

Light, Life and Love

Kurt Reuber's Stalingrad Madonna - Christmas 1942

By Pastor Bjoern E. Meinhardt

I was visiting Zarephath Lutheran Church in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad), Russia, in September 2005. As I met with members of the congregation, my eyes were drawn to a work of art on the wall of the fellowship hall.

I had seen the drawing before — in history books and art history books — but I have to admit that I had not paid much attention to it until then, when I saw it in the context of the city in which it had originated.

Kurt Reuber drew “The Stalingrad Madonna” during the Christmas of 1942, as the Battle of Stalingrad raged on. The German inscriptions around the margins of the work read: “Weihnachten im Kessel 1942. Festung Stalingrad. Licht, Leben, Liebe” — Christmas at the Siege 1942. Fortress Stalingrad. Light, Life, Love. The German word *Kessel* literally means “kettle” or “cauldron.” As a military term it refers to an area that has become encircled during combat and translates as “siege.”

The Battle of Stalingrad was one of the fiercest and bloodiest of World



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The Stalingrad Madonna by Kurt Reuber, Christmas 1942

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War II. The name Stalingrad evokes the very epitome of sorrow and grief. Christmas is probably the last thing that comes to mind in association with this place.

Christmas and Stalingrad do not seem to go together. And yet, Christmas arrived during the battle, which lasted for 200 days (between July 1942 and February 1943). Even on Christmas, the fighting continued. For the scope of this article, we will not concern ourselves with the details of the battle, which serve merely as the context in which the Stalingrad Madonna was created.

When Ute Tolkmitt-Reuber, the daughter of Kurt Reuber, went to Volgograd in 2005, she visited a museum that featured a replica of General Field Marshall (*Generalfeldmarschall*) Friedrich Paulus' command post. She was surprised to see that the exhibit contained photos of her father, a copy of the Madonna, as well as other items pertaining to her father.

She wanted to know why her father was a part of the Paulus-Museum. The director of the museum gave her the following explanation, "General Paulus was the *one* German responsible for the deaths of a vast number of people on both sides. Kurt Reuber was the *other* German, who even in the perceived enemy, saw a fellow human being and turned toward their needs." Though it was forbidden, Reuber provided medical treatment to Russian civilians and prisoners of war.

Who was Kurt Reuber, this "other German"?

He was born on May 26, 1906, in Kassel, a city about 200 kilometers (120 miles) north of Frankfurt. He was a Lutheran pastor, a medical doctor, and an artist. Reuber studied Protestant theology after his high school graduation (*Abitur*), eventually earning a Ph.D. in the field of theology.

In 1933, the year Adolf Hitler rose to power, Reuber was called as a pastor of the Lutheran church in the small village of Wichmannshausen in the state of Hesse. In his ministry he was outspoken against the Nazis, which led to a series of interrogations by the authorities. Driven by questions on the unity of body and soul, Reuber pursued studies in medicine while



