



2015 Convocation

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2015 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,

⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. (John 12: 9-11)

Perhaps the greatest miracle of Jesus' ministry is the raising of Lazarus. Even though Lazarus had been bound and entombed for three days, Jesus had the tomb opened, prayed and called Lazarus up out of the tomb. Those around Lazarus saw the dead man walking and didn't know what to say or do. Jesus had to give them instructions to unbind Lazarus and let him go. The life-giving power of Jesus transcends death, brings hope that transcends this world, and offers a Kingdom-of-Heaven worldview that transcends the limits of the competing reality of our own worldview.

There is good news in this text, even in the culture of North America. There are still many people who are looking for Jesus, and they are looking to meet those to whom He has given life. They want to "see" Jesus and Lazarus. Lazarus was the evidence of the difference Jesus could make in a person's life. If He could make such a profound impact in the life of Lazarus, is there anything beyond the scope of Jesus' power unleashed in their lives? The life of Lazarus pointed to Jesus. If we only point people who are looking for Jesus to our programs, educational opportunities, service projects, or physical facilities, they are bound to be disappointed. They are looking for Jesus and the evidence in our own lives. They want to be in His presence. This is precisely the nature of faithful worship. We are drawn into the awesome presence of the living Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Word and Sacrament, Jesus breaks into our lives, filling us with His Grace—forgiving, renewing, guiding and directing our lives with the truth that He alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It is in His presence that we hear His call to follow Him as disciples. The response to His call connects us to the community of faith, where relationships in Christ grow and faith matures, where disciples accept responsibility for the Great Commission and are equipped to disciple others. In this community of faith Christians are mentored by walking alongside those who are living out their Christian vocation in every context of daily living. This is where the difference that Christ makes in our lives becomes distinct and apparent. It is for the same reason that the focus on discipleship is so critical in the life and witness of the Church today. In all my travels across the North American Lutheran Church, I see the evidence of this witness unfolding and shaping our identity. I see the difference it is making in our pastors, our laity, our congregations, our commitment to mission, and our witness to the world.

This text also reminds us that such a witness comes at a tremendous price. Both the cultural and religious leaders conscripted by the culture had already made plans to kill Jesus (John 11:45). For the sake of their own survival, religious leaders decided they had to please Roman culture and authority in order to preserve their existence. When self-preservation becomes more important than Jesus or the truth of His Word, the Church compromises its identity and becomes a self-serving organization. What is preserved is only a cheap substitute for the Body of Christ. Please notice the risk was just as great for Lazarus as it was for Jesus. If they longed to get rid of Jesus, the evidence must go as well. This insures that a faithful witness holding fast to Christ and His Word will create even more conflict with our culture. The

marginalization is bound to get worse, not better. This makes ministry even more challenging in our time. It is always easier to avoid conflict with compromise, to appease the forces that would marginalize us by cooperating with them. Our search for an easier way can also easily lead to abandoning both Christ and the Gospel. The battles rage from within and without. There is no more favored status for the Christian Church in our culture. The changes and challenges are coming at an ever-increasing pace. I have witnessed the struggles and difficulties created for pastors and laity throughout the NALC as we adjust to the adverse dynamics of our context. Without an accurate larger view of what is unfolding around us we will unnecessarily wound one another.

²³ *And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.* (John 12:23-26)

Jesus describes the sacrificial nature of ministry in His name. He uses the image of a grain of wheat that must die before it can bear fruit. Then, to make sure it is impossible to misunderstand what he is saying, he clarifies it further: If you love your life, you will lose it. But if you hate your life in this world, you will keep it for eternal life. Bonhoeffer writes, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “When Christ calls a person, He bids them to come and die.” Bonhoeffer is reminding us that the cross of Christ, His sacrificial love for the salvation of the world, must be manifest in our own lives. Freed from self-preservation and self-protection in this world we are free to live in His constant presence, free to confess our sin and receive His forgiveness, free to love others, and free to give away our life for the sake of others. It is this freedom and sacrifice that gave courage to the martyrs that first followed Jesus and in every generation since. It is this same faithful witness that is manifest in the lives of martyrs throughout the world today. In this dying we truly live. I count it a privilege to see this sacrificial love manifest in the personal lives of our people and in the ministries of our congregations throughout the North American Lutheran Church.

²⁵ *So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”* (John 12:35-36)

The recent Supreme Court decision reminds us that we are living in a culture that continues to grow darker. But it is not going to grow brighter by simply pointing to Christian definitions of marriage or Christian morality. These come from following Christ, obedience to Christ, faith in Christ and the truth of His Word. I see little hope that we will win these cultural battles at the macro level. And some retreat is necessary so that our light can still shine through the darkness that surrounds us. There is only one light that needs to shine, and that is Jesus Christ. Believing in this light we become sons and daughters of light. It is in the micro levels of reaching one person at a time with the Gospel of Jesus Christ that this battle is won. It is in helping people experience life in Christ through Word and Sacrament ministry, through discipleship—following Christ obediently—and the selfless loving of others in our world for the sake of the Gospel that this world will be transformed and that His light will shine in us as well. For the sake of that mission the North American Lutheran Church presses on. 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. Others through whom the light of Christ shines brightly surround me. It is a great honor to serve with other faithful leaders who also represent you.

Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring continues to offer wise advice and counsel, for which I am truly grateful. Our approach to working with staff has always been consultative and interdependent. While we join

Bishop Spring in celebrating 50 years of Ordained Ministry, we continue to take advantage of the wisdom and experience those years represent. He continues to be actively involved on our Board of Regents in the area of development. I am also thankful for other former bishops who have been helpful and supportive. Those relationships are precious to me and essential for the entire North American Lutheran Church.

The light of Christ also shines in the staff with whom I share responsibilities for leadership in this church. They have blessed our pastors and congregations 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 depend on your prayers for their ministry. They are most worthy of your continued encouragement and appreciation.

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

Other beacons of light in the midst of the darkness and storms are the members of your 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. They keep the North American Lutheran Church moving forward faithfully and efficiently in between our convocations. Their insight, wisdom, various spiritual gifts and abilities are helpful assets that bless our life together. As they seek not only to be involved but to be an example, our life together is strengthened and together that light of Christ burns brighter.

In each of our Mission Districts are other brightly burning lights. Our Deans, like our Executive Council, are also volunteers. As they lead their Mission Districts, they function as an extension of the office of Bishop. Most of them serve congregations that graciously provide time and opportunity to fulfill this office. 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 offer us helpful advice as we continue to grow. Future effective organizational structures will be the result of consultation with our Deans. Remember to pray for their work as they faithfully fan the flames of discipleship into a brightly burning blaze.

The work of training pastors and laity to both experience and pass on the light of Christ has been greatly enhanced by the North American Lutheran Seminary. Other leaders also serving faithfully with us for the sake of the NALC include:

Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, NALS President; Director, NALS Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry; and Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics
Rev. Dr. Mary Havens, Director, Lutheran House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Rev. Dr. David Yeago, Professor of Systematic Theology
Rev. Dr. Monte Luker, Adjunct Faculty / Biblical Studies

Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, Adjunct Faculty / Church History
Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, Adjunct Faculty / Theology
Fara Pienkosky, Administrative Assistant/Registrar

We are also thankful for the light and insight of others who have served as beacons to provide direction as we navigate uncharted waters. We are thankful for their work on:

Convocation	Candidacy
Communication	Court of Adjudication
Mission	Task Force on Diaconal Ministry
Board of Regents	Commission on Theology and Doctrine
Task Force on Youth and Family Ministry	

Their work is helping us to advance our strategic objectives, supporting and strengthening the ministry of our congregations and pastors. Our strength for the future is in the brightly burning witness of each local congregation.

After serving as your Bishop for the past four years, I am no less committed to the pursuit of discipleship as Jesus commands it in the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28: 18-20) and as he modeled it in His interaction with His first followers. While we have spent these years learning valuable lessons from others as individuals, congregations and mission districts, it is now time for the North American Lutheran Church to create its own leadership team and develop its own resources. This will insure that all we do thoroughly reflects our own identity and theological heritage. Our work with Navigators has shifted from the coaching process to training us to coach and disciple others. Now that process is nearly complete. Our staff is implementing what we have learned as we interact regularly with our Deans and others. Although the Navigators will be available for help and support, our own leaders throughout the NALC will be those who will assume the role of guiding and directing our efforts.

While outside resources are helpful, internal resources are even more useful in building trust and personal responsibility for fulfilling the Great Commission. The integration of our own theological heritage with discipleship is extremely important. Understanding the intimate connection to Word and Sacrament ministry is essential, realizing that Christ is still calling His disciples in worship through the Word read and proclaimed and as He comes to us through the sacraments. Even more, discipleship has everything to do with catechesis, teaching the faith. The goal is not merely imparting information but equipping people to disciple others, pass on the faith to others. This is an essential understanding of Christian vocation. As we labor in any area of service, as Christ’s followers we also serve Christ by proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. The most profound way we can love others is by passing on the love we have received from Christ. There is no greater love we can have for others. In every relationship, regardless of context, we have opportunities to share our faith and take personal responsibility for the Great Commission by nurturing or discipling others in the faith. While I continue to be indebted to Dennis Blevins and his personal investment in my life, encouraging me to continue to grow personally and spiritually, he and other leaders also believe it is time for us to assume greater responsibility in shaping discipleship for the North American Lutheran Church. This next step is both a challenge and a great opportunity.

Throughout these past four years I have approached 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 are profound. We are no longer just talking about discipleship; our congregations and Mission Districts are pursuing it. Pastors and congregations are talking about what they are doing. They are sharing their experiences and testimonies of how the pursuit of discipleship has affected their lives and ministry. There is not just one process or one resource for pursuing this quest, but a host of ideas and ways congregations and pastors are exploring the Great Commission as an obedient response to Christ's command, the mission and priority of our life together. 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 a matter of transforming the culture of our congregations into an intentional disciple-making culture. 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. We cannot expect to have any impact on the larger culture without life-giving transformation in the culture of our congregations. 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.

In my travels both near and far, it is my privilege to share your stories that embody your commitment to Christ's mission. There is little for me to share of my own life without telling others about what you are doing for the sake of Jesus Christ and His Church. Your witness brings encouragement and hope to many others.

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.

