



EXECUTIVE COUNCIL APPROVES PROPOSAL TO CREATE REGIONS AND DECIDES TO OPEN CENTRAL NALC OFFICE IN TEXAS

The Executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church has made two significant decisions to facilitate the mission of the church.

The council decided to form four geographic regions and to call an assistant to the bishop for each of the regions to serve congregations and mission districts.

The council also decided to establish a centralized NALC office in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, metro area.

The decisions flow from the 2020 *Vision* endorsed by the 2020 NALC Mission Convocation. Component 5 of the vision calls for “a strategy for continental restructuring able to expand with denominational growth.” The goal of the vision component is to “review recommended restructuring strategy and commit to a comprehensive restructuring effort by no later than the 2021 Convocation.” For more information on the 2020 *Vision* go to thenalc.org/vision.

The Executive Council made these two significant decisions to enable the North American Lutheran



Church to continue to grow and develop, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of our shared witness and work, and ensuring we remain committed to the four Core Values at the heart of our shared faith and life.

The Executive Council decided to move forward with a restructuring effort designed to assist the bishop and mission district deans in providing discipling relationships of pastoral care, teaching, administration and accountability for the NALC’s more than 470 congregations and ministries.

The proposal organizes the NALC into four geographic areas, each with a part-time assistant to the bishop, responsible and accountable to the bishop and Executive Council to fulfill this purpose. To avoid confusion, the current assistants to the bishop on the NALC executive staff will be given new titles yet to be determined.

The council also decided to establish a centralized NALC office in the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area, to

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begin operations on Jan. 1, 2022. Located at the central office will be the bishop, general secretary, support staff and other functions as determined.

All current staff impacted by this decision, if desiring to continue serving, will have the option to relocate. Once those individual decisions have been made, plans for transition and new staff will be addressed as needed.

Both decisions were made in response to the 2020 Vision presented and endorsed by the 2020 Mission Convocation. Each decision is designed to move the NALC forward as a thriving and growing denomination, building on our Mission Driven and Congregationally Focused Core Values, while, at the same time, maintaining our commitment to a lean denominational structure.

Continental Restructuring

Beginning in October of 2020, the working group tasked with this part of the vision began meeting regularly to determine what restructuring design would be best suited for the NALC and its future. Their work is utilizing the foundational work that began more than four years ago by a task force of the NALC deans and a similar sub-team of the Executive Council that was placed on hold until a new bishop was elected in 2019.

Pastor Daniel M. Powell of Springfield, Ohio, who chaired this working group, expressed “deep appreciation for the faithful, thoughtful efforts of these earlier groups, upon whose foundational work we continue to build.”

Consistent with the conclusion of the earlier task force and sub-team, the current working group was unanimous in concluding that our current NALC structure, designed for a smaller church body, is no longer adequate to care for, promote and further develop all aspects of the church’s mission. As a result, a structure designed to expand with denominational growth is needed.

The four geographic areas — West, South, Midwest and Eastern — will be comprised of approximately 12

mission districts. At present, the Canadian Mission District is included in the West.

Each of the assistants to the bishop will be responsible for supporting the mission district deans in caring for and supporting the pastors and congregations in their respective districts.

Following the submission of geographic area nominations from our mission districts, the selection of the four assistants to the bishop will be made by Bishop Dan Selbo.

As the NALC grows, the commitment to limiting the responsibility of the assistants to the bishop to no more than 12 mission districts and the responsibility of the mission district deans to no more than 12 congregations will ensure the same high level and quality of personal care and support will continue.

Job descriptions for the assistants to the bishop and the mission district deans are being designed to focus their respective work in complementary fashion.

The selection of the four assistants to the bishop will be made by no later than Oct. 31, 2021, with their work to begin in January of 2022. Between now and then, the Executive Council and the bishop will be working with the mission district deans to enable the nomination and selection process to move forward as designed.

Centralized Office

Under the same restructuring banner, it became obvious to the working group that the NALC has outgrown the decentralized approach it has been using for most of its first 10 years.

The decision to bring the bishop, general secretary, and several staff members into a centralized office was made to support and enable a more efficient and effective use of the collective gifts and resources of the NALC and its staff.

