

NALC GLOBAL WORKER IN BELARUS HELPING REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE

By Pastor Valery Hryhoryk
NALC Global Worker in Belarus

The war in Ukraine has created a lot of pain and death. Many people were forced to abandon their homes and flee to other countries. The vast majority of the Ukrainian refugees went to western Europe and the United States. However, many also came to Belarus. Over the last year, more than 75,000 Ukrainian refugees came to our country and the number is still growing.

Yacheslav and Marina left their home in Zaporozhe, Ukraine. To save their lives, they first went to Poland and then to Spain. Life in Spain for the family was not easy because of the language barrier and limited access to medical services.



Yacheslav and Marina

Marina had a stomach problem but she could not get an appointment with a free doctor for three months. She did not have local health insurance. The couple could not find a job in Spain because their diplomas had to be approved by the Spanish government. After having spent five months in Spain, the couple decided to come to Belarus where there would be no problems with the language, medical care or jobs. Such families need a lot of help and care.



The Palaguta family

The Palaguta family from Ukraine now lives in a small village in Belarus called Pirevichy. Julia and her husband Michail came to Belarus first in 2014. They got a small house from the local government where they started a new life.

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When the war conflict became bigger, Julia's sister also came to Belarus from Ukraine with her family and her parents as refugees. The family is very grateful to the local people for their kindness and hospitality. People brought food, clothes and kitchenware. They also provided financial support.

Lidia is 94 years old. She was born in Siberia in a Russian repatriation camp for Germans under Stalin. Later her family moved to Odessa where she lived for almost all of her life.

Lidia is a Lutheran believer and attended a Lutheran church in Odessa, Ukraine. Lidia's daughter brought her mother to Minsk, the capital of Belarus, just when the war in Ukraine started. Lidia had to leave an apartment and almost all of her possessions behind in Odessa.

I was happy to see Lidia. She did not look her age at all! She loves the Lord dearly. A pastor from Odessa, Oleg Shevchenko, asked me to travel to Minsk and to share the Lord's Supper with this dear sister. It was a privilege to serve!

The book, *Love, Truth and Grace*, a commentary on a short catechesis of Luther, was presented as a gift. Sister Lidia was blessed to have a daughter, living in Belarus, but many refugees do not enjoy this privilege and need help with basic things.



Lidia and her family with Pastor Valery



Pastor Valery serves Holy Communion to Lidia

UNICEF, Red Cross and Caritas (a Roman Catholic Church relief organization) are helping the Ukrainian refugees — mainly women, children, elderly and, in some cases, young men, who cannot take part in the war because of their health.

We explored the situation in Vitebsk, Belarus, meeting with local leaders who are seeking to coordinate the overwhelming relief challenge.

Galina, the director of the Red Cross in Vitebsk informed us that 320 refugees are now officially registered in Vitebsk. The number is constantly growing. The number of unregistered refugees is unknown. Refugees can stay in the country for 90 days without registration.

Galina said that the refugees from Ukraine are in a great need as they have nearly nothing with them. Mostly these are women with children and the elderly. Galina says that they just turn up asking for

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help. These people are under a great psychological stress. They need psychological and spiritual help. Help is also needed with clothes, (especially warm clothes), food and hygiene supplies.

We visited a crises center that is being built in Vitebsk for the Ukrainian Refugees.

Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship (BLMF) is monitoring the needs of Ukrainian refugees via social media groups devoted to the topic and also via direct connection with the Red Cross in Vitebsk.

We are planning to start helping with basic needs. For \$115 (U.S.) we can support five families with a food package (pictured below) for two weeks or three families with means of hygiene for a month (toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, washing powder, women's means of hygiene, and diapers for children).

The food package includes: 1 bottle of sunflower oil, 1 pack of butter, 1 pack of pasta, 1 pack of buckwheat, a piece of cheese, 1 sausage stick, 1 can of green peas, 1 can of corn, 1 packet of mayonnaise, 1 packet of ketchup, 1 can of meat, 1 packet of biscuits, 1 packet of waffles, 1 packet of sugar, 1 packet of tea, 1 kg of tangerines, 1 kg of flour.



Food package provided to refugees



Pastor Valery with Galina, the director of the Red Cross in Vitebsk, Belarus.

