



## 2014 Convocation

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## 2014 North American Lutheran Church Convocation

### Report of the Bishop

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

*Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Acts 7:58-8:3)*

These are difficult times for Christians throughout the world and even in North America. I have witnessed the struggle, the pain and the grief that remains long after the struggle is over. The text I chose to begin my report is the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr. While our present difficulties do not compare with those of Christians who are tortured and murdered because of their faith, I have been amazed at the great sacrifice both our pastors and laity are willing to make for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our work together in the North American Lutheran Church. As I am privileged to serve as your Bishop and visit our congregations—and even house churches—across North America, I am encouraged by the time I am able to be with you, listening to your stories, preaching, teaching and celebrating the sacraments.

Your stories remind me of the transformation that began in this text. It is the conversion of the one who watched over the garments of those stoning Stephen and consented to his death, Saul. Like those he watched, he became a persecutor of the church, brutalizing Christians, binding them in chains and leading them to prison and death. He was highly regarded for his work and believed he was faithful until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Not only was he struck blind and had to be led by others, but his entire worldview was transformed, his mission changed and he never saw his world or his life in the same way. He experienced this new worldview—the Kingdom of Heaven proclaimed by Jesus—through the living example from the first followers of Jesus who then disciple him.

I have always wondered what Paul thought about when he participated in Stephen's death. Perhaps he wondered what could possibly be so important that a person would be willing to die for the sake of their faith in Jesus. That same passion he exhibited in persecuting the church he employed in proclaiming Christ and leading countless others to become disciples of Jesus. The one who persecuted the church became the chief missionary to the Gentiles. The theme for our convocation comes from the same man who persecuted the Church and is now in chains as he writes words of encouragement to the church in Ephesus, directing them to put on the armor of God so they will be able to endure the persecution that is sure to come.

Paul moved from trying to defend his faith, protect his reputation and work—a mission that was life-destroying—to fully utilizing his faith in Jesus, accepting a new mission, a new identity, and a new purpose for living. Like Stephen, Jesus was everything. Jesus was his hope, his life, his faith. Jesus was his salvation, his redemption, and the Gospel he would proclaim to much of the known world.

I see a similar transformation unfolding in the lives of our people as they focus on discipleship. Both clergy and laity are growing in their life in Christ and in their commitment to mission. They realize we cannot grow larger unless we grow deeper in Christ, bolder in our proclamation and more confident in the Word regarding the nature and identity of Jesus, the one who is the Gospel. They have not only realized that we can't keep doing things the same way while expecting different results, but they have discovered a new path that is really the oldest of paths: following Jesus as one of His disciples. They have discovered a new sense of mission and purpose that is as exciting and engaging today as it was to the Christians in the first century. This year you will hear from others who are fully engaged in that journey.

As you consider this text perhaps, like me, you have also wondered what difference it made for Paul to be close enough to hear Stephen's prayer as he died. The text for our Convocation theme invites you to reflect on Paul's words from Ephesians 6: 18-20, "*praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*"

There are very few ways for me to express my gratitude for your faithful witness other than to remind you that you are in my prayers. I have been praying for you throughout the year. Paul knew the demands of discipleship could be overwhelming. Preparing for the battle, putting on the full armor of God is no simple task. It requires a change of values, changes in behaviors and a renewed focus on the mission and ministry of the church, the command from Jesus in the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. This shift moves us from a defensive posture to a tactical offense. It never means forfeiting our heritage but rather fully utilizing it for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel and leading others to discover the new life in Christ that is ours by His grace through faith, living a life of leading others to that same life-giving source.

Like Paul, I no longer see the North American Lutheran Church among those who are wounded and grieving, although we are in some ways. Instead, I see us as those who are encouraging others, equipping others and re-igniting the faith and hope of others by our example. I am amazed by the number of people who have visited with us in this past year from other places in the world. They come to develop a relationship with us because they find hope in our witness. As Paul encouraged his readers to pray for all the saints so must we. Such prayer is one of the most powerful forces in our arsenal of offensive weapons. This prayer gives expression to a love that is so amazing that nothing can overcome it. It is a love that is eternal. That love is ours in Christ Jesus and it is the power that holds us together in Him.

Like Paul, I am also bold enough to ask for your prayers for me. There are no more comforting words for me than to hear both laity and clergy say they are praying for me. I depend on Christ's answers to your prayers. Pray that the Lord will give me boldness so that I may speak as I ought to speak. I am honored by the trust you have placed in me to represent you and to tell others how proud and humbled I am to serve with you in the North American Lutheran Church.

It is also good for you to know that you are also being represented by the work of many other faithful leaders in this church.

Not only has Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring offered wise advice and counsel for which I am truly grateful, but he has also taken on additional assignments in leading the Board of Regents for our seminary and assisting with fundraising efforts. Other former bishops have been helpful and supportive. Those relationships are precious to me and essential for the entire North American Lutheran Church.

