachers gathered Jan. 6-7 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Gastonia, North Carolina, to learn more about Youth and Family Ministry.

Guest speakers included the Rev. Dr. Amy Little, general secretary of the NALC; Melanie Corn, Christian education director at St. Peter Lutheran Church and Youth and Family Ministry Specialist for the NALC; the Rev. Melinda Jones, pastor of Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Charleston, South Carolina; the Rev. Dr. Steven King, managing editor of Sola Publishing; the Rev. Dawn Rister, pastor of Salem Lutheran Church, Salisbury, North Carolina; and the Rev. Teresa Peters, associate pastor of Joy Lutheran Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and director of Youth and Family Ministries for the NALC.



Youth and Family

Rev. Teresa Peters
Director of Youth
and Family Ministry

The speakers covered topics including, “Tackling Biblical Illiteracy (an intergenerational approach);” “Youth and Family Best Practices;” “Identify the Spiritual Gifts of our Youth;” “The Use of Storytelling with Children;” “Raising God’s Children to be Disciples in a Broken World;” “Youth and Family Ministry in the NALC.”

Pastor Tom Corbell, interim pastor at Holy Trinity in Gastonia, North Carolina, had this to say about the event: “There are times when the Holy Spirit visits us in ways we least expect. Stories told in new ways, object conveying powerful lessons, visions balanced with practical ways of ministering to

children and adults! In these, and many other ways, blessings were received through the NALC Faith Formation Festival. ... As I personally experienced fresh ways of telling the “Old, Old Story,” I was challenged and blessed by this shared experience. If you have an opportunity to attend the NALC’s Faith Formation Festivals, I would strongly encourage you to go! Go and be blessed! Go, and then come home, with prayerful hope that translates into action!”

The next Faith Formation Festival will take place May 5-6 in the Ohio Mission Region.



Pastor Dawn Rister speaks at the Faith Formation Festival in the Carolinas Mission Region.

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If you are not in the Ohio area but would like to have a Faith Formation Festival in your part of North America, contact Pastor Teresa Peters. We would love to set one up.

NALC youth serving in love

Once again, the North American Lutheran Church is encouraging youth throughout the United States and Canada to participate in a service event sometime during the month of February.

Youth can lead a service project or participate in a service ministry your congregation already is planning. We know that young people see themselves as part of the church when they are actively involved.

After your project, please email a photo and description of your project to Pastor Peters. We will feature as many of your servings projects as we can in the NALC News.

If you want more details or want ideas, please reach out.

Mental Health America states that 15.8 percent – that’s almost one in five young people ages 12-17 – had at least one major depressive episode last year in the United States. While parents need to have more open conversations about mental health concerns, youth ministry leaders are probably the most open and most ready to talk about mental health with students.

Pastor Teresa Peters will be leading youth ministry leaders through a four-week Bible Study that they can then take back to their youth groups and lead with the young people there.

This will take place on Zoom at 6 p.m. ET on Thursdays in March. Please contact Pastor Peters to register.

Other happenings

+ Join the “NALC Youth and Family Workers” group on Facebook.

+ Youth and family pastors and leaders connect on Zoom, on the second Thursday of the month at 8 p.m. ET, and on the fourth Thursday of the month at 11 a.m. ET. The Zoom link is us02web.zoom.us/j/6250934259.

+ Check out “Holy Families” under the tab “Leaders Resources” you will find resources created by Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and pastors throughout the NALC for you to use. There is not much there yet but check back often. Here’s a link: holyfamilytime.com. Also let me know if you have resources to share.

+ The Rev. Dr. Mark H. Braaten, Southern area assistant to the bishop, is offering confirmation classes on Zoom. This is a great opportunity for churches without pastors or those that might only have one or two students. For more information contact southernab@thenalc.org.

Pastor Teresa Peters is the director of Youth and Family Ministry for the NALC. You may contact her at tpeters@thenalc.org.



July 1-4, 2024 - Boerne, Texas

Ending human trafficking

By Pastor Dona Johnson

On the last Sunday of December, many churches focused their attention on the slaughter of the Holy Innocents – the day King Herod ordered the killing of all toddlers two years and younger in Bethlehem. In this heinous move, Herod feared for the safety of his throne and had anticipated that the infant Jesus would be one of them.

The word “innocent” from its Latin root means “not wounded.” Isn’t that how most of us start life? We’re innocent. It doesn’t have anything to do with morally right or wrong. It has everything to do with being wounded. We start out innocent, but the killing of our holy innocence (as in Herod’s command to kill the babies) is an archetypal image of what eventually happens to all of us.

The month of January has been named anti-trafficking month – and for a good reason. Super Bowl Sunday is usually scheduled in January or February. The Super Bowl is a prolific breeding ground where young girls and boys, once innocent children, are groomed and sold as sex slaves to anyone who will pay the price.

In fact, thousands of children will be flown into the Phoenix, Arizona, area before this year’s game. Did you know many of the airlines train their crews to scan passengers for signs of trafficking? Thomson Reuters reported in 2021 that it is estimated that up to 66 percent of the global profits from human trafficking (approximately \$150 billion) come from sexual exploitation. Major sporting events are their “Super Bowls.” A pimp on the street today will average \$250,000 per victim.