BLMF and Awakening Lives To World Missions (ALWM), our missionary partner in North America, have a unique opportunity to display the love of God to these people in need. With much prayer, we have determined that BLMF and ALWM can also make a difference, so we have established the Belarus Ukrainian Refugees Ministry.

For more information on BLMF and their ministry or to partner with them go to alwm.org/blmf or thenalc.org/partners/valery-hryhory.

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 as soon as possible.

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 one lay person and one pastor to the NALC Executive Council — all to four-year terms.

Only one lay and ordained member will be elected to the Executive Council at this year's convocation. The 2020 Mission Convocation voted to amend the NALC Constitution to hold convocations every other year and to elect two lay members and two pastors to Executive Council at each convocation, but the NALC is still in the transition period toward electing two lay members and two pastors at each biennial convocation.

The 2023 Mission Convocation will also elect two members to the Court of Adjudication. Both pastors

and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication.

Information on the nominating process including the nomination form and descriptions of the positions is available online at thenalc.org/nominations. All nominations must be submitted electronically.

To prepare for the nomination and election process for bishop, the Executive Council has prepared a booklet of prayers encouraging NALC congregations and members to engage in prayer and discernment leading up to the election.

The Nominating Committee is asking that nominations be submitted by May 1 to allow the committee time to compile biographical information and meet the constitutional deadline to distribute it to NALC members 90 days prior to the convocation.

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

RESPONDING TO OHIO TRAIN DISASTER

NALC Disaster Response is responding to the Ohio train derailment that spilled thousands of gallons of vinyl chloride in the town of East Palestine, Ohio.

Good Hope Lutheran Church in Boardman, Ohio (suburban Youngstown), was in the path of the airborne hazardous waste.

Air and water is being tested and local residents are told that it is safe to return home. However, many residents are reluctant to do so. Cleaning supplies in our flood buckets are being distributed so that families may wash down the exterior and interior of their homes, trying to remove as much of the smoke and airborne vinyl chloride as possible. Drinking water is being distributed by the local government.

NALC Disaster Response is also distributing Walmart and Visa gift cards to those families who are still evacuated, so they may buy groceries and extra cleaning supplies.

Please keep the residents of East Palestine and the surrounding area in your prayers.

Go to thenalc.org for disaster updates or to give online. 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.

Gift cards may be sent to NALC Disaster Response, 16500 Noble Ave., Caldwell, OH 43724.

BECKY SEIFERT AND JOAN CORNIEA ARE LEAVING THE NALC STAFF

Becky Seifert and Joan Corniea are leaving the NALC staff at the end of February.

Becky has served as the assistant to executive staff since 2011. She worked at the NALC office in Hilliard, Ohio, and then from her home after that office was closed.

Becky has worked primarily for the bishops and for Pastor David Wendel, administrative assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. Her role with the NALC included coordinating and managing NALC committee meetings, assisting in the candidacy process, and recording minutes for the Executive Council.

Joan Corniea has served as financial assistant in the New Brighton, Minnesota, office since 2018. Her role included work with basic financial operations, database maintenance, membership notifications, records retention, fielding office phone calls, and assisting with proofreading NALC publications.

"On behalf of the North American Lutheran Church, I wish to thank Becky and Joan for their years of faithful and dedicated work. Their love for the Lord Jesus and His people have been obvious in the ways they have served and in the manner in which they have given of themselves to strengthen our fellowship and our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their gifts have served our church body well," said Bishop Dan Selbo.

"On a personal note, I, too, have been blessed by their partnership and by the relationships I have developed with each of them. They are dear and treasured sisters in Christ and their presence on our staff will be deeply missed," Bishop Selbo said. The Minnesota office is scheduled to close in May. All NALC phone calls began going to the Texas office in mid-February. Mail correspondence should continue to go to the Minnesota office for the time being.



Joan Corniea



Becky Seifert

Anne Gleason will continue to work for the NALC until after the 2023 Mission Convocation. She will be finalizing the closure of the Minnesota office and will be shipping the NALC records and archives to Texas.

Anne has worked for the NALC since before the church was constituted in 2010. She worked for the WordAlone Network and Lutheran CORE prior to the formation of the NALC. She has been the primary financial official and support staff for all of those organizations.



Anne Gleason

The NALC is still seeking permanent office space near Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. NALC leaders and staff are currently working in a temporary location in a shared office facility in Grapevine, Texas. It is hoped that the details will be finalized soon. The NALC is still seeking to hire additional support staff for the office in Texas.