The staff with whom I share responsibilities for leadership in this church have blessed our pastors and congregation in ways too numerous to list. They are equally committed to serving our people and are

constantly engaged in advancing our mission strategy. They embody the values we hold and are worthy of your encouragement and appreciation. As you have opportunity during the Convocation and beyond, please offer your own affirming words.

Rev. Mark Chavez, General Secretary  
Rev. Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Mission  
Rev. David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism  
Becky Seifert, Administrative Assistant to the Executive Staff  
Jenny Brockman, Administrative Assistant for Missions  
Anne Gleason, Financial Administrator  
Kathy Jacobson, Administrative Assistant  
Stephanie Kallestad, Financial Assistant

Also deserving of your thanks and praise is the Executive Council. As we develop and implement various elements of our strategy they are not only giving approval but implementing what we are encouraging our congregations to pursue. They are studying the same materials for discipleship. In addition to preparing for our face-to-face meetings, they are available each week to act on important proposals. In between our convocations they keep the North American Lutheran Church moving forward faithfully and efficiently. Their insight, wisdom, various spiritual gifts and abilities are helpful assets that bless our life together. They have blessed my life, and I count it a privilege to work with this gifted group of leaders.

Our deans, like our Executive Council, are also volunteers who function as an extension of the office of Bishop. Most of them serve congregations who graciously provide time and opportunity to fulfill this office leading each of our Mission Districts. Without their faithful work it would be impossible to fulfill the demands of this office. They are able to keep in close contact with our pastors and congregations when such contact is impossible for our staff. They are becoming increasingly organized as a group and working on strategic issues regarding potential organizational structures that help us to live out both our values and our mission. Please offer these leaders your thanks and your prayer support.

Others are also deserving of both recognition and thanks for their work on:

Convocation	Candidacy
Communication	Court of Adjudication
Mission	Task Force on Discipline
Task Force on Diaconal Ministry	Interim Board of Regents
Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine	Task Force on Theological Education

Their work is helping us to meet our strategic objectives, strengthen our witness and make us even more effective in our ministry in support of our congregations and pastors.

Throughout this year I have continued to grow personally, professionally and spiritually through the Navigator coaching process. These consistent sessions have been demanding and nurturing, challenging and fun. They are filled with insights and direction for accomplishing the goals and objectives I have created for fulfilling this work to which both you and the Lord have called me. Our executive staff are also benefitting from the same coaching. As we began our pilot projects for discipleship in several Mission Districts, we did not want our leaders to be involved in any process that we had not also experienced. I am extremely grateful to Dennis Blevins and his commitment to invest his life and faith in us as together we pursue all that it means to follow Jesus and make disciples. I was invited by Navigators to be a keynote speaker for the national CDM (Congregational Discipleship Ministry) Conference in Orlando. Our executive staff attended. I made two keynote presentations, together we offered two workshops on Lutheranism 101 (both were well attended), and we offered Lutheran worship (LBW)

including Communion on the Sunday morning of the conference. We were well received and blessed by the interaction. This relationship is mutually edifying as we not only learn from them but also have a gift to give in our faith, heritage and confessional theology.

I continue to approach this call through my perspective as a parish pastor, deeply appreciating my time in our congregations, leading worship, preaching, celebrating the sacrament, participating in baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. Anniversary celebrations, installations and ordinations also provide opportunities for celebrating our life together. As I spend time at Mission District convocations I am encouraged by the commitment of our people to begin new mission starts and house churches. The excitement and mutual encouragement is profound. No longer are we simply encouraging others regarding discipleship. We are now offering specific ways for our pastors and congregations to pursue discipleship with a goal that each of our congregations becomes a disciple-making congregation. Our intention is clear: That we pursue Christ's mission for His Church, investing all we have and are to that end. The Great Commission is not mission impossible but our highest priority as we respond obediently to Christ's command. This challenge to reach the entire world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed is life-giving for our congregations.

While I have sensed the excitement I also know this is not an easy task. It requires adjusting our vision, values and behaviors. It is important for leaders to move together in harmony with the congregation and equally important for the congregation to embrace a clear vision to pursue discipleship, remembering that keeping everything the same as it has always been will only guarantee the same results. The strength of community in the local congregation is essential, as disciples need a nurturing community in order to grow and mature into those who can disciple others. We have spent considerable time meeting with pastors and congregational leaders where conflicts have arisen because the vision has not been mutually embraced. Each of these struggles gives way to opportunities for growth and renewal in the commitment to mission.

Your commitment to this mission is attracting attention from various places in the world and it is my privilege to share your stories with many others in my interactions with them.

There is never enough time to do all we would like to do. However, there is always time for prayer. I continue to pray for our pastors and congregations, and I ask that you pray for me by following the Apostle Paul's request that the Lord would give me His words to speak when I open my mouth so that I also boldly proclaim the mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

While I don't enjoy traveling any more than I did last year, I love the people I am with when I have the opportunity to be with you. Below is a list of some of the most significant ways I have used my time in serving you and discharging my responsibilities.