Staff cohesion, creativity, communications, backup coverage and problem solving will all be enhanced by working from a centralized location. Along with

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these positive and ministry-enhancing implications are the advantages resulting from a centralized and uniform management and processes system and a unified and coordinated data and technology-based infrastructure.

The decision to choose the Dallas-Fort Worth area came after a long and detailed process that began with more than 15 sites being considered. That list was narrowed to six finalists. From there, the team considered and applied 22 factors to each location — cost of living, climate, the number of NALC congregations in the area, etc. — before settling on its top two site selections. From there, the team brought their work to the Executive Council, sharing their process and the rationale for their top two recommendations.

The Executive Council, after considering the two options, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and spending time in prayer, unanimously recommended the Dallas-Fort Worth area for the NALC office.

Primary to the final decision were factors relating to the accessibility of airline travel from anywhere in the NALC, the importance of available and affordable office space and housing, and the Central time zone.

The actual office site within the Dallas-Fort Worth area is yet to be determined. That decision will be made well in advance of the transition to the new NALC office in January.

“During the pandemic, the Executive Council worked countless hours in online meetings. We were determined that the NALC would continue to move forward in responding faithfully to the call of our Lord,” said Scott Kramer, Executive Council member and chair of the working group.

Moving Forward

“At this important time in our history, these two decisions will enable us to move forward in implementing the vision we have been given by God and the work with which we have been entrusted,” Bishop Selbo said. “Just as the disciples were called to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit after our Lord’s resurrection and ascension into heaven, so we are called to place our trust in Jesus and follow the Spirit’s lead as we boldly move forward together in faith.”

More information on the *2020 Vision* is available at thenalc.org/vision. Details regarding this and other *2020 Vision* efforts will be shared at the NALC Pastors’ Conference and in future communications.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR POSITIONS TO BE ELECTED AT 2021 CONVOCAATION

The NALC Nominating Committee is seeking the names of candidates for nomination to serve in positions to be elected at the 2021 NALC Mission Convocation Aug. 4-6 in Corpus Christi, Texas.

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

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

The Court of Adjudication hears appeals from disciplinary decisions; resolves questions of interpretation of NALC governing documents; and decides claims that a person or entity has violated these governing documents.

Both pastors and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication. The Nominating Committee is seeking nominees with legal experience.

Congregations are encouraged to nominate individuals for any of the open positions. Please

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ALIVE IN THE BODY

The 40 days between Jesus' resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven are filled with bodily appearances. Jesus appeared to His disciples on Easter evening and, again, the following week. He appeared to two travelers on the road to Emmaus, recounting the witness of the Scriptures and revealing Himself to them in the breaking of the bread. He appeared to His followers on the shores of Galilee. He spoke to them before His ascension. At one time, Paul tells us, He appeared to more than 500 people at one time.

The Christian faith is a bodily, in-the-flesh religion. It is more than simply a spiritual walk with Jesus, preparing us for that day when we will finally be with Him spiritually in heaven. No, the Christian faith is very much carnal. It is incarnate.

In fact, Christianity has been called — and I believe rightly so — the most materialistic religion in the world. Not materialistic in the sense that our faith is built around or upon the accumulation of material things. But materialistic in the sense that God created us in the flesh, and He came to us in bodily form — as a material being.

In the opening chapters of the Bible, it says “God created man and woman in His own image,” as living beings (Genesis 1:26). It says, when Jesus came into this world “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14).

Many religions keep all their thoughts spiritual, all their actions on the immaterial level. Not Christianity. The Christian faith is inherently and inescapably material. God gave us our bodies. He loves us in our bodies. And the Bible says we will live forever with Him in our bodies.

When Jesus was resurrected on Easter morning, His body was raised from the dead. The tomb was empty. As He came out from the grave, it was not as some disembodied soul, some spiritual and hard-to-grasp being. No, He had a body — a real, touchable and recognizable body.



FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO
BISHOP

Someday, you and I will be given new bodies. For all of us, that is good news. We do not know what kind of bodies they will be. When Jesus was raised, His body was different from the one He had before. After He was raised, He could walk through closed doors. He could suddenly appear inside of rooms. Some people even believed He was ghost. He was not a ghost. He was real. He was alive. He had a body.