2023 NALC LENTEN DEVOTIONS

By the Rev. Andrew S. Ames Fuller
Director of Communications

Loved and Freed, a 2023 collection of Lenten devotions from the North American Lutheran Church is now available.

As we enter the ancient season of Lent, we are invited to walk with Jesus through His journey of sacrifice and triumph, from His baptism to His crucifixion and finally to His resurrection on Easter Sunday, where we find ultimate love and freedom.

Lent has been a time of spiritual renewal for Christians for centuries. It is a time to reflect on our faith, repent of our sins, and grow closer to God through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and service to others. This book of devotions offers daily reflections and prayers to guide you on this journey of spiritual transformation and death to self.

The theme of this book, *Loved and Freed*, is inspired by the opening verses of Revelation 1:5–6, which give us a beautiful picture of the incredible love and freedom we have through Jesus Christ. As we read through these devotions, may we be reminded of the love and freedom we have in Christ and be empowered to love and serve others in the same way.

This year's devotions were written by 16 members of the NALC staff for each day from Ash Wednesday to The Resurrection of Our Lord. The readings each day are based upon the daily lectionary provided in the NALC Devoted To Prayer daily prayer and reading guide, which is an adapted version of the daily lectionary in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

PDF copies of this devotional booklet are available for download from the NALC website for printing for individual use or distribution in congregations.

For details on how to access the devotional electronically or to receive it as a daily email or text message, please visit thenalc.org/lent.



Listen to this year's devotional on the North American Lutheran Church podcast available on most podcast apps.

A video recording of the devotional will be available for viewing daily at facebook.com/thenalc.

Make the most of this Lenten season by setting aside time each day for reflection, prayer, and service. Allow yourself to be drawn closer to God through this season of sacrifice and renewal, death and life.

So, take a deep breath, open the pages, and allow yourself to embark on a journey with Jesus over the next 47 days, that you may experience the transformative power of His love and freedom in your life.

May this season of Lent be a time of growth, renewal, and deeper intimacy with God as we prepare for His passion, death, resurrection, and beyond!

2020 VISION REACHES \$1 MILLION FUNDRAISING MILESTONE

Energy was vibrant at the NALC Pastors' Conference in San Antonio, Texas, when Bishop Dan Selbo shared the news that we are already seeing momentum and impact through our 2020 Vision — the initiative developed to address the needs of the North American Lutheran Church's diverse congregations. The Today, Tomorrow & Forever financial appeal part of the vision just reached its first big milestone: \$1 million in pledges to help us grow, serve, renew and fulfill the life of our congregations.

"It was incredibly encouraging to hear the 220 pastors who gathered together in San Antonio cheer and clap when Bishop Dan announced that we had reached the \$1 million milestone. It tells us that our pastors are on board with the initiative and want the NALC to be as strong and as missional as possible. We are doing this together for the sake of Christ, and as a church body we continue to grow closer and stronger," said Pastor Amy Little, general secretary.

There are a number of ways this vision has already begun to transform our efforts as a church: the number of seminarians who have entered our candidacy process to become pastors is growing; we have commissioned new mission workers and launched new church plants; we have begun new Faith Formation Festivals to encourage those involved in youth and family ministry; and we are planning over 20 Fresh Eyes for Mission summits this year to help renew and revitalize congregations looking to discover what kinds of ministries to which the Lord might lead them next.

Most recently, our first-ever Pastoral Development Days came to fruition as a direct result of the commitments we have made in the serve component of our vision to offer continuing education opportunities for our pastors. The Pastoral Development Days, which preceded the Pastors' Conference, were led by Pastor Little and Pastor David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism. The event was open to any

NALC pastor wishing to improve and develop pastoral skills, understanding and excellence. Sixteen pastors and one seminarian participated.

"It was wonderful to spend four days with a cadre of our pastors who wanted to sharpen their pastoral tools. The insights from all involved were incredibly helpful and encouraging as we learned from one another's perspectives on ministry in our unique contexts. Within the group we had new pastors who were just ordained, pastors who recently came to the NALC from other church bodies, and seasoned pastors in search of community of engagement with others. By the end of the four days, each of us had 16 new friends," said Pastor Little.