Travel is seldom easy, but the people I get to interact with while serving as your Bishop are precious. It has been an honor to spend time with them and my joy to love them. 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 30 weekends with congregations in the US and Canada

- Ordinations and installations

- Work with the Commission on Theology and Doctrine

- Trip to India to pursue relationships with our mission partners

- Meeting with Mission District Deans

- Mission Conference Presenter

- Mission District Convocations

- Board of Regents

- Right to Life March in Washington DC

- NPRC Worship Service in Constitution Hall

- 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)

Responding to Lutheran World Federation application process
Continuing discussion with Lutheran CORE regarding changes in their organization and clarification of their mission
Strategic planning process with Executive Council
Installation of Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin as the President of NALS
Continued work with Gordon-Conwell and Trinity School for Ministry as partners with us in NALS
Mission District clergy retreats
Candidacy Committee participant
Visits to our Hispanic congregations (including San Juan, Puerto Rico)
Teaching Discipleship at NALS intensive summer course at our Lutheran House of Studies – TSM campus

As this term serving as your Bishop comes to a close, it is my prayer that our light continues to burn brighter as we focus on Christ and point to Christ in every opportunity to proclaim Him in word and deed. It is far more important for us to understand our identity as a Confessing Church Movement than another organization or institution. To that end we press on trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit to lead us forward, regardless of who holds this office. I count it a privilege to witness Christ's presence in your life and work as congregations of the North American Lutheran Church, and I 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

2015 North American Lutheran Church Convocation

Report of the General Secretary

Leadership and Staff

It truly is a joy to work with the leaders in our congregations and Mission Districts. The NALC is blessed with some of the most faithful, dedicated Christian leaders in North America. Likewise, it is a joy to work with our staff. From my perception we work together very well as a team, and it has been interesting to hear NALC members make the same observation about our staff.

Youth and Family Ministry Congregational Coach

Gary Pecuch began working as a consultant for the NALC on August 1. His role is to serve as the Youth and Family Ministry Congregational Coach for NALC congregations. Gary will be leading a workshop — What's in Your Bag? — at the Dallas Convocation and unveiling his new web site, faithwebbing.com. I encourage you to connect with Gary and his wife, Laurie, to learn about their outcome-based youth ministry. It is a long term strategic design for equipping children and youth with the necessary faith skills to live out their personal calling in life. They have been doing marvelous ministry at St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, OH, for many years. We are very pleased that they are willing to serve other NALC congregations.

Communications Team

This past year the Communications Team focused much of its attention on the implementation and growth of the NALC Network (nalcnetwork.com). We are most thankful to David Hahn, Todd Harrison and Jenny Brockman for their work on the network.

The network has 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. Regarding the first function, most of the NALC committees and task forces are now using the network as the main vehicle for their communication and collaboration. However, it is a learning and growing process.

The greatest potential for growth is with the second function. Most of the NALC is not connected with the NALC Network. We want to create a dynamic communications culture within the NALC, in which there is a constant flow of news and events throughout the NALC. Creating this culture will be essential for connecting with the younger generations.

Thanks to Kathy Jacobson and Todd Harrison for maintaining and improving the website. The NALC's website is a constant target for hackers, so thanks to David Hahn and Todd Harrison for keeping the site secure.

Pr. David Baer in his free time continues to do a marvelous job in putting together our monthly newsletter. You can make his job move more efficiently by sending him stories about your congregational ministry and mission.

The Communications team met in May to begin working on new key message points for the NALC and a role description for a Communications Coordinator. The goal is to bring someone on staff in 2016 who will be at the hub of all the NALC's communications (website, NALC Network, Facebook, newsletter, and email). The person in this position will work with the Communications team to develop and implement communications and marketing strategies to support overall NALC goals and messages. The position promotes awareness of NALC key message points to both internal and external constituents, and

utilizes marketing communications to reach individuals and churches that are looking for a Christ-centered, mission-driven church that is making disciples.

In addition to those already named, I thank Donna Evans, Ryan Schwarz and Pr. Scott Ness, the other team members, who develop and guide our communications plans.

Canada Section of the NALC

After years of labor and filings of documents, the Canada Revenue Agency recognized the Canada Section late this spring as a charity (the Canadian equivalent to a religious non-profit in the U.S.). The Canada Section has a very narrow purpose of making sure that our Canadian congregations and the Mission District can operate freely in Canada in compliance with Canadian laws and regulations, especially those governing the sending of funds out of Canada. Thanks go to Pastors Phil Gagnon, Glen Johnson and Karl Johnsen for leading this process. They were assisted by a volunteer, Barrister Phil Brose, and worked with Barrister Terrance Carter and Theresa Man of the Carters Professional Corporation, a law firm in Ontario.

Discipline Procedures

The good news is that in the past year we have not had to use any of our formal discipline procedures. Let us pray for the same good news in the coming year.

Legal Support

Because of the above good news, we only called upon our lead attorney, Martin Nussbaum, and his assistant, Joan Rennekamp, at Lewis Roca Rothgerber LLP in Colorado Springs, CO, for a few routine personnel matters. As always, they are most helpful. If your congregation has not already done so, I encourage you to 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 thankful to the law firm of Trimble and Associates, LTD, in Minneapolis, MN, for their continuing good work in dealing with the Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) issues.