What kind of bodies will we be given? We do not know. Paul says, “I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51). We will have a new body to be sure, but not like the bodies we now have.

Have you ever tried to imagine someone without a body? Many people have that image of heaven, that none of us will have bodies. We will, somehow, be floating around on the clouds. That is an interesting idea, but it is not what the Bible says. The Bible says we will all be given new bodies, free from the pains and the struggles we have in this life. New bodies, but different. Similar in nature and recognizable, but not the same.

I imagine it will be something like a class reunion. You see people you used to know well, but they have changed since you last saw them. Only after talking with them for a while, do you recognize who they are. I imagine that is what it might be like because that is what it was like for the disciples after Easter with Jesus.

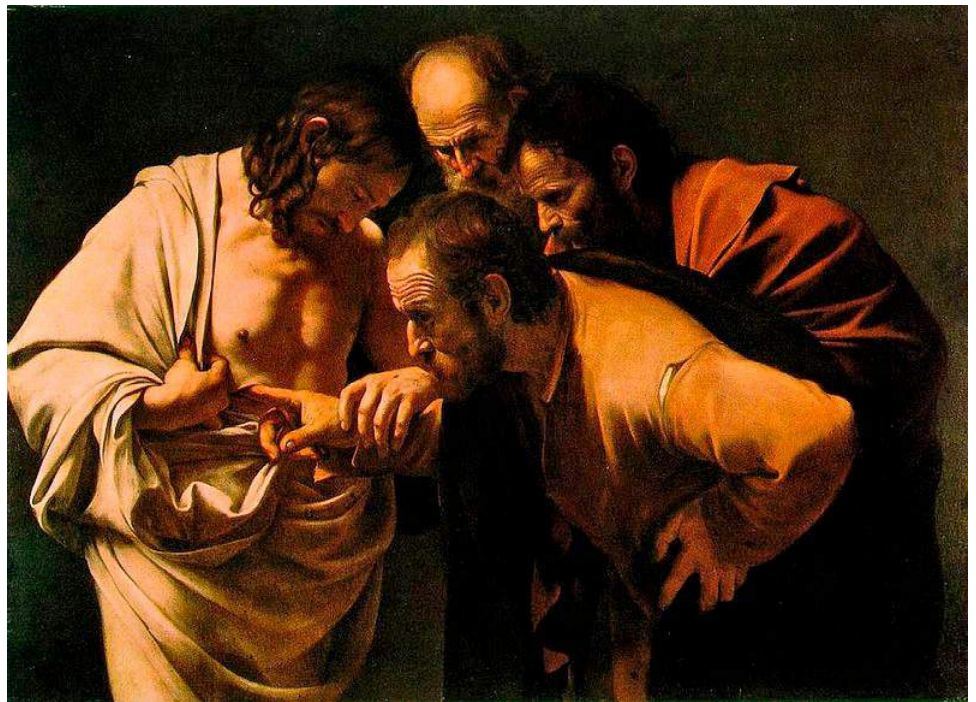
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I also imagine that it will be easy to recognize Jesus — not because we have seen Him in the flesh, in this life, but because He will look much like He did in this life. Jesus will be the one with the nail prints in His hands and His feet. Jesus will be the one with the scar still on His side from that spear. We will all be able to recognize Jesus because He will be, in heaven, much like He was when He left this earth.

The good news is that you and I do not have to wait until we enter heaven to see Jesus. We do not have to wait until we leave this earth to come face to face with Christ. We see Him in the Scriptures. We see Him in the Sacraments. We see Him as He appears to us through His Holy Spirit in faith. We see Him in the body we call the Church.

As followers of Jesus, we are His in-the-flesh representatives. We are called and chosen to be His witnesses — living and walking and breathing expressions of the hope and the promise we have in Him. That means we have bodily, in-the-flesh work to do — every day, connected to Jesus and living out our faith in the daily relationships of life.

Do not underestimate the importance of those bodily connections. Do not overthink how God has chosen to work in this life. He works through people. He came to us as a person. And He promises that He will



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610)

work through our in-person relationships and experiences to bring others into His Body, the Church.