Pastor Wendel said: "Since the formation of the NALC, we've been discussing the possibility of offering an in-depth continuing education opportunity specifically for NALC pastors desiring to focus on growth and excellence in ministry, and the 2020 Vision gave us the push to offer these NALC Pastoral Development Days for the first time. On a scale of 1-10, the participants rated the first NALC Pastoral Development Days an 8.9. What is most exciting is the impact this continuing education for pastors may have in the congregations they serve!"

We are filled with gratitude for the many congregations and individuals who have faithfully and generously contributed to this fundraising milestone. We will continue to direct these funds to efforts that will grow, serve, renew and fulfill the life of the NALC and our congregations, to ensure a legacy of faith today, tomorrow, and forever. Thank you for helping us reach 20 percent of our \$5 million goal!

We are excited for all of the work to come, and we praise God for His continued faithfulness in bringing vitality and longevity to His church.

Learn more about the 2020 Vision and get involved at vision.thenalc.org.



Dr. John Grabowski of The Catholic University of America was the featured speaker for the Pastors' Conference. Dr. Grabowski presented a clear understanding of Christian anthropology and then addressed the current attack on Christian anthropology from gender ideology advocates.



Bishop Dan Selbo addressed those in attendance several times and led worship and a meeting of the NALC Ministerium.

2023 PASTORS' CONFERENCE

RECLAIMING
CHRISTIAN
ANTHROPOLOGY:

GENDER
IDEOLOGY AND
OUR PASTORAL
RESPONSE



225 people attended the 2023 NALC Pastors' Conference.



Pastor David Wendel, assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism, led daily prayer services throughout the conference.



A panel discussion followed the presentations by Dr. John Grabowski, responding to his lecture and to questions from the pastors. Panel members included, from left, Dr. Grabowski; Bishop Dan Selbo; Dr. David Luy, North American Lutheran Seminary professor; Pastor Amy Little, general secretary; and Bishop John Bradosky, NALC bishop emeritus.

JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 2 IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



Pastor Amy Little, general secretary, told the pastors that the NALC has reached \$1 million in pledges toward its \$5 million goal in the Today, Tomorrow & Forever vision fund-raising initiative.



The Rev. Dr. Eric Reisen, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary, talked about the work of the seminary network and the training of future pastors for the NALC.

NALC PASTORS' CONFERENCE

"See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord." – Colossians 4:17 RSV

This verse was the theme for the first NALC Pastoral Development Days — three days of intensive education, sharing and experiences aimed at assisting pastors in fulfilling their calling. This event was followed by a special NALC Pastor's Spouse gathering and the NALC Pastors' Conference. These events were held at the Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk.

The Pastoral Development Days (Jan. 27-30) fulfilled a long-awaited dream of offering such an in-depth continuing education event for pastors of the North American Lutheran Church. The 2020 Vision initiative gave us the push to offer the first gathering, which preceded the Pastors' Conference.

There were 16 pastors and one seminary intern participating. Pastors ranged in experience from a pastor ordained as recently as two months ago to a pastor with 25 years of ordained ministry.

The focus was on leadership assessment and goal-setting, how to build an effective and healthy ministry leadership team, the DNA of the NALC and improving preaching.

On a scale of 1-10, the participants rated the first NALC Pastoral Development Days an 8.9.

While the goal was to provide pastors with the opportunity to shape and hone their pastoral skills, ultimately, the continuing education event was offered in the hope that these pastors will return to their congregations with renewed energy, enthusiasm and focus, impacting congregations in positive, fruitful ways.

The NALC Pastor's Spouse gathering followed on Monday evening, Jan. 30. The first event for clergy spouses took place in 2022, with 20 spouses participating, the event grew to more than 35 in attendance this year.



MINISTRY MATTERS

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

The gathering included Bible study and devotion, a presentation by Pastor Amy Little, general secretary, and group discussion. Pastor Little's presentation encompassed understanding family systems, and participants were able to discuss issues, many of which were raised at last year's gathering.

Some of the areas discussed included 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 and relationships in the congregation, how to keep one's identity as a pastor's spouse, and more.

Spouses were welcome to sit in on the Pastors' Conference presentations. Gender confusion and related issues are of concern and importance to spouses as well as pastors.

The 2023 NALC Pastors' Conference had a record high participation of more than 200 clergy, spouses and visitors.

The conference topic was "Reclaiming Christian Anthropology; Gender Ideology and Our Pastoral Response!" under the biblical theme "Male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27).

Conference participants heard three presentations from Dr. John Grabowski of the Catholic University of America. There was also extensive time for discussion and small group focus on case studies.