- More than 20 weekends with congregations in the US and Canada
- Ordinations and installations
- Work with the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine
- Trip to Africa initiating and strengthening our relationships with the churches in:
  - Ethiopia
  - Tanzania
  - Kenya
- Trip to India to pursue relationships with our mission partners
- Meeting with Mission District Deans
- Mission Conference Presenter
- Mission District Convocations
- Task Force for Theological Education

Theological Education Task Force  
Design for NALS (Seminary)  
Provisional Board of Regents for NALS  
Right to Life March in Washington DC  
NPRC Worship Service in Constitution Hall  
Ancient Future Church Conference at Trinity School for Ministry  
Ecumenical efforts:  
    Meetings with leaders of the Anglican Church of North America  
    Meetings with Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod leaders  
    Association for Church Renewal (now Common Ground Christian Network)  
Continue application process for membership in Lutheran World Federation  
Continuing discussion with Lutheran CORE  
Strategic planning process with Executive Council  
Continued work with Gordon-Conwell and Trinity as partners with us in NALS  
Strengthened our relationship with Navigators for discipleship strategy  
Discipleship Coaching with Navigators  
CDM National Conference speaker, workshop and worship leader  
Pilot project with Navigators for the 20 congregations of the NALC in four Mission Districts  
Mission District clergy retreats  
Holy Land tour leader  
Mission trip to Haiti with Living Water Lutheran Church (NALC)  
Candidacy Committee participant  
Visits to our Hispanic congregations (more to follow in September)  
2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly

Even as I continue to grow in my faith in Jesus Christ through my devotional life of study and prayer, so I pray for that same growth and transformation in your life, that we may be as powerfully transformed as the Apostle Paul was and reflect that same passionate commitment to the bold proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do so trusting in the power and work of the Holy Spirit to accomplish all that we desire according to His will.

I am deeply privileged to witness Christ's presence in your life and work as congregations of the North American Lutheran Church and am deeply honored and humbled to serve with you in this role.

It is good to be with you following Christ,



Bishop John F. Bradosky

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# **2014 North American Lutheran Church Convocation**

## **Report of the General Secretary**

### **Outstanding Leadership**

I say it many times, but it bears repeating: God has blessed the NALC with outstanding leaders in our congregations, Mission Districts and staff. I am honored to work with many gifted people. We are most thankful that Jenny Brockman joined our staff last year as the missions assistant to Rev. Gemechis Buba. She quickly stepped in after Rachel Sosebee moved to North Carolina. Jenny brings a lot of experience with missions and mission teams and is an invaluable addition to our staff.

### **Communications Committee**

The Communications Committee devoted its attention this past year to improvements to the new web site, assisting interested congregations with the development of their web sites and the development of the new NALCNetwork.com. Kathy Jacobson, David Hahn and Todd Harrison have done the work of improving the web site.

David and Todd have done the work in developing the NALCNetwork. Jenny Brockman has been a big help in orienting us to the workings of the NALCNetwork. It is the equivalent of our own private social network, much like Facebook and other similar sites. Our goal is to move almost all of the online communication of our many groups, committees and task forces from Google groups and Facebook to the NALCNetwork. The network will have two basic functions: 1) provide an online workspace for the internal working of committees and groups, and 2) provide a place where people could get a better idea of all the activity within the NALC and connect in a supportive relationship.

We maintain the overall goal of growing a communications culture within the NALC that is dynamic, with a constant flow of news and events throughout the NALC. This will be important for connecting with the younger generations. The Communications Committee will be challenging congregations and Mission Districts to make this shift in culture.

In addition to those already named, thanks go to the other committee members who guide our communications plans: Rev. David Baer, Donna Evans, and Ryan Schwarz.

### **Certification of Pastors**

The NALC remains attractive to ordained pastors in other denominations, Lutheran and non-Lutheran. Again I thank the Mission District Deans for conducting most of the certification interviews. God is providing the pastoral leaders we need in the NALC.

### **Lutheran Benefits**

Verlyn and Kelly Hahn and the Hahn Financial Group in Sioux Falls, SD, have been one of the most important blessings for the NALC in their administration of Lutheran Benefits. They have an incredible team that always provides quick, personal and outstanding assistance. Especially with all the confusion and turmoil in the health insurance industry, we are most thankful for their great service.

They are in the middle of making improvements to the retirement plan and processing the renewal of the health insurance. The cost of the health insurance remains positive in comparison with other church plans.

Verlyn Hahn will report to the Convocation, but here is a brief summary of the current status of Lutheran Benefits as of late June 2014:

#### **The Lutheran Benefits Health Plan**

- 250 individuals (178 congregations) currently enrolled in health plan
- 50 individuals (24 congregations) currently enrolled only in the ancillary (non-health) package

#### **The Lutheran Benefits 403b Retirement Plan**

- 586 individuals eligible to participate (census-loaded)
  - 343 individuals participating (\$ in account) – 60.8%
  - 265 individuals who have transferred in \$ from other accounts – 77.3% \*
- 216 congregations enrolled / actively participating
- Total plan funds under management – \$56,222,976

\* Several participants had multiple transfers come into the plan. The total number of transfers into the plan from an outside source is 335.