Someday, we will see Him in the flesh, eternally in heaven. When that day comes, we will all have new bodies, just like Jesus. Until then, we offer a real-life, in-the-flesh, bodily witness to the hope and the promise and the assurance that is materially ours in the risen Christ.

NALC MAILING ADDRESS FOR DONATIONS

Donations to the North American Lutheran Church and all of its designated funds should be sent to: PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565.

For more information or to give online go to thenalc.org/giving.

CONGREGATIONAL ANNUAL REPORTS

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

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

You can download a preview version of the report or complete your congregation's report at thenalc.org/congregationalreport.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL UPDATE

The Executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church held its quarterly meeting on March 10-11 in Columbus, Ohio. This was the first in-person meeting of the council since January 2020. The council was pleased to be able to meet in-person, enjoying fellowship, devotional time and sharing of the Lord's Supper.

The following are actions of the council and items of interest:

The treasurer's report reflected a good start to 2021 in terms of offerings to the NALC and support for our shared ministries. Expenditures are down for the first two months, primarily related to a decrease in travel. Expenses are projected to increase as COVID-19 vaccinations become more accessible and as churches and mission districts begin scheduling more events.

Congregations ratified the amendments to the NALC constitution approved by the 2020 NALC Mission Convocation. As a result, in-person mission convocations are scheduled for 2021 and 2023. Online mission convocations are planned for 2022 and 2024, which will include elections and the adoption of budgets. The election cycle for all NALC elected positions will adjust, during those years, to align with the amendment to hold biennial convocations.

Significant time was spent in discussing plans for continental restructuring and consideration of a centralized office location for NALC staff. Consistent with the endorsed 2020 *Vision* component #5, to develop "a strategy for continental restructuring able to expand with denominational growth," decisions will be made to enable the restructuring efforts to happen.

Changes to the "Standards for Pastoral Ministry" were considered by the council, specific to how we address pastoral divorce and remarriage. Bishop Selbo will communicate any changes to all NALC pastors as they are finalized.

The council endorsed a staff restructuring proposal from the Missions Team for Pastor Gemechis Buba to support global and multi-national mission and Pastor Phillip Gagnon to support domestic mission. Jenny Brockman and Pastor Brad Hales will continue to support both mission areas.

The council approved the Rev. Dr. Margaret Obaga as a new NALC Global Worker. Pastor Obaga is serving in Nairobi, Kenya, through World Mission Prayer League.

Proposed amendments to the NALC Constitution regarding mission districts and regions were discussed and revised.

The Governance Committee of the council is continuing to review all NALC policies and practices and to revise them as needed.

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confirm that individuals are willing and able to serve prior to submitting their names.

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

All nominations should be submitted by May 4. This will give the committee the time necessary to compile biographical information on the candidates and comply with the constitutional requirements to provide this information to NALC members.

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

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position and nomination and biographical forms are available at thenalc.org/nominate. Questions may be directed to the committee at nominations@thenalc.org.

NALC PASTORS' CONFERENCE

The NALC Pastors' Conference will be held May 4-6 at the Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.

The theme of this year's pastors' conference is "Keeping the Main Things the Main Things" and will focus on the scope of Lutheranism and sacramental theology. The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen and Dr. Robert Benne will be the featured speakers.

The pastors' conference is normally scheduled for February, but it was moved back because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The conference will include discussion of several significant topics regarding the office of ministry. A draft statement on sacramental practices from the Commission on Theology and Doctrine will be discussed as will be what pastors have learned in ministry through the recent pandemic.

There also will be discussion of "ordination under special circumstances," a proposal for an NALC diaconate, and online celebrations of Communion.

Other conference highlights include a meeting of the NALC Ministerium, a Holy Communion service with the renewal of ordination vows and blessing of oil,



Those who attend the NALC Pastors' Conference will be able to take in some of the sights of San Antonio during free time including the city's famous River Walk.



Robert Benne



James Nestingen

as well as dedicated time for networking and encouragement with fellow pastors.

All NALC pastors are strongly encouraged to attend the conference. Congregations are asked to support their pastor's attendance financially.

The conference will be live-streamed on the internet for those who cannot attend. Information on how to connect to the live-stream will be emailed to pastors.