We are thankful for NALC members who are lawyers or have a legal background who are helping our congregations take necessary precautions to protect their religious liberty (see the next section in my report). They prepared a guide for congregations in light of the Supreme Court's decision on same-sex marriage and are working on another resource to help congregations get their constitutions, bylaws and policies in good order.

Common Ground Christian Network

The biannual meetings of the Common Ground Christian Network (CGCN), an organization of Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and other Reformed leaders, have been and will be focusing on religious liberty issues. The threats to religious liberty are increasing in North America and around the world. The March meeting addressed the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and Africa, and the efforts in the United States to restrict the free exercise of religion and how to fend off those efforts. The U.S. Supreme Court Decision in June making same-sex marriage a right in all 50 states will further intensify the efforts by the government and militant activists to curb religious liberty. The coming October CGCN meeting will focus on the implications of the high court's decision.

Disaster Response and Training

It has been a joy to watch our disaster response team grow and flourish in their training programs for congregations and coordinating responses to disasters. They have their own report for this Convocation and I encourage you to read it and connect with the task force.

Lutheran Benefits

Verlyn and Kelly Hahn and the Hahn Financial Group in Sioux Falls, SD, continue to be an incredible blessing for the NALC. Their administration of our Lutheran Benefits Plan is superb, and their personal attention to our members' needs is commendable. Given the health care and health insurance challenges in the United States, we are fortunate to have the Hahn Financial Group helping us navigate such turbulent waters.

The improvements made to the retirement plan in the past year have gone very well, producing good investment results and significantly improving the processing time for our staff. A new health insurance plan went into effect on August 1, which is a significant improvement over the previous plan and at less cost. Once again the cost of our health insurance is very positive in comparison with other church plans. Verlyn Hahn will report in more detail about the new health insurance at the Convocation, but I will emphasize here that the new plan results in significant savings because members will need to pre-certify for medical services that are not routine.

Here is a brief summary of the current status of Lutheran Benefits as of mid-July 2015:

The Lutheran Benefits Health Plan

- 176 individuals (152 congregations) currently enrolled in health plan
- 76 individuals (62 congregations) currently enrolled only in the ancillary (non-health) package

The Lutheran Benefits 403b Retirement Plan

Employees

- Total number of employees enrolled in the plan: 398
- Total number of active participants (with an account balance): 364 (91.4%)

Employers

- Total number of enrolled churches: 236
- Total number of churches enrolled actively submitting dollars: 186 (78.1%)

Transfers

We have processed 18 transfers since the plan moved from AUL to RPC last August. This brings the total transfers since inception to 353.

Plan Assets

Total plan funds under management – \$60,730,854

Certification of Pastors

The NALC continues to receive ordained pastors from other Lutheran churches and a few non-Lutheran pastors. The mission and vision of the NALC attract attention. I would not be able to keep up with the incoming flow without the support of the Mission District Deans. They conduct most of the certification interviews.

Congregational Reports

This part of my report is nearly identical to last year's. Again, only about a third of our congregations completed their annual congregational reports. There are many reasons why more complete reporting would be helpful for our congregations and our leadership. The 2014 report had expanded sections on mission data that would be most helpful for our Missions Teams' planning. Likewise, the section on discipleship would help with our planning for working with congregations that want to become disciple

making congregations. With such incomplete data, I am able only to report the statistics below, 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: 393
Total baptized membership: 140,000
Geographic Setting of NALC congregations
 Farming area: 69
 Small town or rural: 205
 Metropolitan area: 52
 Suburb of large city: 67

I also want to report that there are now 76 dual NALC/LCMC congregations and 40 dual NALC/LCMC pastors. Both of those numbers are steadily growing and will do so for the foreseeable future.

Trends in Lutheranism

Each year Thrivent invites representatives from Lutheran churches to meet with Thrivent leaders. Last fall the theme for the meeting was Trends in Lutheranism. Representatives from other ministries were present, including Pr. Darrell W. Zimmerman, Grace Place Lutheran Wellness Ministries, an LCMS related ministry that addresses church worker wellness. In the discussion with Pr. Zimmerman we learned that for the past 50 years clergy in North America have been relatively unhealthy compared with other vocations. Clergy have relatively poor physical, mental and spiritual health. Many are burned out or on the verge of burn out.

I discussed this information with our Executive Council and pastors in two of our Mission Districts. In all likelihood, pastors in the NALC are not substantially different from clergy in general. I strongly encourage all of us in the NALC to pay attention to our pastors' health and wellbeing. One of the biggest risk factors is being isolated—isolated from other colleagues and even isolated within a congregation.

Pastors, let's take an honest, hard look at how we are doing. If we are not meeting regularly with other pastors in the NALC or in our local ministerium, let's do so. Congregational leaders, care for and pray for your pastors. Check in regularly with them to make sure they are not isolated and have a good support group. No disciple can go it alone. We all need the constant presence of our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We need fellowship with and support from the other members of Christ's body. Pastors are no exception, and statistically, the ones most at risk.