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The strategy was to provide pastors with in-depth biblical and theological information on Christian anthropology, together with real-life application.

More than a recap and a reporting on these important NALC events, this serves as an invitation for pastors, spouse and their congregations to plan for participation at the 2024 NALC Pastors' Conference and related gatherings.

Congregational leaders are encouraged to plan now to provide time and funding for their pastor (and spouse) to attend these important events which are aimed at support and encouragement, refreshment and renewal for pastors and their families.

Clergy are often tired, burned-out and feeling isolated — even when surrounded by church members. Some spouses experience little support and have few to talk with and confide in, given the realities of parish life and dynamics. Pastors may find it difficult to make time for intentional learning related to self-reflection, assessment and goal-setting, leadership development and growth in preaching.

Each of these events offered by the NALC are important ways that we are addressing these realities. But only a third of NALC pastors have attended the annual Pastors' Conferences. The support and encouragement of congregational leaders is essential to pastors' willingness to participate, connect with the larger church and receive the renewed energy and excitement which comes from such gatherings.



Participants in Pastoral Development Days

The 2024 Pastors' Conference and related events will take place Jan. 16-18, 2024, at the Drury Plaza Hotel Orlando Disney Springs in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

This is an exciting new venue just a short walk from the Disney Springs restaurant, shopping and event area, which is open to the public at no charge. Fireworks from the Disney parks are visible from the hotel.

The Pastors' Conference is being held a bit earlier in 2024, to be able to avail ourselves of the pre-conference season jump in prices. For planning purposes, the hotel room rate will be \$159 per night. The conference registration fee will be a modest charge to ensure the conference is affordable. Discounted room rates are usually available for a few days before and after the conference. Watch for more details regarding the Pastors' Conference theme and speakers, as well as the Pastoral Development Days and Pastor's Spouse events.

For now, plan for your pastor to attend the 2024 NALC Pastors' Conference!

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



Participants in Pastor's Spouse Gathering

GEORGIA CONGREGATION RESPONDS TO TORNADOES

By Pastor Scott Ness

Finding your way through the aftermath of a storm is challenging, disorienting — a roller coaster of emotions as you assess the damage and the ever-growing to-do list of what needs to happen next. It can be overwhelming, especially when your neighbors and greater community are facing the same daunting task.

On Thursday, Jan. 12, Spaulding County and Pike County in Georgia were hit with five tornadoes. The destruction in the wake of the storms was unimaginable, especially in the city of Griffin, where at least three of those tornadoes made contact.



People had extensive damage to their homes and businesses, if not total loss.

In hours following the storm, the people of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Georgia, were already looking for ways to help their neighbors. By partnering with The Gathering People, a team of seven members went down on Saturday, Jan. 14, to help with debris removal. More plans are

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in the works to continue similar work in the weeks to come.

Saturday also saw the NALC Disaster Response trailer make its way down from North Carolina, loaded with flood buckets, blankets, Bibles, hygiene kits, diapers, school supplies, tools and water. Prince of Peace members spent their Sunday School hour the next morning “loving in action” as they unloaded the 24-foot trailer into their Life Center.

A week after the storms hit, the supplies made their way down to a volunteer site in Griffin. Prince of Peace members and community volunteers helped reload a new trailer with all the supplies and unload it for distribution.

Coming through the other side of a storm — literal or figurative — is a long process. But it does not have to be done alone. There are always those looking to help, to share their time, to share a small bit of hope in the chaos. Keep finding ways to help your neighbors. Spread love as far as you can, in whatever ways you are able to muster. Jesus really meant what He said: “Love your neighbor.”



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.



CENTRAL TO WHO WE ARE

The North American Lutheran Church was formed on the foundation of Jesus Christ. He is the rock upon which the Church is built. He is the cornerstone for us as a church body. Without Him we have nothing. In Him we have everything. He is at the center of our life together and the reason we exist. He is also the One in whom we find our purpose and the One about whom our message to the world is framed.

It is no coincidence that our denominational Core Values reflect the primacy of Jesus in our witness — Christ Centered. Nor is it by accident that our worship and life are grounded in the traditions of the Church — Traditionally Grounded. The historic creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, along with the Holy Scriptures, are our first and final and only authority for faith and life, and continue to be central to our proclamation.