Although this conference is designed for NALC pastors and seminarians, other NALC leaders are welcome, as are non-NALC pastors and seminarians. Clergy spouses are welcome and encouraged to attend, but are asked to register so adequate arrangements can be made.

The registration fee is \$75. Registration fees are waived for NALC seminary students.

The hotel provides breakfast and evening appetizers each day for its guests.

The conference begins at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, May 4, and concludes at noon on Thursday, May 6. Registration opens at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday.

To register, make hotel reservations, view the event schedule or for more information, go to thenalc.org/pastors-conference-2021.

MISSION UPDATE FROM PANZOS

We arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in January. The trip was so long as we had a seven-hour layover in Brussels, Belgium. A COVID-19 test was required before boarding the airplane from Brussels to Kinshasa. We were forced to do another test at the airport upon arrival. We were blessed with negative results.

Out of the airport, we met with a CELCCO (Communauté Évangélique Luthérienne du Congo Ouest — Evangelical Lutheran Community of the Western Congo) delegation that received us and escorted us to the hotel, where we prayed together to give thanks to God. After two days of rest in Kinshasa, we continued our trip by car and arrived in Boma on Jan. 12.

After 21 days of rest and quarantine, we resumed our mission's work by first contacting the church leadership team for updates and information about the life of the church and the dilemma faced during this time of COVID-19.

Despite being more than nine months without worshiping together and wondering how pastors survived during the pandemic, the church is in good spirit. They appreciated the collaboration with the World Mission Prayer League (WMPL) and the NALC to back them up with financial support during the crisis caused by the pandemic.

The church leaders invited us to participate in the consecration of 10 deacons who are called to serve in



evangelism and mission for church expansion. These servants will serve in different areas of mission for church planting and mobilization. CELCCO is experiencing significant growth in the Province of Kongo Central.

I was asked to preach that Sunday. We read Matthew 25:14-30 (The Parable of the Talents) as I exhorted church members and those who were consecrated to produce more in the vineyard for the advancement of God's kingdom. Jesus often packaged spiritual truths and lessons of faith into short, relatable narratives known as parables. These stories were His way of explaining the attributes of God and instructions for godly living, in accessible human terms. The day was celebrated with choirs from different districts of Tshela, and the name of God was praised.

Thirty-six students are enrolled in this academic year. After launching the opening, the faculty started with enthusiasm as the students showed their dedication in following the instruction of the faculty and also promised to succeed until graduation. The only difficulty that the school is facing is incentivizing professors in the difficult time that the school is facing financially. We will continue to pray and ask God for provision that may sustain the school's operation.



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MISSION UPDATE FROM GOWINS

On Dec. 17, we were officially commissioned as Bethany Gateways missionaries and traveled back to Gambia in the beginning of February with all of our luggage safely intact. There was a big dust storm (blown in from the Sahara) when we arrived, which may have aggravated the cough/cold we all got. We're okay now, though still adjusting to drinking the well water.

We have been settling into life at Kiti Village and gearing up for ministry. So many people to meet and old friends to reconnect with.

Odette's mother is visiting from neighboring Senegal, and she especially enjoys the grandkids. It was her first time to meet Abby.

We are working with Gambian-based Indigenous Mission of West Africa (IMWA). We will be involved in various aspects of IMWA's mission and church work (evangelistic outreaches, discipleship programs, and missions training).

We brought with us:

+ 10 "Jesus Film" backpacks (donated by the Jesus Film Project)

+ 150 audio Bible players (donated by Faith Comes By Hearing)



+ 2 boxes of New Testaments (donated by Gideons International)

The common denominator: God's Word (freely given)!

Jon Gowin is an NALC Global Worker in Gambia serving with Bethany Gateway. To learn more about the Gowin family or to partner with them in ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/jonathan-gowin.

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Prayer requests

+ Pray for the orphans who are in our care and for the loss of one of their peers.

+ Pray for CELCCO leaders as they prepare for the bishop's installation: for wisdom and finances that will help support the event that is planned for Sept. 12.

+ Pray for the theological school for protection against COVID-19 during this academic year

and also pray that God may provide for the administrative needs.

+ Pray for us as we are working in obtaining our permanent visas before the temporary ones expire.