Respectfully submitted,



Rev. Mark C. Chavez
General Secretary

2015 North American Lutheran Church Convocation

Report of the Assistant to the Bishop for Missions

As baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, living members of His body, our “mission” is to share the good news of His saving death and resurrection with those living in darkness, fear and godlessness, bringing the kingdom—His risen presence—near, that through God’s Word and Holy Spirit, they may become his followers, baptized into His Church, disciples, with us, in the Kingdom of God. *Mission is sharing the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, bringing the kingdom near, making disciples, together, following all that Jesus has commanded us.*

Mobilization for Mission

The NALC Mission Office has a primary focus of mobilizing congregations, leaders, and Mission Districts for mission. In order to achieve this, systematic organization for mission is critically important. Therefore, the NALC Mission Office is proposing and preparing to pursue a teamwork approach in order to mobilize the whole denomination by forming three categories of teams:

- National Mission Teams (NMT)
- District Mission Teams (DMT)
- Congregational Mission Teams (CMT)

Training, equipping and resourcing these teams will help us awaken, mobilize, and equip our mission workers nationwide at every level. These mission teams will be responsible to be advocates, ambassadors, leaders, and resource people for the work of mission in their own areas.

National Mission Teams (NMT) – In the formation of the NALC, it was quite clear that mission work could not be “staff driven.” I would like to take a moment to personally thank all of the people who selflessly have given of their time in the last several years as the various national mission teams were formed. These pioneers were inspired, gracious, and incredibly hard-working. Without them, the great strides we have made would not have happened.

In the last year, we have worked diligently to re-form our National Mission Teams to respond to the changing and growing needs of the NALC. Gathering annually face to face and meeting monthly has allowed us to have an aggressive agenda as we pursue resourcing our congregations and leaders.



One of our primary goals for 2015 through the Great Commission Society (GCS) Team is to actively pursue the Mission and Vision laid out by Bishop John Bradosky for every congregation, small or large, to have an active, intentional relationship supporting a local community ministry, one of the NALC mission congregations in North America, and one global mission. For more information on this or our other initiatives, please take a moment to visit the website: www.thenalc.org/missions. By clicking on the name of each National Mission Team (or the “NALC Mission Office”) pictured above, you can see their current goals, resources, and contact people. All teams are working together to serve the NALC and drive mission forward!

District Mission Teams (DMT) –The training, development, and formation of District Mission Teams initiative was announced last summer to the Mission District Deans of the NALC, as we conducted interviews with each to gain information about the resources needed at a congregational and mission district level. Further training was conducted at the deans’ annual meeting in November of 2014 with training for these District Mission Teams at last year’s Mission Festival – Abida: Hearts on Fire. Continued training will be provided at Mission Driven! (The Mission Intensive in Dallas during the 2015 Convocation) and at the Mission Festival in November 2015, to be held in Columbus, Ohio.



The purpose of these District Mission Teams is to help congregations engage in the Great Commission by: discipling faith communities grounded in the Lutheran tradition; developing relationships with local, domestic and global partners; and planting churches and new mission starts.

Congregational Mission Teams (CMT) – Congregational Mission Teams will have a greater focus to enhance mission work in their congregations through inreach and outreach work, to renew and mobilize people for mission. An initial training will be the focus of Mission Driven! (Dallas, Texas) this August. Following that, the upcoming Mission Festival November 5-7 is going to be the major platform to form and provide in-depth training for mission teams. We would like to invite every congregation in the NALC to send a team—small or large—to this training event called “Mission Possible.” Inspirational and motivating speakers, nuts-and-bolts practical training for discipleship and mission, and breakout sessions led by experts in their fields will be grounded in Bible study, worship and prayer. We have kept the cost as low as possible to help enable all congregations to be able to attend as we drive mission forward together! For all details and to take advantage of a discounted early bird registration, please visit www.thenalc.org/mission-festival-2015.

Equipping for Mission

In the NALC, there are various opportunities to equip congregations and leaders for mission work. In the 2014-15 mission year there were various national, regional and congregational events designed to equip and mobilize the church for the work of mission.

The major platform used for this work is the NALC's annual Mission Festival in November. This year we are also using multimedia videos and Internet communication to bring necessary information and resource leaders to help them enhance the work they are doing in advancing mission in their targeted mission territories. Please note that these resources are not just designed for clergy but for all in the NALC.

Discipleship Moment Videos – Each week a new “discipleship moment” is published to the NALC's website from Bishop John Bradosky, Pastor Mark Chavez, Pastor David Wendel, or myself. These short reflections on what the word “discipleship” really means, the vision for the NALC and what it means to be “mission-driven,” are just a few of the many topics you will hear about as well as personal stories from local congregations, international missions and personal ministry experiences. As we strive to be Christ centered, mission driven, traditionally grounded and congregationally focused, we hope and pray these resources will be excellent and helpful tools. While initial videos were a bit longer, our most recent recordings make it very easy to use a weekly discipleship moment before worship on Sunday morning, in Sunday school, or included in a weekly Bible study. These videos can be downloaded or streamed by visiting the NALC website at www.thenalc.org/discipleship-moment/.

Prayer Network – Every Thursday from 1:00–1:30 PM EST, people all across the country gather together to pray. The time begins with a short Word of Scripture and continues with an open forum for prayer – bringing petitions aloud or silently. Whether taking a moment on your lunch break or out of your busy day, please join us on the conference call or from where ever you are. If you have prayer requests that you would like to have included, please send them to Jenny Brockman (jbrockman@thenalc.org) or join us by dialing 1-312-878-3078 and entering the access code: 805-751-189 (no additional passwords are needed).