#### **Disaster Response and Training**

The NALC Disaster Response task force continues its work to coordinate disaster response in the United States and train congregations before a disaster hits to be prepared to respond quickly and effectively.

Pr. David McGettigan (Atlantic City, NJ) chairs the task force and works with Ms. Cheryl Ingraham (Charleston, WV), Pr. Amy Little (Norwalk, OH), Ms. Jessie Philips (Watertown, WI) Pr. Bert Schultz (Prairie Farm, WI), Pr. Ron Warren (Grove City, OH), and Ms. Mary Woodward (Caldwell, OH). They are making significant progress, having led the first training event for congregations in Texas earlier this year, with plans to do training events in Ohio and one other location later this year. Three additional regional training events are planned for 2015.

Congregations in the United States can support Lutheran World Relief ([lwr.org](http://lwr.org)) for responding to international disasters and emergencies. Congregations in Canada can support Canadian Lutheran World Relief ([clwr.org](http://clwr.org)) for responding to disasters in Canada and internationally. These relief organizations are pan-Lutheran. In addition to providing emergency relief, they assist with economic, agricultural and community development. Their goal is to deal with root causes of poverty so their ministries are helpful when there are no emergencies.

As just one example, Lutheran World Relief works with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the Lutheran Malaria Initiative (LMI) to mobilize Lutherans in the United States in support of an international effort to end the one million deaths annually in Africa due to malaria.

#### **Legal Support**

Thankfully we did not often have to call upon our lead attorney, Martin Nussbaum, and his assistant, Joan Rennekamp, at Lewis Roca Rothgerber LLP in Colorado Springs, CO. When we did, they again provided excellent advice and assistance. Congregations may still work with Ms. Rennekamp to get a tailored employee handbook. If you would like to work with Ms. Rennekamp to get a handbook for your congregation, contact our Minnesota office at 888-551-7254. We also are very thankful to the law firm of Trimble and Associates, LTD, in Minneapolis, MN, for their good work in successfully resolving all of the 501(c)(3) issues with the Internal Revenue Service.

## **Discipline Procedures**

Discipline procedures for matters of misconduct and doctrine are now in place. Thanks again to Paul Spring, Jim Gale and Ron Warren for developing the procedures.

Thanks also to these leaders who agreed to be appointed to serve on a discipline panel:

### Inquiry Panel (discipline for matters of misconduct)

The panel coordinators are Rev. James Bangsund (San Jose, CA), Rev. Ralph Kempinski (Aiken, SC), Rev. K. Glen Johnson (Calgary, AB), Mr. Victor Stevens (North Ridgeville, OH) and Rev. Solveig Zamzow (Grafton, IA).

### Examination Panel for Discipline for Doctrine (for four-year terms):

The panel members are Rev. Dennis Di Mauro (Herndon, VA), Rev. Marshall Hahn (Saint Olaf, IA), Rev. Jimalee Jones (Calumet, MI), Rev. Gerald Miller (Annapolis, MD) and Rev. Kevin Ree (Barhead, AB).

The process by which NALC members could report potential disciplinary violations to one of the panels will soon be posted on the web site and reported in the newsletter.

## **Common Ground Christian Network**

In February the Association of Church Renewal (ACR) transformed itself into the Common Ground Christian Network (CGCN), an outgrowth of the meetings of Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and other Reformed leaders in 2012 and 2013. The CGCN will facilitate the working together of orthodox Christians in the historic Reformation traditions in four areas: 1) theology and discipleship, 2) confronting the culture, 3) missions and church planting, and 4) social witness. CGCN involves leaders in the older mainline denominations and leaders in the new Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Reformed associations and denominations. The whole Church in North America faces stiff challenges that will likely get stiffer. Our hope is that CGCN is one way for orthodox Reformation churches and members meet those challenges.

## **Congregational Reports**

Last year 51% of our congregations completed their 2012 congregational reports. This year as of mid-July just 35% of our congregations have completed their 2013 congregational reports. The NALC is lean in structure, forms and paperwork, so perhaps the low response rate for completing congregational reports is not a complete surprise. However, the reports are not that complex or difficult to complete. We should aim for more complete information about the NALC and its congregations. An accurate statistical summary would be very helpful for many reasons, not the least of which is better long-range planning. Because of such incomplete data, I can only confidently report these statistics, which are based on information in our database that we have gathered by other means in addition to the information reported in annual congregational reports:

Total number of congregations: 384

Total baptized membership: 137,000

Geographic Setting of NALC congregations

Farming area: 53

Small town or rural: 162

Metropolitan area: 39

Suburb of large city: 43

Dual Membership with another Lutheran church  
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ: 71  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: 13  
Augsburg Lutheran Churches: 1

Here is a heads-up to congregations that have not completed their 2013 reports – I will personally be communicating with you to urge you to provide the information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark C. Chavez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'C'.