During this season of Lent, these two Core Values are front and center. Lent is a time when the central focus is on the path Jesus walked to Calvary, on what God has done for us in His Son and why His work on the cross for our sin was necessary. Ultimately, Lent points us to Easter and to the celebration of life eternal that is ours in Christ.

Lent is also one of the traditions of the Church that continues to shape one of the key seasons in our liturgical Church year, and offers examples of some of the disciplines of the Church from the time of the first apostles.

Early Christianity records the discipline of fasting during the Lenten season. Diets consisting of bread, vegetables and water were allowed, but the consumption of meat and wine were forbidden. St. Athanasius wrote that the Lenten fast was to be observed throughout the world. St. Augustine taught that fasting throughout the year was voluntary but during Lent it was sinful to not fast.

Today, we understand the disciplines of the early Church to be exemplary for us and not required. At



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

the same time, if Lent is to continue to hold a special place in our traditions, and if this season of the Church year is to point us to the cross and the resurrection of Jesus and strengthen our witness to the world, is it not important that we see and use these 40 days as an opportunity to deepen our relationship with Christ?

In that sense, Lent is a time for us to do something. First and foremost, it's a time for us to confess our sin. It's a time to come clean before God and to be real. It's a time to stop pretending that we are good enough on our own, and to accept the fact that only in Jesus Christ can we ever stand before a holy and righteous God.

The prophet Joel states it clearly: "Yet even now," says the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments'" (Joel 2:12-13 RSV).

The people of Israel had the practice of doing at least part of what the prophet Joel had said. They would rend their garments. They would tear their clothes as a sign of repentance and mourning. They would also take ashes and cover their bodies with soot, as a reminder of their need for cleansing in the sight of God.

It was a good practice. It served them well. It was a discipline they followed, an outward sign of an inner need in their lives. But the prophet says that's not enough. He tells them to "rend their hearts, and not their garments."

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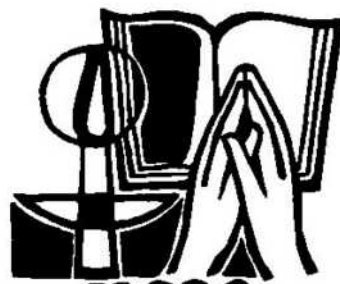
Lent is a time to be open and honest, to confess your sin and to allow that confession to change your heart and your life. It's a time for looking inwardly, a time for a deep and a careful assessment of our lives. It's a time to repent of our lack of attention to the things of God and our over-attention to the things of ourselves — a time to own up, and to get it right with God, and to allow our hearts to be torn.

Lent is also a time to take on something. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that if you're not taking on something during Lent that is above and beyond what you're already doing, then you're missing an important part of what this season is about.

The apostle Paul was not afraid to challenge the believers in Corinth. He said, "We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us, that in him, we might become the righteousness of God." Then he said, "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain" (2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:1 NIV).

Something needs to change. Something's supposed to be different. What's supposed to be different is to be seen in your life — more time spent in God's Word; a deeper and more focused time of prayer; a more active awareness of opportunities to share your faith.

Whatever it is, it needs to happen. If something needs to change, there's no better time to make those changes than now — and not to save yourself because you have already been saved in Jesus and not to prove your righteousness to God but to respond to His mercy and grace because you have already been made right in Christ.



**more
fervent in
PRAYER**



**more
generous
in works of
CHARITY**



**more
eager in cele-
brating the
MYSTERIES
by which we
are reborn**

Lent is also a time to give up something. And here, I'm not talking about giving up certain foods or activities or things you enjoy, as has been the practice for centuries. Rather, I'm talking about something more central to who we are as followers of Jesus.

How about giving up something that hinders your public witness? Instead of complaining about what's wrong, why not pay more attention to what's right? Instead of finding faults in others, why not focus on the things in others that are good? How about giving up worries and anxieties, and work on handing them over to the Lord? How about giving up buying things you don't need and passing on what you would have spent to someone who does?

The truth is you don't need to give up anything during Lent to be right with God, nor to be faithful as a Christian. But if you do, make it worthwhile and do it for the right reasons. See it as an opportunity to grow in your trust of the Lord and in your witness to Him. And don't expect anything in return, apart from the forgiveness and life He has already given to you.

During this Lenten season, we are reminded of the centrality of Christ in our faith and witness. We remember the traditions of the Church that continue to shape and unite us in our life together.