Kurt Reuber, Self-Portrait, January 1943

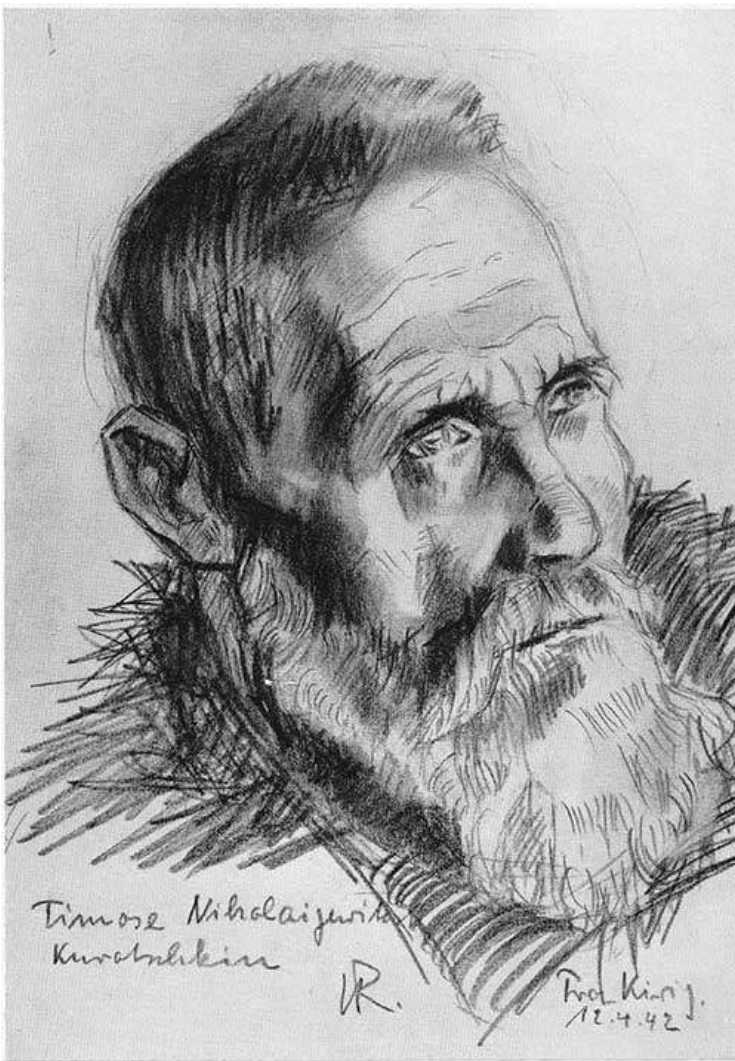
serving his congregation. In 1938, he became a Doctor of Medicine.

Kurt Reuber was also a very talented artist. After the Stalingrad Madonna, it is Reuber's portraits of Russian people, drawn during the German campaign against Russia in World War II, that stand out for me. At a time when the reigning Nazi ideology considered Russians (and other peoples) as subhuman enemies, Reuber saw dignity and captured, very aptly, each individual's character, personality, and humanity.

World War II broke out in 1939. Reuber, despite his criticism of National Socialism, was drafted into the army, not as a military chaplain, but as a field surgeon.

In the summer of 1942, the 6th Army launched its attack against Stalingrad. Reuber joined the troops in November, only a couple of days before the encirclement by the Soviet forces began.

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*Portrait of Timose Nikolajewitsch Kurochkin
Kurt Reuber, 1942*

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On February 2, 1943, General Field Marshall Paulus surrendered. This marked the end of the Battle of Stalingrad. Kurt Reuber and some 90,000 soldiers were taken prisoner. After the war only some 6,000 captives survived to return home to Germany. Reuber was not among them. He died, after severe illness, on January 20, 1944, in Yelabuga prison camp (present-day Tatarstan), where he was buried in a single grave.

Albert Schweitzer, the French-German physician and theologian, said the following about his friend Kurt Reuber: "He died as a human being whose goal it was to lose his life in the service to his fellow human beings in order that he might gain it." (*In German: "Er starb als ein Mensch dessen Ziel es war, im Dienst am Menschen sein Leben zu verlieren, um es zu gewinnen."*)

As the circumstances of the German 6th Army in Stalingrad became dire, desperate, and hopeless, Kurt Reuber wanted to create a visual aid to help the soldiers "celebrate" Christmas. He drew the Stalingrad Madonna, with the very primitive materials available to him, as a charcoal sketch on the back of a Russian map.

In the letters that Reuber wrote home to his wife Martha, he described the general mood of the soldiers: They prepared for Christmas "in a soldier-like fashion with stirring love and devotion." The sounds of "harmonica, fiddle, and singing, and the cheerfulness of the ordinary soldiers (*Landser*)" temporarily blotted out the sounds of the battle. Food reserves were conjured up and shared with one another. But Reuber also noted that the attacks by the Russians continued throughout their celebration. "How it booms through the Holy Night!" he wrote, describing the artillery barrage that carried on. He fulfilled his duties as a military physician and wrote that his "beautiful festive bunker turned into a field hospital."