Rev. Mark C. Chavez  
General Secretary

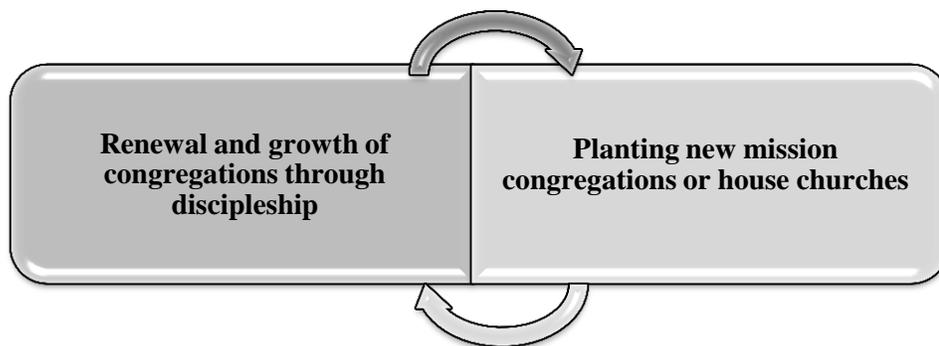
## 2014 North American Lutheran Church Convocation Report of the Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust also in me.” John 14:1*

The North American Lutheran Church mission office is engaged in advancing God’s mission in this world through local and international mission work. This past year, our mission office continued its work through the following activities that are reaching thousands of people in the United States, Canada and around the world.

### **Called to Mission**

Our church adopted a bold resolution of growing to 1517 congregations by the year 2017, the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation. With that vision, our mission office is working to inspire, mobilize, equip and organize congregations for this calling. Having a clear picture of the vision before us is the first step in mission. Therefore, as a mission-driven organization, we are called to take the following actions:



With renewed and transformed congregations whose main mission is making disciples, we are called to produce numerous new mission congregations and house churches. As a mission-driven church, we have made making disciples and congregational reproductions our most important missional duties.

### **Organizing for Mission**

The North American Lutheran church is organized into more than 24 Mission Districts. All of our districts are mission-driven. Their geographical affinity is important; however the major driving force is mission. Therefore, raising up mission teams in every mission district is a key strategy in organizing the church for mission.

The national mission team has prepared a draft job description and task framework to assist our Mission District mission teams in getting started. However, missional calling and missional tasks are always local, so local Mission District teams will have the freedom to creatively and contextually form their specific mission work description and missional targets.

### **Equipping for Mission**

Several mission conferences were organized to equip and train missional leaders in past years. This year, we are conducting seven regional conferences throughout the U.S. and Canada. Through regional conferences and the national mission festival, we work on equipping key ordained and lay leaders for the

sake of mission. Furthermore, Mission Districts are encouraged to conduct their own regional and local mission conferences or participate in mutual mission-equipping events to strengthen their work and encourage one another in the work of advancing God's mission in the world.

### **Resourcing for Mission**

The NALC mission office is resourcing congregations mainly through the funds made available through the Great Commissions Fund of the NALC. Distributions from the Great Commission Fund are made to congregations in the form of seed money, bridge funds, or emergency aid after a team thoroughly reviews their application. Since the Great Commission Fund was established, more than \$250,000 has been given to mission congregations and mission projects within the U.S. and Canada.

In addition, our mission office is resourcing worthy mission projects in various parts of the world with financial aid and grants. In addition to monetary aid, books, medicine and building equipment have been sent to several countries. Experienced people have also been sent to serve and share their time, talent and resources.

### **Mobilizing for Mission**

Our key role in the NALC mission office is mobilizing the disciples of Jesus Christ for the works of mission and ministry. In that spirit, there are hundreds who are being mobilized for local, national and international missions work in the kingdom of God, including a number of full-time and part-time missionaries in the mission field. In addition, many individuals serve on our national mission teams, such as the new congregational starts team, the congregational renewal team, the international missions team, the Great Commission Society leadership team and the multinational missions team. Many also are involved in the discipleship training process. Through the regional Mission District teams, hundreds of leaders will emerge to take on mission work in their specific mission territories and beyond.

### **Connecting Missional Needs with Resources**

The Great Commission Society was established with the simple vision of connecting missional needs with resources. Through the Great Commission Society website, we are able to lift up and connect very well vetted and highly effective ministries, mission congregations, missionaries and mission projects with needed resources.

The Great Commission Society also receives gifts that strengthen its emergency fund, which is used in line with the principles and processes of the Great Commission Society to assist congregations in times of crisis and emergency need.

Furthermore, congregational needs and resources are connected by means of the NALC website and newsletter to bring congregations, mission projects, missionaries and mission organizations together for the advancement of Christ's mission.

### **Consulting for Mission**

One of the key ministries of the NALC mission office is consulting with mission congregations, mission leaders and pastors who are engaged in the mission of the church in various ways. These consultancy services are provided mainly through such technologies as meetings via Skype, teleconferencing, and phone calls so that we can deal with issues inexpensively and in a timely manner. Occasionally, mission site visits are necessary.