+ Pray for the DRC government as they are striving economically and people are suffering so much.

Pastor Didi Panzo is an NALC Global Worker in the Democratic Republic of the Congo serving with the World Mission Prayer League. To learn more about the Panzo family or to partner with them in ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/didi-panzo.

MISSION UPDATE FROM CHELSEA SMITH WITH CRU IN CINCINNATI

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

— *Philippians 1:3-11 NIV*

This is the passage that our campus Bible studies discussed this week. There is so much I could write about now that I have completed about five weeks of ministry here in Cincinnati. It is evident that Jesus is at work in the lives of students here who are already involved and those whom we have yet to meet.

"I've been wanting to find a Bible study, but I didn't know how."

"I told my mom about this, and she is so excited for me."

These are just a few excerpts from a conversation that I had with first-year student Mariam during a follow-up meeting after she had filled out a survey and indicated she was interested in learning more about Cru.

Those three days we were on campus doing surveys were so cold, rainy and tiring; discouraging at times even, but I tried to keep in mind the attitude that if



we even affected one person's life, it would be worth it.

Mariam is coming to the Bible study that I help two of my disciples lead, and it brings so much joy! Luckily, Mariam wasn't the only one to get involved. There are plenty more stories where that came from, across our various men's and women's ministries at the University of Cincinnati (UC) and Northern Kentucky University (NKU).

As you may know, the winter conference was virtual this year rather than us traveling to Indianapolis. There are typically multiple different winter conference locations across the United States, but

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this year we were all together on a platform called Socio (about 7,000 people).

I was very impressed with how well the conference was done, despite it being virtual. It was so fun to see students and staff interacting over the chat feature, the production and speakers were phenomenal, and the planning team found so many ways to make this a fun and meaningful time. On Friday night, our UC and NKU students got together and had some watch parties in their own homes, and, on Saturday night, we were able to throw them a group watch party at my new church, Christ the King.

The winter conference participants were challenged to have Gospel conversations with three people in their lives this week and next. We will be having a worship and celebration night to share any stories they have about steps of faith they took to do this. I'm looking forward to heading up worship with the help of a few student leaders!

Besides these special events, in an average week, we have at least one Bible study running every night studying Philippians, we have Action Group (discipleship of student leaders) on Wednesdays where we are studying Acts and the book, *Be the Bridge*, which discusses racial reconciliation, and our monthly connect, where this month our speaker Liz shared about how our beliefs and actions align with one another.

Prayer Requests: For the faith conversations happening regarding the winter conference outreach and for continued motivation and joy for students living in this COVID-19 college situation.

Chelsea Smith serves with Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) in Cincinnati, Ohio. To learn more or to partner with this Great Commission Society endorsed ministry, please visit thenalc.org/partners/chelsea-smith.

June 7-11, 2021 InterTerm Course



Confessing Christ Today

What Does it Mean to be Christ Centered in the 21st Century?

with Dr. David Luy



An ATS accredited course | Ideal for NALC Candidates
Followed by the NALC Seminarian Retreat June 11-12
More info at thenalc.org

BONHOEFFER'S Life Together IS FOCUS OF GREAT COMMISSION SOCIETY'S ONLINE READING GROUP

The Great Commission Society's Mission Connectors team is about encouraging congregations and mission districts to make relational mission connections.

The vision of the NALC is that every congregation is in relationship with at least one local, one domestic and one global mission partnership.

Our team helps by preparing mission-focused resources and training, being available to coach leaders and teams, and by calling every mission district and mission region at least once a year. The purpose of these calls is to pray with the leaders, to hear how the Holy Spirit is moving in their district, and to encourage them as they serve God's kingdom.

In our most recent calls, people have shared the joys and frustrations of being Mission Driven during a global pandemic. We've rejoiced with people in their flexibility, innovation and commitment to sharing the Gospel. We prayed with them as they shared frustrations and struggles in discerning, trialing and adapting to what ministry and mission look like today.

*These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I would go with the throng
and lead them in procession to the house of God
with glad shouts and songs of praise,
a multitude keeping festival. — Psalm 42:4 ESV*

Psalm 42 is about longing. Longing for what we remember and longing for needs deeper than words can fully express — soul longing for community with God and community with fellow followers of God.