Reuber also referred to his bunker as a "cave of clay." In the days leading up to Christmas, it "became a studio" for his art work. In a letter to his wife he wrote about his deliberations, "I wondered for a long while what I should paint and in the end I decided on a Madonna with child, or mother and child."

In order that his wife could visualize the drawing he described it to her in detail: It looked "like this: the mother's head and the child lean toward each other; and a large cloak enfolds them both. It is intended to symbolize 'security' and 'motherly love.' I remembered the words of St. John: Light, Life, and Love. What more can I add? In particular if one considers the situation of darkness, death, and hate around us — and the longing for Light, Life, and Love, which is so immeasurably immense within each one of us! ... I wanted to signify these three things in this down-to-earth and eternal vision (*erdhaft-ewiges Geschehen*) of a mother with her child and the security that they represent."

Reuber went on to describe to his wife how "my Madonna" was received when Christmas Eve arrived and he opened the "Christmas Door" of the

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dug-out: “My comrades stood spellbound and reverent, silent before the picture that hung on the clay wall. ... Our celebration in the shelter was dominated by this picture, and it was with full hearts that my comrades read the words: Light, Life, and Love. ... Whether it was a commanding officer or an ordinary soldier, the Madonna was always the source of their inward and outward reflection.”

It is understandable that the notions of security and motherly love, the way they are depicted in the drawing, stirred these very human emotions. We can only imagine what the first viewers of that drawing must have felt in those moments. Perhaps the soldiers imagined what it would be like to celebrate Christmas at home, in the arms of their wives and loved ones, by the Christmas tree. Or perhaps they longed to finally see the child, that was born after they were deployed, safe in the arms of the wife. Maybe they were remembering their own childhoods, the safety and security of their mother’s embrace.

Kurt Reuber’s Stalingrad Madonna is one of the most powerful “sermons” on hope and redemption, love and reconciliation. There are times when a visual work can communicate more clearly and effectively than the spoken word. There are times when a minimalist message, reduced to its most essential words, carries the most power. It is a message that still speaks to us and moves us today: Light, Life, Love.

In January of 1943, the drawing of the Madonna, along with a self-portrait of Kurt Reuber, were flown out of Stalingrad by one of the last supply planes and eventually delivered to his family in Wichmannshausen.

Since 1983, the original Stalingrad Madonna has been on permanent display in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (*Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche*) in downtown Berlin, Germany, where it is viewed daily by approximately 3,500 people.

An exact replica of the Stalingrad Madonna was gifted to the Cathedral Church of St. Michael in Coventry, England, in 1990, and another to the Kazan Orthodox Cathedral in Volgograd in 1995.

Berlin, Coventry and Volgograd are three cities that suffered unimaginable losses during World War II. Now, these three cities are connected with each other through Kurt Reuber’s Stalingrad Madonna.

The words “Light, Life, Love” send a hope-filled message of reconciliation that needs to be heard everywhere.

For more information, recommended literature (unfortunately available only in German) includes: Martin Kruse (editor), Die Stalingrad-Madonna. Das Werk Kurt Reubers als Dokument der Menschlichkeit, Lutherisches Verlagshaus, Hannover, Second edition, 2012. The photos are from the Kruse book, pages 27 (Madonna), 43 (self-portrait), and 50 (Kurochkin).

Pastor Bjoern E. Meinhardt serves St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, a bilingual (English and German) congregation in Winnipeg, Manitoba. You may contact him by email at pastormeinhardt@mymts.net.

Moments of Mission calendars and notecards

“Moments of Mission” notecards and 2018 calendars are available for purchase. Sets of 12 notecards are \$6, and calendars are \$10 (not including postage).

The calendars and notecards feature watercolor paintings by Pastor Phillip Gagnon of St. Albert Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Alberta.