## **Inspiring and Motivating for Mission**

The ministry of teaching and preaching is something we do extensively in congregations and mission sites throughout the world. In the past year, our teaching and preaching ministry was conducted in many parts of the U.S., Canada, India, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Slovakia, Norway and China.

All of these places were visited for various reasons, but the single most important reason was to inspire, motivate and encourage individuals and church leaders for the work of mission. There are many leaders and church bodies blessed with numerous resources and surrounded with tremendous opportunities for mission. However, they are not motivated and mobilized due to a lack of courage. In our visits, we address fear of mission and motivate church leaders to take action in order to move the mission of Jesus forward.

## **Visiting Mission Sites**

Jesus said, “GO into all the world and make disciples of all nations...” Thus the word “GO” is what comes first. If we get that word and its implications wrong, our mission will be stagnant or misguided. In both cases, paying closer attention to the word “GO” is critical.

The NALC mission office believes traveling to visit mission sites, preaching, consulting with leaders and exploring new missional territories is of utmost importance. The mobility of mission leaders within their missional territory determines the quality and quantity of their missional fruits. Therefore, we have visited mission congregations, mission plants, missionaries and mission projects in local and international contexts.

## **Prayer Network**

One of the most important actions within our mission plan was the launching of a nationwide prayer network. Our prayer network has been established, and there are people who regularly pray together for 30 minutes every Thursday from 1:00-1:30 PM (Eastern). At that time, we all pause to pray for the NALC. The role of prayer in mission is very significant. One can judge this claim by looking at the ministry journey of Jesus here on earth. He was praying constantly. A mission-driven church like the NALC is required to pray even more.

## **Conclusion**

The NALC’s mission work continues to be organized and provide necessary missional leadership in the following ministry categories:

1. New congregations, house churches and mission fellowships
2. Renewal of existing congregations
3. International missions and missionaries
4. Multinational immigrant ministries
5. Great Commission Society
6. Theologians without Borders
7. Newly formed Mission District mission teams.

Through these mission and ministry focal points, the NALC mission office continues to serve pastors, lay leaders and congregations of the NALC by supporting and resourcing congregational mission that is local and international in its vision and reach.

May God continue to guide and lead our work, and in the end may He take all the glory now and forever more.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gemechis D. Buba". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis D. Buba

## **2014 North American Lutheran Church Convocation**

### **Report of the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism**

If I could choose one theme that would describe much of my ministry in the past year, it would be “healthy congregations, healthy pastors, and healthy pastor/congregation relationships.” That certainly doesn’t encompass all that I’ve been doing this year, but in every aspect of my work with congregations, congregational lay leaders and pastors, it is obvious that we need to address these issues.

I’m not speaking of “healthy” in the sense of “self-care” or the need for weight loss or an exercise routine, although there is a need for these as well. Rather, I’m talking about what makes strong and faithful pastors, and what makes good congregational leaders, and how the two can work in a mutually supportive, encouraging relationship, rather than in an always adversarial relationship that breeds contention and division. As I’ve said, this is not something that is unique to the NALC; such issues are experienced in all Christian communities and congregations. Our reality is that we are the same sinners in the NALC that we were in previous Lutheran church bodies. Now is the time, however, for us to address such issues for the good of congregations, pastors and the NALC as a whole. And why are Christians struggling with these considerations?

First, we understand such conflict as the natural result of an understanding of “church” as institutional, rather than relational. For too long, many Lutherans and others have thought of the Church of Jesus Christ in institutional terms, often adopting what might be called a “corporate” or “business” model that sees the pastor as a hired hand, and the congregation council as “the boss.” This can create a devaluation of the pastoral ministry and lead to constant tension between congregational leaders and called pastors. Rather than fostering open, honest communication, this often results in power politics, power struggles and conflict over who holds power in the congregation—the pastor, the council, or “shadow leaders,” i.e., not elected leaders, but those who hold the reins of the church.

I have been working with call committees and pastors in the call process, as well as with other congregational leaders and pastors to encourage a more healthy understanding of the pastor/parish relationship as more of a “marriage.” Marriages are all about relationship, connection, and open, honest communication. In marriage, the two people covenant to work cooperatively for the good of the household and to bear fruit that gives glory to God and loves and serves the neighbor. The pastor and congregational leadership ought to work in the same way, as the call of the pastor is indeed a covenant, establishing a “marriage” of pastor and congregation.

In the past year, I have been addressing this different understanding in every aspect of my work as Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry. I rewrote and expanded the NALC Call Process Manual (available online at [www.thenalc.org](http://www.thenalc.org)). I included a Bible study on the Lutheran understanding of “Call” in the manual, to be used by both call committees and councils, but also by pastors. I share this understanding in the orientation/training sessions I offer to congregational leaders beginning the call process. I have been working to shift our thinking in the Congregational Leadership Workshops I have led in many congregations throughout the NALC, from the Carolinas to Texas and California, from Houston to northern Michigan.