Drops from the Well – A great gift of our Lord is the chance to drink deep from His living water. In John 4:14, we read: “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.” Reading the Word of God on a consistent basis is at the heart of our faithful obedience as followers of Jesus. We read His word to know Him better. And yet, for so many, this is a challenging task. Daily readings get lost in the shuffle of life. Welcome to ***Drops from the Well***. Utilizing the readings from Sunday morning, a “Drop from the Well” can be delivered to your phone via a text message or to your inbox via email. More than a verse a day, *Drops from the Well* focuses on sending out one key point or Gospel kernel with the hopes that you read and reflect on that drop each day of the week. There is a reason this initiative is called *Drops from the Well*. It is not meant to replace reflective devotional reading of Scripture. But it can provide a simple way for people to enter into the Fount of Living Water in a new way. This is the first step in this new initiative. Please watch for new updates as this project continues to grow.

Webinars – Beginning this fall, GCS will be sponsoring a monthly webinar. NALC executive staff and other key leaders will provide a time to connect, teach, train, and provide other resources. While participating live in the webinar will allow you to ask questions and view these resources first-hand, the webinars will be recorded and made available for later use. Please watch for more information in the NALC newsletter and website.

Redesign of Mission Website – As noted earlier, there are several new features on the NALC Missions web pages. The most prominent of these is the Mission Resource section, which provides a variety of

resources for mission and discipleship. Teaching documents, guidelines for mission starts, and an abundance of videos are available that can be used easily for Bible studies, Sunday school and small groups. Our goal this fall is to increase these resources by designing a six-week curriculum on discipleship and mission. Please visit www.thenalc.org/missions/ today to take advantage of these resources.

Other Mission Initiatives

Resourcing for Mission – The NALC continues to offer grants for congregational missions, missionary support and international mission projects. This supports come from the NALC Great Commission Fund; we invite you to join as a member today. Your membership enables these amazing projects and missions to start as they form the relationships which will sustain in the long run. If you wish to become a member, or you are already a member and are interested in becoming a partner with one of our many approved missions or missionaries, visit the GCS website: www.thenalc.org/great-commission-society or speak to a member of the team at Convocation to assist you in joining or forming a long sustaining relationship.

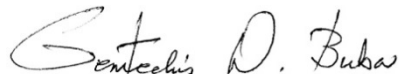
International Mission – The NALC continues to build relationships, provide training and growing together with Mission Societies all over the world. This year we have visited and been working specifically with:

- South Africa
- Dubai
- India – www.indiatransformed.org
- EECMY (Ethiopia) – www.eecmy.org
- CLBI (Canada's LBI) – www.clbi.edu
- Slovakia – www.eemn.org
- Tanzania
- Kenya
- Norway
- Sweden
- Germany

The NALC has many international ministry partners whose information can be viewed on our website. For more information about ecumenical relationships, please feel free to contact Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism.

Thank you for the continued gift of being called to serve in the North American Lutheran Church. It is a continued blessing to both me and my family, as we strive together to proclaim the Gospel!

Blessings,



The Rev. Dr. Gemechis D. Buba

2014 North American Lutheran Church Convocation

Report of the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism

Although some in the North American Lutheran Church refer to me (fondly, I hope) as the staff person with the longest title in the NALC, I would like to reassure you that my primary responsibility is working with the bishop on behalf of “ministry” in the NALC—in all its aspects and dimensions! This includes, but is not limited to:

- + Working with congregations and pastors:
 - in the call process
 - developing “Vision for Mission”
 - strategic planning
 - developing healthy pastor/parish relationships
 - developing stronger leadership skills
 - in conflict

- + Serving as staff liaison to:
 - the NALS Board of Regents
 - the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine
 - the Candidacy Committee
 - the Church and Ministry Task Force

- + Doing anything and everything possible to assist, encourage and strengthen the life and ministry of our pastors, congregations and each and every disciple in the NALC!

While I could provide extensive reporting on each of the above areas of responsibility, I would like to share a few thoughts in particular about the call process in the NALC in the past year. As pastoral change and transition is something that every pastor and congregation faces at some point in their ministry, it is of interest to most in our young Lutheran body.

With regard to the NALC call process, I would certainly say that the process is positive and helpful, with few frustrations for all involved. Our aim is to have a call process that is straightforward, open, flexible and, most of all, focused on God’s will and agenda and not our own.

This, of course, is what causes some frustration and confusion in our congregations with a pastoral vacancy, as folks are used to and expect to be able to have things happen according to their own schedule and timing. It is a hard pill to swallow, to realize and accept that, indeed, the calling of a pastor follows God’s timing, not ours. The call process usually takes 6-9 months, but in some instances it can be up to a year. We do everything for which we are responsible, but sometimes God appears to be working something out in the life and ministry of a congregation and their future pastor. In these situations, we pray, wait and trust that God is at work!

This has been the case especially the first few months of 2015. For whatever reason, the vacancies in the NALC grew to double the number we had been having, with less activity and movement among pastors. While calls were still being completed, it was taking more time than had been the norm, requiring faith, trust and patience on the part of all involved. We have sufficient pastors available for call and a wonderful number of seminarians in preparation for ordained ministry. It’s clear that there will be cycles and seasons

in the call process, reminding us that it is a spiritual process, following God's agenda and not our own. In spite of that, I do continue to appreciate and enjoy working with our pastors and congregations in the call process!