The purpose and power of community is the topic for the next Great Commission Society online book



study as we respond to the practical needs expressed in our most recent calls.

We will study Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*. Bonhoeffer explores Christian community. He addresses individual discipleship practices and the wealth of mutual encouragement found in a community of believers.

It was written during a time social norms and culture were turning upside, during a time of worldwide strife and hardship and during a time gathering in large groups could be dangerous.

In the time when every Christian leader is exploring the how's and why's we gather, *Life Together* has much to offer.

Grab your old and worn out copy or completely new copy of *Life Together* and gather with other Christian leaders around the country and explore what Bonhoeffer has to teach us today about Christian community.

Join us on Zoom from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (ET) on Thursdays from May 13 to June 17. To register or for more information, visit bit.ly/Life-Together-NALC.

YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

By Laurie Pecuch

Nexus update: Nexus is planning an in-person event for July 11-17 at the usual host site of Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. The event is a theological experience for students Grades 9-12. The only cost for the event is a \$25 registration fee and transportation to and from Des Moines. For more information or to apply visit grandview.edu/NEXUS.

Axis.org: We now have a subscription to axis.org. The aim of Axis is to connect parents, teens and Jesus in a disconnected world. They give parents and mentors hope by being your guide through the current culture



into conversation around Jesus. We will be sharing some of their free resources via the NALC Youth Leaders Facebook page.

Monthly webinars: We are winding down our "Trot Through the Bible" video webinars. The last webinar

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Please copy and share this newsletter widely.

CALL PROCESS DURING COVID-19

One of the realities of congregational life is that, at some point, there will be a call process. Pastors are called to new congregations, retire or turn to new career paths. There is no escape — every congregation will have a vacancy.

The process of calling a pastor in the NALC is organized, clear and works well in most circumstances. Most congregations wish it could be something like Monster.com — where you post your vacancy and, in 24 hours, you have 20 pastoral candidates. But calling a pastor within the Lutheran tradition is a much more intentional, spiritual and relational process. We are seeking God's will — not our own — and God's will may not follow our impatient timeline.

Still, it is always good to review our processes and procedures to see how it's going — especially during a time of pandemic.

As we are focused now on our *Vision 2020* strategy of ensuring we have pastoral support for every congregation, we have been engaged in review and reflection with regard to the NALC call process.

Just before the COVID-19 shutdown in early 2020, we had assessed that the average NALC call process was eight months and three weeks from the time a call committee submitted their congregational vacancy profile until we received their completion of call documents.

Information from other Lutheran bodies indicated that some call processes were taking three to five years, so our timing seemed reasonable — and then COVID-19 hit!

It has been a challenging year, to say the least. Although November and December 2020 were the slowest in terms of call processes, as we are moving toward the end of the pandemic, it seems a good time to consider how vacancies and calls happened in the year of COVID-19, and what the prospects look like moving forward.



MINISTRY MATTERS

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

Here's some information:

In 2019, 24 congregational vacancies were filled and 32 new vacancies were added. In 2020, 47 vacancies were filled and 42 new vacancies were added. So far in 2021, 14 vacancies have been filled and 22 new vacancies have been added.

In the year of pandemic from the beginning until the vacancy list was updated on April 12, 61 vacancies have been filled and 64 new vacancies have been added.

What can we conclude from this simple review?

+ In spite of COVID-19, there were a large number of vacancies and more vacancies were filled than were added in 2020. In the year-long pandemic, completion of calls and new vacancies pretty much kept pace.

+ As the virus is considered to be under control, there have been a few more pastors retiring. It seems there were a number who planned to retire earlier but delayed, not wanting to leave their beloved congregations during the shutdown. Now, pastors are moving forward with retirement plans. Of the nine new vacancies added in April, five were retirement related.

+ As mentioned above, although November and December 2020 were quite slow in terms of pastors interviewing, by the January update, 10 vacancies had been filled. Thanksgiving through Christmas is

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usually slow with regard to interviewing, as is Lent and Easter, as pastors and congregations are focused on Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. Already, we are seeing an increased number of pastors completing profiles and engaging in the call process.