These workshops are one way we can address these issues proactively, to improve the pastor/congregation relationship before serious conflict and division surface. I am available and willing to

provide such a workshop to any of our NALC congregations, as we consider what it means to think of the Church as an institution, as opposed to Jesus' intention that His Body be a living community of disciples. I would also like pastors and congregations to know that, in consultation with Bishop Bradosky, I am also available to work with pastors and congregations already experiencing difficulties. As with marriage counseling, we are much more fruitful the earlier we begin to address issues creating conflict and division.

We are certainly addressing these very issues, as well, in our work with the process of discipleship—considering what it means to be disciples and to make disciples—people who know Jesus Christ, know His Word and, in response to the gift of salvation through His death and resurrection, seek to follow Him day by day. In institutional churches, we think in terms of being members of an organization. In congregations that understand themselves to be a community of disciples, it's all about relationships—with the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with other disciples as we seek to follow Jesus together and, yes, relationships with the world around us, as people continue to struggle with sin, death and the devil. We have much work to do in this regard, but the NALC will be healthy and strong when we focus ourselves on the Word of God, the Son of God, and being disciples together in the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

On behalf of our staff, I served as liaison to the Theological Education Task Force, which completed its work with the formation of the North American Lutheran Seminary. I continue to be a resource to the NALS Board of Regents, as requested by the bishop. I also serve as liaison to the newly formed Diaconate Task Force, with Dr. Marianne Yoder, chair. I serve as ex-officio member of the Candidacy Committee, largely because I will be working with our newly approved candidates for ordination. I serve, as well, as a resource staff person for the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine, as requested by the bishop. And that is the key—I serve as an assistant to the bishop, so I have many “other duties as assigned” that cause my ministry in the NALC to be varied, exciting, and always challenging!

As I conclude my report on the “Ministry” side of my responsibilities, let me return briefly to my work with the call process in the NALC. As stated above, I have continually worked to improve our process, aiding pastors and congregations in discerning God's will with regard to new calls. The process is not perfect, but we are always open to improvement, hence the newly expanded NALC Call Process Manual.

This spring I began sending out the updated congregational vacancy list to all NALC pastors, not just those who have entered the call process. This is an acknowledgement that we never know how the Holy Spirit will “nudge” or begin to work in a pastor's life with regard to a new call. This was received positively, and will continue as we update the vacancy list every four to six weeks. At this time, we have 19 congregational vacancies throughout North America. We have about 50 pastors available for call in the NALC, although not all of those pastors are open to call in every region and context of North America. Until this spring, we regularly had 12-13 vacancies, and with that number, calls were being extended a bit more quickly. With the increase in vacancies, the call process is taking more time, as might be expected. As I remind our call committees and congregations, the call process is a spiritual process, and we are “waiting for the Lord,” as the psalmist writes in Psalm 27:14. That being said, today it is most challenging to find pastors willing to serve our smaller, rural/farming congregations. I am continually asking our pastors to prayerfully consider serving in one of these congregations. There are great blessings in serving in such ministries!

Turning to our work with ecumenism and inter-Lutheran relationships, the most visible item of note is the response of the Lutheran World Federation. As you are aware, we had an on-site visit with two

representatives of the LWF on March 10, 2014. We received a response from General Secretary Martin Junge on May 7, 2014, indicating LWF would not be approving our application for full membership at this time, and that they consider it pending, encouraging us to be in conversation with the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. At this time, we have been in conversation with other church leaders, and have been prayerfully considering our response. Our Executive Council was asked to provide input at their meeting in early July, after this report was prepared. A response and report to the NALC will be made in due time.

Another significant development in our inter-Lutheran relations was the visit of our four executive staff—Bishop Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, Pastor Gemechis Buba and me—to three east African nations, to visit the leaders of four major Lutheran bodies in that part of the world. We traveled the first ten days of 2014 to visit leadership of our one full-communication partner, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Addis Ababa, followed by a visit to Nairobi to meet with Archbishop Walter Obare of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, as well as a separate meeting with the bishop of the Kenyan Evangelical Lutheran Church. This was followed by a trip to Dar es Salaam to visit with leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, with whom we have a Memorandum of Understanding. The trip was to facilitate face-to-face meetings with these leaders to discuss the nature of our relationships and our desire to develop relations that are based on mutuality, respect and cooperation. In short, we believe we have much to learn from them, and they from us. The meetings were truly fruitful and provided a framework for moving our relationships forward.

We continue to have close relationships developing through our consultations with the Anglican Church in North America and another formal consultation with the NALC, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Lutheran Church-Canada. These twice-yearly consultations focus on mutually agreed-upon topics for study. It should be said that these consultations aim primarily at how we can currently work together for the sake of mission, ministry and witness and not on strategies for full communion, or altar and pulpit fellowship. Though deep and abiding relationships are desired, there is a great openness in our ecumenical conversations, allowing our relations to develop naturally—and we hope organically—as our pastors and congregations learn about one another in local contexts.

Although we do have contact and communication with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in the U.S., primarily through the ecumenical office of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we are not currently engaged in any formal conversation/dialogue with the USCCB.