Ultimately, these 40 days serve as an opportunity for us to come clean before God, to address the changes in our lives that need to happen, and to remember who we are, why we exist, and where and in whom we find our hope. His name is Jesus. He was and is and will forever be the Christ. It is upon this rock and secure foundation that we continue to stand.

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF AND WATER MISSION ARE RESPONDING TO EARTHQUAKE IN TURKEY

Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and Water Mission are among the ministries responding to the recent earthquake in Turkey.

On February 6, a deadly magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Turkey, followed by aftershocks as large as magnitude 7.5. Nearly 50,000 men, women, and children in countries throughout the region have been killed. More than 105,000 people have suffered injuries and 300,000 people are displaced from their homes.

More than 9.1 million people in Turkey have been impacted and more than 47,000 buildings have been destroyed or damaged.

Much of the population is sheltering outside in tents in winter temperatures, which often fall below freezing. There is snow on the ground in many areas.

Lutheran World Relief, an NALC ministry partner, is delivering aid and support to survivors of the earthquakes in Turkey.

LWR has deployed members of its Humanitarian Action team to Turkey to support response operations and is coordinating with local organizations, United Nations agencies and other international humanitarian organizations to ensure aid is delivered effectively, without duplication, and meeting most urgent needs.

LWR conducted rapid needs assessments in affected areas. Urgently needed supplies including tents, tarps, winter clothing and solar lights have been airlifted to Turkey. An initial shipment arrived in Turkey on Feb. 20.

LWR is coordinating with local partners to distribute ready-to-eat food, hot meals, sleeping bags, sleeping

mats and warm winter clothes. LWR is also shipping quilts, Baby Care Kits and Personal Care Kits.

You can learn more about LWR's disaster response at lwr.org.

Water Mission, an NALC recognized ministry, has a disaster assistance response team in Turkey assessing emergency safe water, sanitation, and hygiene needs across a 200-mile-long area in the southern region of the country.

During any disaster, clean, safe water is critical. It helps prevent the spread of waterborne illnesses, which are especially deadly to young children. Water Mission has an extensive background in providing immediate and long-term safe water solutions.

Water Mission's Disaster Assistance Response Team deployed to Turkey within days of the deadly disaster to assess urgent water, sanitation, and hygiene needs.

Water Mission is shipping lifesaving equipment and supplies. Shipments include emergency water treatment systems, water quality testing kits, tapstands kits and jerry cans for water distribution, water purification supplies, and hygiene kits to help keep people healthy.

Water Missions is shipping numerous safe water treatment systems to the region.

Water Mission has more than 20 years of experience responding to natural disasters and humanitarian crises with immediate and long-term safe water solutions.

You can learn more about Water Mission's disaster response at watermission.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 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 to 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.

MENTAL HEALTH BIBLE STUDY FOR PASTORS, YOUTH LEADERS, PARENTS

Mental Health America recently found that 15.8 percent of young people ages 12-17 in the United States have had at least one major depressive episode last year. While parents need to have more open conversations about mental health concerns, youth ministry leaders should be open and ready to talk about mental health with students.

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



YOUTH AND FAMILY

REV. TERESA PETERS
DIRECTOR OF YOUTH
AND FAMILY MINISTRY

This Zoom Bible study will take place at 8 p.m. ET on Thursdays March 2, March 9, March 16 and March 23. Please contact Pastor Peters at tpeters@thenalc.org to register.

NALC YOUTH GATHERING

An NALC Continental Youth Gathering will be held July 1-4, 2024, in Boerne, Texas (near San Antonio).

The NALC Continental Youth Gathering is a four-day event that will provide opportunities for NALC youth to grow in faith and relationship with others as the Body of Christ. It is a time for youth, leaders-in-training (LIT), leaders and volunteers to worship together, study God's Word, be equipped through large and small group sessions, reach out to the community through mission events, and engage in fellowship and fun.

Youth ages 12-18 are welcome to attend the gathering as youth participants. While the gathering is planned for NALC youth, we encourage your group to reach out and bring friends because all youth are welcome. We will have chaplains around to provide pastoral support for questions about the teachings of the Lutheran church.

We also welcome and encourage young adults ages 19 to 24 to come as leaders in training (LIT). The



WE BELONG
"I KNOW MY OWN AND MY OWN KNOW ME"

LITs can come as a part of a group or as individuals. There will be Zoom training sessions before the gathering that they will need to attend. When they arrive at the gathering, they will be assigned special roles to help ensure the gathering runs smoothly. Leaders who attend will need to be 25 and older and have a current background check and be recommended by their congregations. More information on all of this will be included with the registration packages which will come out in October 2023.