Before turning to our work in the NALC in ecumenical and inter-Lutheran relations, let me offer a few reflections on my other work in congregations regarding "ministry." Specifically, I would like to encourage us to continue our transition from an understanding of "church" from an institutional standpoint and moving more and more to the biblical understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ—a community of disciples.

We believe that any church body (denominations and congregations) that continues to focus on herself as an institution will continue to decline, as the model of church as institution is contrary to Christ's intention that his body in the world be a living, breathing gathering of disciples—followers seeking his will and way, rather than a worldly organization.

Post-World War II, with the resulting baby-boom, the Church (and Lutheranism) grabbed hold of institutional forms of church, building bigger and bigger church facilities, requiring larger and larger budgets, income, staffing and organizational structures. We focused on constitutions, membership, rules and regulations, committees and fund-raising. Sadly, what was lost was discipleship—and the reality that being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was more than/different from becoming a member of a religious organization! Many began to think that being a Christian was simply being a member of a congregation, without regard for living the life of a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. In our day, with disenchantment with institutions and distrust of most top-heavy/top-down organizations, it's no wonder we have been losing "church-members" for some time. Congregations that continue to see themselves as institutions and organizations are doomed to decline and finally fail, as rarely are people today drawn to participate in institutions and organizations, even those which present themselves as "religious." The Church and our congregations will have a future only in so far as they are able to reclaim/be renewed by the grace of God through Word and Sacrament—the community of disciples called the Church—rather than clinging to an organization/institution.

And this is critical for our pastors and congregations to understand in order to move forward in today's mission and ministry. In the call process, it is important for pastors and congregations to have a shared understanding in this regard. In our theological education and formation of future pastors, it is critical that our seminarians grasp this movement in the NALC from institution to community of disciples. As congregations and pastors work together in local ministry, fruit will be borne only through a common commitment to moving away from "program based" understandings of church, to the biblical notion that what the Body of Christ is about is "being disciples and making disciples," baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that (Jesus) has commanded us! (Matthew 28)

In short, much of the work I am doing with congregations and pastors regarding conflict, transition, communication, strategic planning, and visioning for mission revolves around the desire to hold onto old, failed understandings of "church" as institution, rather than being grounded in the NALC's commitment to the Body of Christ as a community of disciples—followers of Jesus hearing and heeding His Word. Through this brief reflection, I invite our pastors and congregations not yet involved in this transition to at least begin the conversation. If you'd like help in understanding and making this transition, please let me know and I'd be happy to visit and facilitate!

Let me now briefly mention our work in ecumenism and inter-Lutheran relations in the NALC. Here's a summary of primary efforts:

- + We continue to communicate and cooperate with our only full-communion partner, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, seeking to strengthen ties between local congregations, pastors and Mission Districts, as well as relations between denominational leaders. In addition to being participants with us at the LCMS-sponsored Confessional Leader's Conference in Wittenberg, EECMY is sending General Secretary Berhanu Ofga'a to our International Confessional Lutherans Forum (see below).
- + We continue to seek ways to deepen our relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, with whom we have a Memorandum of Understanding. ELCT also participated in the conference in Wittenberg, and we are hoping to have representation at the ICLF gathering (again, see below).
- + We continue to have a cordial and fraternal relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, meeting for an annual update and conversation with the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops' Ecumenical Officer, Fr. John Crossin. We also participate in our common work in defense of marriage and religious freedom.
- + We meet twice a year with representatives of the Anglican Church in North America, where we are currently working on four statements hoped to be included in a short study booklet for our churches. The four topics are "Jesus Christ, the Gospel and Justification," Baptism, Holy Communion, and Holy Scripture.
- + We meet twice yearly with representatives of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, providing updates regarding our ministries and discussing areas of common concern. These include marriage, sexuality, religious freedom, the sanctity of all human life and, of course, the truth and authority of Scripture and our shared commitment to the Lutheran Confessions. As publicized in our monthly newsletter, we were invited to participate in the Confessional Leadership in the 21st Century Conference in May, 2015, in Wittenberg, Germany. Together with Dr. Jim Nestingen, who was a presenter, I attended this conference and the dedication of the new LCMS International Lutheran Center in Wittenberg.
- + We participate in the Common Ground Christian Network, a group of leaders from various Christian bodies committed to reform and renewal among mainline denominations and Protestant communities in North America. Look for more information in the report of Pastor Mark Chavez, who has been one of the leaders of this network.
- + We sponsored the first International Confessional Lutherans Forum August 8-9, in conjunction with the 2015 Lutheran Week. This invitation-only gathering aimed to bring together Lutheran reform leaders within existing national church bodies, such as the International Christian Network (IKBG), the Swedish Mission Province and similar groups in Europe and Scandinavia. Also invited were leaders of EECMY and ELCT, so that reform groups may network with leaders of the largest Lutheran churches in the world. The aim of this forum was to have these leaders in one place at one time, to facilitate new and strengthen existing relationships, as well as to discuss the possibility of some new structure for ongoing cooperation.