+ As congregations return fully to in-person gatherings, travel becomes more comfortable and congregational life normalizes, it seems the call processes will return to a normal pace as well.

As a result of slower than usual call processes in late 2020, several new strategies have been added to increase activity in the NALC: monthly online conversations with deans and call committee chairpersons have been instituted specifically related to the call process.

In addition, pastors are invited to a first-ever online meeting related to call process at 3 p.m. (ET) on Monday, May 11. All NALC pastors or non-NALC pastors interested in being called to a NALC congregation are invited to join in the conversation. Simply send an email to dwendel@thenalc.org to receive the Zoom link.

For those who aren't aware, we have also been encouraging call committees to prepare a three to five minute video introduction to be posted on the NALC website, together with their profiles. In our age of YouTube and Vimeo, it seems helpful for pastors to see more than just electronic profile forms from congregations.

Of the 38 full-time congregational profiles on the website, 12 have prepared video introductions. We continue to encourage all our call committees to provide us with these videos as an important way to introduce their congregation to pastors and to stimulate interest.

Finally, we are continually seeking retired, semi-retired and other pastors who can serve our vacant congregations as supply pastors, vice pastors and interims. Most deans are in need of pastors who may be able to fill in, assist and serve as interims where there are vacancies.

All in all, call processes in the NALC have survived the pandemic. Pastors are engaged and we have added some helpful strategies to improve our process even more. Any pastor or congregation with questions or desiring information should go to thenalc.org/call or email dwendel@thenalc.org.

JUNE 2021 INTERTERM

WEEK 1. JUNE 7-11 | WEEK 2. JUNE 14-18



REV. DR. AMY C. SCHIFFRIN

Introduction to Lutheran Liturgy & Homiletics I
Each class 1/2 day over weeks 1 & 2



REV. DR. MARK MATTES

Theology & Writings of Martin Luther
Week 2

REGISTRATION OPEN MARCH 31 | AUDITING AVAILABLE FOR \$300/CLASS | CLASSES MAY BE OFFERED ONLINE | CHECK THENALS.ORG FOR DETAILS

NEXUS YOUTH THEOLOGY INSTITUTE

By Laurie Pecuch

NEXUS is a week-long youth theology institute for high school students. Since 2017, students, mentors, and pastors from NALC congregations around the country have gathered on the campus of Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa for a week-long faith experience.

During the week, participants dig deep into Scripture, build community and learn what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus. This year's theme is "All Things New."

Let's admit it. This past year has been really hard. Students will dig into Scripture to see the Good News — how all things are being made new in Jesus and how they get to be a part of it.

NEXUS will take place July 11-17.

The only cost to this week is a \$25 registration fee and transportation to and from Des Moines. How is this possible? We're glad you asked! NEXUS is part of the High School Youth Theological Institutes and is made possible through a generous grant from the Lilly Foundation and supportive churches and organizations. The NALC also gives a direct donation to NEXUS.

How do I register for NEXUS? That's another great question! Registration is currently open for our NEXUS week. Students are required to complete an application process. Space is limited. This allows attendees to receive a lot of undivided attention during the week and to make life-long friends.

Registration closes on May 1, and spaces are filling up very quickly, so be sure to sign up soon! Youth can apply at grandview.edu/forms/nexus-app.

This experience is like no other. The opportunity is unique. Students meet with students from other NALC congregations, dig into Scripture, build community, create positive memories and go home

GRAND VIEW UNIVERSITY



where God's call meets your life

empowered with hope, a commitment to follow Jesus and to be witnesses in their church and community.

For more information on NEXUS or to apply visit grandview.edu/NEXUS. NEXUS can also be followed on Facebook and Instagram @nexusinstitute or on twitter @NexusInstGV.

YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

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of the season will be at 2 p.m. (ET) on Tuesday, May 11. You can view the video on the NALC Youth Leaders Facebook page.

Carolinas Day Camp: The Carolinas Mission Region congregations are doing a summer Day Camp in 2021. They will offer five weeks of camp. Contact Melanie Corn at mcorn@stpplchapin.com.

Sets of Books: We gifted a set of our books, *Faith Webbing* and *What's In Your Bag?* to each NALC congregation. If you are unable to locate the books, let us know and we will be happy to send out another set at no cost.

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