As you will see evidenced by ecumenical and inter-Lutheran guests at our 2014 Convocation, we have had contact with leaders of the Swedish Mission Province; the International Christian Network in Neuendettelsau, Germany; and Pastor Valery Hryhoryk, a sole pastor working to re-plant the Lutheran Church in Belarus!

We also have significant relationships developing through our international mission connections, which will be shared in the report of the Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, Dr. Gemechis Buba.

I could go on about the exciting work we are doing in ecumenism and inter-Lutheran relations, but for now this should suffice to give a glimpse into the commitment of the NALC to working with faithful, confessional Christians in North American and the world to assist those in need of the Gospel, to care for those who are hurting, homeless and persecuted, and to give glory to God the Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I will close by expressing my deep appreciation and love for each of you—our pastors, congregations, and each and every one of you who are part of the NALC. I would especially give thanks to God for our Bishop John, my colleagues Mark and Gemechis, and all of our administrative staff, for the opportunity to work side-by-side with these folks who are no longer just co-workers, but close friends. As I have said, if I die tomorrow, I will die at peace, and blessed that I had the chance to serve the North American Lutheran Church in this way!

Respectfully submitted in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "The Rev. David M. Wendel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor David M. Wendel

## **2014 North American Lutheran Church Convocation Report of the Treasurer**

As the NALC completes its fourth year of operation, I am pleased to report that our church body is on solid financial footing. Benevolence from congregations and other donations have continued to exceed operating expenses. Our cash reserves are strong. We've made many grants from the two funds dedicated to our core priorities of mission and theological education, and have launched the NALS. God has certainly blessed us with substantial resources for ministry.

2013 Results: The second page of this report summarizes the NALC's financial statements for 2013. For the full year, the NALC received congregational benevolence of \$1,446,381, individual and other donations of \$56,923, and other income of \$97,682. Donations to the NALC's dedicated funds and other specified purposes totaled \$705,966. Total expenditures, including operating costs and grants from the dedicated funds, were \$1,875,568.

2014 Forecast: As the NALC's growth has slowed (but not stopped), so too has the growth in income and expenditures. In the first five months of 2014, the NALC received congregational benevolence and other operating income of \$601,441, while operating expenses totaled \$528,460.

For the full year 2014, we now estimate that congregational benevolence and other operating income will total roughly \$1,680,500, which is approximately \$95,000 greater than budget. Due to careful expenditure management, operating expenses will total approximately \$1,519,713, which is slightly less than budget. The resulting surplus will largely be transferred to the Great Commission Fund and Fund for Theological Education.

Turning to these dedicated funds, we forecast total grants in 2014 from the Great Commission Fund of \$162,200, slightly in excess of budget. We estimate total expenditures from the Fund for Theological Education of \$407,758, which is substantially above budget and reflects the launch of the NALS and the anticipated growth in enrollment in the seminary system this fall.

2015 Proposed Budgets: For 2015, we are proposing an operating budget which contemplates a 5.5% increase in total income to \$1,772,375, and a 12.9% increase in total expenditures to \$1,715,642, compared to forecast 2014 levels. The growth in planned spending includes new funding for training of mission teams and disaster response teams, the establishment of the spring preaching conference as an annual event, and the addition of a new part-time staff position in mid-2015, potentially to support the NALC house church movement.

The Great Commission Fund budget for 2014 proposes total expenditures of \$178,000. The Theological Education Fund budget calls for a further significant increase in total expenditures to \$651,700, largely to support the growth and full operation of the NALS. The proposed budget for the NALS contemplates \$545,750 in total operating expenditures, predominantly for faculty and staff compensation and an agreed contribution to the operating costs of Trinity School for Ministry.

This report, the Treasurer's presentation at the Convocation, the 2015 budgets and the 2013 audited financials when completed will be posted on the NALC website for further review.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan M. Schwarz", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ryan M. Schwarz, Treasurer

**NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**Summary 2013 Consolidated Unaudited Financial Statements**

**Statement of Activities**

**Income**

Unrestricted Donations	
Member Congregation Donations	\$ 1,446,381
Individual and Other Donations	56,923
Other Income	97,682
<b>Subtotal - Unrestricted Donations</b>	<b>1,600,986</b>
Restricted and Designated Donations	705,966
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 2,306,952</b>

**Expenditures**

Committees and Task Forces	\$ 81,532
Convocation and Conferences	196,100
Mission Support and Other Grants Distributed	414,053
Salaries and Benefits	794,710
Employee Travel	218,716
Administrative Expenses and Other	170,457
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>1,875,568</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 431,384</b>

**Balance Sheet**

**Assets**

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 2,288,679
Accounts Receivable	115,912
Prepaid Expenses	28,751
Property and Equipment	40,215
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 2,473,557</b>

**Liabilities and Net Assets**

Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$ 104,511
Accrued Expenses	37,411
Total Liabilities	141,922
Net Assets	2,331,635
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 2,473,557</b>

NOTE: Complete Audited Financial Statements will be available on the NALC website.