- + Regarding our application for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation, we are scheduling a meeting with representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to discuss issues related to our application.
- + We continue to relate informally to a number of pastors, congregations and ministries internationally through our various congregations and Mission Districts, as well as through our Missions Office.

Finally, with regard to ecumenical and inter-Lutheran relations, it would be useful to note that one constitutional change being recommended will remove another layer of bureaucracy in the NALC, shifting primary responsibility for such relations and work to the Commission for Theology and Doctrine, in consultation with the NALC bishop. Previously, there was also to be a committee for such work, which would then report to the CTD. This committee is being eliminated.

Again this year, let me offer my appreciation for the opportunity to serve with Bishop Bradosky, Bishop Emeritus Spring, my colleagues Mark and Gemechis, the NALC support staff and all our pastors and congregations. It is truly a joy to serve in the NALC, and I pray that you, too, are living and serving in joy and that your joy is full and complete! We are blessed to be together in this unique community within the Body of Christ.

Respectfully submitted in Christ,



Pastor David M. Wendel

2015 North American Lutheran Church Convocation

Report of the Treasurer

As the NALC completes its fifth year of existence, I am pleased to report that our church body remains on solid financial footing. Benevolence from congregations and other donations have generally matched 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 North American Lutheran Seminary. God has certainly blessed us with substantial resources for ministry.

2014 Results: The last page of this report summarizes the NALC's financial statements for 2014. For the full year, the NALC received congregational benevolence of \$1,467,296, an increase of 1.4% over the amount in 2013. Individual and other donations grew almost 14% to \$64,851, and other income totaled \$120,726. Donations to the NALC's dedicated funds and other specified purposes totaled \$603,371, a decrease of 14.5% from the prior year during which the NALS was launched.

Total expenditures, including operating costs and grants from the dedicated funds, were \$2,146,664. While the NALC incurred a modest operating deficit in 2014 of approximately (\$22,042), contributions to the dedicated funds were sufficient to generate a consolidated surplus of \$109,580.

2015 Forecast: While growth in benevolence to the NALC has slowed materially since the NALC was formed, benevolence and other income has largely kept pace with expenditures. In the first six months of 2015, the NALC received congregational benevolence and other operating income of \$759,642, while operating expenses totaled \$749,537.

For the full year 2015, we now estimate that congregational benevolence and other operating income will total roughly \$1,795,625, which is slightly greater than budget. Operating expenses will total approximately \$1,854,876, which is significantly greater than budget, primarily due to the end of shared office and staff expenses with Lutheran CORE, and Convocation expenses which are substantially greater than budgeted. Consequently, we presently forecast an operating deficit of (\$59,251) in 2015.

Turning to the dedicated funds, we forecast total grants in 2015 from the Great Commission Fund of \$136,200, which is significantly less than budget due to donations running far below budget. We estimate total expenditures from the Theological Education Fund of \$514,850, which is substantially below budget and reflects actual operating expenditures for the NALS being significantly less than was budgeted at the inception of the seminary.

2016 Proposed Budgets: For 2016, we are proposing an operating budget which contemplates a 5.1% increase in total income to \$1,887,250, and a 7.3% increase in total expenditures to \$1,989,408, compared to forecast 2014 levels. The growth in planned spending includes funding for two new staff positions: a Youth and Family Ministry Congregational Coach who starts effective August 1, 2015, and Communications Coordinator starting January 1, 2016. Both are responses to congregational requests and feedback.

As a result, we forecast an operating deficit of (\$102,158) in 2016. While we are disappointed not to be able to propose a balanced budget, the Executive Council believes that spending a portion of the operating surpluses from prior years is appropriate to grow the NALC's capabilities to serve its congregations.

The Great Commission Fund budget for 2016 proposes total expenditures of \$170,000. The Theological Education Fund budget calls for a significant increase in total expenditures to \$625,860, largely due to anticipated increases in the number of NALS student scholarships. The proposed budget for the NALS contemplates \$450,030 in total operating expenditures, predominantly for faculty and staff compensation.

This report, the Treasurer's presentation at the Convocation, the 2016 budgets and the 2014 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 2014 Consolidated Unaudited Financial Statements

Statement of Activities

Income

Unrestricted Donations	
Member Congregation Donations	\$ 1,467,296
Individual and Other Donations	64,851
Other Income	120,726

Subtotal - Unrestricted Donations	1,652,873
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Restricted and Designated Donations	603,371
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Total Income	\$ 2,256,244
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Expenditures

Committees and Task Forces	\$ 110,706
Convocation and Conferences	183,656
Mission Support and Other Grants Distributed	259,246
NALS Operating Expenses	292,502
Staff Salaries and Benefits	862,631
Staff Travel	245,194
Administrative Expenses and Other	192,729

Total Expenditures	2,146,664
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Change in Net Assets	\$ 109,580
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Balance Sheet

Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 2,442,801
Accounts Receivable	27,891
Prepaid Expenses	34,210
Property and Equipment	40,986

Total Assets	\$ 2,545,888
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Liabilities and Net Assets

Liabilities

Accounts Payable	\$ 9,480
Accrued Expenses	48,051
Total Liabilities	57,531

Net Assets	2,488,357
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Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 2,545,888
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NOTE: Complete Audited Financial Statements will be available on the NALC website