We are excited to be planning this the first NALC Continental Youth Gathering. Watch for more information in the next newsletter.

THE ART OF TEACHING CONFIRMATION

Laura Langhoff Arndt, author of *The Art of Teaching Confirmation*, will be leading a workshop on Zoom for pastors and lay leaders who teach confirmation classes.

We all know that middle schoolers' brains are built differently than adults' brains. Laura will guide us through some best practices to reach young people this age. By changing just a few things about how we teach, confirmation educators can bring about a more significant understanding of the Bible and their faith for adolescents and with the help of the Spirit, a more meaningful personal relationship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

We will meet on Zoom at 11 a.m. ET on Thursday, March 23.

Laura's book is available from Sola Publishing solapublishing.com.

To register, please contact Pastor Teresa Peters, director of youth and family ministry, at tpeters@thenalc.org.

CONFIRMATION CLASS ON ZOOM

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 southernaab@thenalc.org.

BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

By Pastor David Keener

In my travels and conversations with fellow pastors and lay leaders, I have been impressed with the many programs, systems, outreach projects, educational opportunities and discipleship methods that have been developed by our congregations. I would like to compile a directory of "best practices" as a sharable resource for the NALC.

This resource might include such things as:

- + Community outreach ideas
- + Discipleship training materials and methods
- + Worship planning and materials
- + Ministry with and for various age groups

- + Educational materials and creative teaching ideas
- + Organizational models for church councils and committees
- + Visioning exercises and future planning
- + Spiritual growth programs, retreats or methods encouragement.
- + Creative uses of technology and social media
- + Mission trip opportunities

This list is meant to be illustrative and not exhaustive. If you are willing to share what is working well with your people or serve as a resource person in guiding others please let me know at dkeener@thenalc.org.



NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
SEMINARY

LUTHERAN WEEK
at Trinity School for Ministry

SPRING 2023

March 28

Rural Ministry Today — Circuit Pastors with More Horsepower

6:30 – 7:45p.m.

This panel features pastors who have a combined 76 years of experience in rural and small-town ministry and currently serve parishes in the Mid-Northeast Mission District. The panel discussion will focus on rural and small-town ministry today by exploring multi-point parishes, the differences between rural and urban congregations, some common distinctions between large and small congregations, the discussion of theology in the rural setting, the farming and blue-collar culture, and many more topics relating to rural ministry.

PANEL

The Rev. Nila Cogan
Dean, Mid-Northeast Mission District

The Rev. Mathew Magera
Assistant to the Dean

The Rev. Matthew Vatalare
NALS alumnus and
Director of Camp In-Tents

The Rev. Jim Neal
Services Board President,
Bethesda Children's Home

The Rev. Joyce Dix-Weiers
Assistant to the Dean

March 29

Standing Out in the Life Field — How to be a Life-Minded Congregation and Community

6:30 – 7:45p.m.

Why are Lutherans for life? What distinctive voice can we bring to cultural conversations about life issues? How is the sanctity of human life connected directly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? What can we do to bring the joy and hope of God's "Yes!" to life-or-death situations? We'll explore finding motivation, getting education, and taking action to change hearts and save lives.

SPEAKER



The Rev. Michael Salemink
Executive Director
Lutherans for Life

March 30

Nådemedelskristendom — The Church and Bo Giertz's Means of Grace Christianity

6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Bo Giertz (1905-1998) served as a rural parish pastor, occasional preacher to the royal court, bishop of the Gothenburg diocese in the Church of Sweden, Vice President of the Lutheran World Federation, and prolific author on every subject imaginable. It would be no overstatement to say that Giertz — in productivity, accessibility of style, and influence — is the Swedish, pastoral, confessional Lutheran parallel to C.S. Lewis. What can we learn from Giertz's view of Word and Sacrament as being foundational for and central to the Church's life and our faith in Christ, and how that relates to community and to the mission to "Go forth?"

SPEAKER



The Rev. Eric Andrae
Campus Pastor
First Trinity Evangelical Church, Pittsburgh

LEARN MORE AT [THENALS.ORG/LUTHERANWEEK23](https://thenals.org/lutheranweek23)