The Phoenix Dream Center, a flagship center for human trafficked victims, has a 92 percent success rate in recovery efforts. It reports the average age of victims in Arizona is now 12 years of age for girls and 11 for boys. These young children come from all sorts of socio-economic backgrounds. Sex trafficking is happening everywhere. In the poorest

and wealthiest of neighborhoods. In fact, many of Phoenix’s sting operations have shifted to Scottsdale, Arizona.

Many of these young girls and boys have experienced emotional and physical strife at home, many have aged out of the foster care system with no permanent family as support or backup. And so out of their woundedness and their need to survive they go searching for love and a way to sustain themselves. Very experienced predators wait to prey on their woundedness. At first, they are lured by promises to be loved and cared for, but once they take the bait, they are drugged, beaten and sexually abused into submission.

We are reminded in the Gospels, that the Christ child is the image of the unwounded One. The anointed One experienced our woundedness on the cross. But through His agonizing death he also conquered sin and death for those who are abused and exploited. God is tirelessly at work against this dreadful situation.

God is working through passionate police teams and sting operations, psychologists, pastors and agencies like Shared Hope International and the Phoenix Dream Center. Jesus’ mission was, is and will always be to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to set free those who are oppressed (Luke 4:16-21).

Through constant prayer, raising awareness in your congregation and by joining the effort to combat sexual slavery, there is hope. So, as you gather with friends and family to watch Super Bowl 2023, remember beneath the glamour, the lights and all the infamous commercials, the holy God-given innocence of children is being exploited, but there are many organizations working to push back this darkness. If you would like more information on how to get involved or would like our Sedona Shared Hope Ambassadors to bring a presentation to your church, business or social club, contact Pastor Dona Johnson at gracepointofsedona.org.

2023 annual March for Life



NALC participants in the 2023 National March for Life in Washington, D.C., posed for a group photo.

The annual march was held on Jan. 20.

Daily prayer and Bible reading calendar for 2023

“Devoted to Prayer,” a daily prayer and Bible reading guide, is now available at thenalc.org.

“Devoted to Prayer” was conceived and prepared by the Rev. Andrew S. Ames Fuller, director of communications for the North American Lutheran Church.

This guide is to provide the average layperson and pastor with simple tools for sorting through the busyness of their lives and reclaiming an act of daily discipleship with their Lord.

The daily readings follow the *Lutheran Book of Worship* two-year daily lectionary, which reflect the church calendar closely. The commemorations are adapted from Philip H. Pfatteicher’s *New Book of Festivals and Commemorations*, a proposed common calendar of the saints that builds from the *Lutheran*

Book of Worship, but includes saints from many of those churches in ecumenical conversation with the NALC.

Our hope is that this calendar and guide will provide new life for congregations learning and re-learning to pray in the midst of a difficult and changing world.

Congregations seeking pastors

You may find a list of congregations seeking pastors at thenalc.org/call-process.

Podcasts for preachers

Podcasts and online video recordings are seeking to help pastors as they study the lectionary Scripture readings and prepare to preach them. The podcasts may also be of interest to lay members in pondering the Scripture readings heard in worship.

“Preaching the Text” is a new podcast featuring the Rev. Dr. Steven Paulson, a renowned Lutheran theologian, and the Rev. Dr. John Hoyum, an NALC pastor. The podcast presents the Scripture readings with a particular emphasis on how the Gospel is proclaimed and heard in weekly preaching.

Dr. Paulson is a Senior Fellow in Residence at 1517. He has taught at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Luther House of Study. He is the author of many articles and books, including three volumes of *Luther's Outlaw God*.

Dr. Hoyum serves as pastor of Denny Park Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington. He recently completed his Ph.D. in systematic theology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

You may download the podcast through most podcasting apps. You can access the podcast and learn more at 1517.org/podcasts.

“Scripture First” is a podcast from Luther House of Study. It features one of the Luther House of Study professors discussing the three-year lectionary Gospel reading with a small group of students.

The Luther House of Study at Sioux Falls Seminary (Kairos University) is a part of the North American Lutheran Seminary Network.

You may download the “Scripture First” podcast through most podcasting apps. You can learn more at lutherhouseofstudy.org.

“Cross Talk” is a weekly online lectionary study from St. Paul Lutheran Seminary. It is led by the Rev. Julie Smith, coordinator of districts and fellowship for Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ



John Hoyum



Steven Paulson

(LCMC). This study was led by the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen prior to his death on December 31, 2022.

Pastor Smith works through the lectionary texts for the coming Sunday, offering insights for Gospel preaching. Contact St. Paul Theological Seminary to be included in a weekly email with a link to the study. You can learn more at semilc.org.

1517 also hosts a video discussion of the lectionary Gospel reading featuring a group Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors from California called “Talking Shop.” A second video discussion group on the epistle readings features LCMS pastors from Arizona. You can subscribe to the videos on YouTube under “Craft of Preaching.” You can also access the videos and learn more at 1517.org/craftofpreaching.

“Issues, Etc.,” an online Lutheran talk radio station and podcast, includes discussions of the lectionary texts called “Looking Forward to Sunday Morning” featuring LCMS pastors. You may download the Issues, Etc. podcast through most podcasting apps. You can learn more at issuesetc.org.

Luther Seminary offers a lectionary podcast and other resources featuring faculty members from a variety of different traditions at workingpreacher.org.