All funds raised from the sale of the notecards and calendars will go to the Great Commission Society. Contact the NALC Administrative Office at 651-633-6004 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org to obtain an exact price for your order including postage.

NALC clergy cards coming soon

NALC clergy identification cards for 2018-2019 will be mailed before Christmas. Pastors who do not receive their cards by January should contact the NALC Administrative Office at 651-633-6004 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org.

Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries gives gift of Christ's care to veterans, contractors and their families

Blue Christmas Vigil will be held Dec. 21 on Facebook

Christmas is often the hardest time of year for military personnel, contractors and their families. Come this time of year, the mission of Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries is given its greatest test, according to Chaplain Leslie Haines, executive director of LMVFM.

“For many military households, the familiar — worship services, sights, smells, sounds, and so forth — make Christmas a time to remember and relish. For some though, this Christmas looms as a hole in the heart that longs to be filled, a hunger that holiday treats cannot satisfy, a grief that seems unbearable,” Chaplain Haines said.

Emotional hardships that go with military service — whether past or present — are intensified during the Christmas season:

+ Daddy or Mommy might be deployed, again, serving in a faraway place and preserving our right to celebrate this holy season and the hope in Christ that it brings.

+ Son, daughter or spouse might have been expected home by now, except for that order of tour extension that arrived as their units were boarding transport back home.

+ For some, it could be the first Christmas following the death of a loved one from service-related wounds of body, mind and spirit.

+ For others who live with the wounds of war, the holiday blues cast a gloom beyond description.

LMVFM will host a Blue Christmas Vigil for military veterans and families live on Facebook on Thursday, Dec. 21, 6 p.m. to midnight Eastern time.

“At Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries, we know that only the light of Christ, shining like a bright star in the windows of our souls, can penetrate the holiday blues and truly heal the spiritual wounds of war. This Christ-light guides LMVFM's ministry to veterans wherever the wounds of war affect body, mind and spirit of warriors and their dependents,” Chaplain Haines said.

To participate in the Blue Christmas Vigil, you will need to be a member of Facebook. For details go to: www.facebook.com/events/185810785333366.

Please share the information about the Blue Christmas Vigil with your congregations and any who might be interested.

LMVFM, an NALC recognized ministry, serves with Christ's love those who have served.

“We take no government funds and charge no veteran for the services we provide. We also equip congregations, pastors and other caregivers to recognize and respond to the spiritual wounds of war — such as post traumatic stress and moral injury — with the hope that only Christ and his Church can offer,” she said.

Please consider supporting this ministry. Gifts will make a difference in spreading the word of Christ and its healing effects on his many hurting, heartsick sons and daughters who suffered in war so that we might celebrate these holy days in freedom and joy.

Gifts may be given online at lmvfm.org or sent to: Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries; 3480 Stellhorn Road; Fort Wayne, IN 46815.

2018 NALC Pastors Conference to focus on discipleship and leadership

The 2018 NALC Pastors Conference will be held Jan. 30 to Feb. 1 at the Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas. The theme of this year's conference is "Discipleship, Leadership and the NALC Pastor."

Bishop John Bradosky will offer two keynote presentations on discipleship and leadership. Dr. Jim Nestingen will offer two sessions on preaching for Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

Workshops dealing with practical aspects of pastoral ministry, discipleship and leadership will be offered on Wednesday afternoon.

Bishop John Bradosky will lead a meeting of the NALC Ministerium which will include discussion of the ongoing work of the NALC Structure Task Force, the Church and Ministry Task Force, the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship initiative and other important concerns.

A worship service including the renewal of ordination vows and the blessing of anointing oil for use in congregations is set for Wednesday night.

Registration is \$50 per person until Dec. 31 and \$65 beginning Jan. 1.

A discounted hotel rate of \$129 per night is available at the hotel for rooms booked by Dec. 29. The discounted rate will be honored three days before and after the conference.

Clergy spouses, seminarians and non-NALC clergy are welcome to attend but must register to ensure that adequate seating is available.

To register or for more information go to the NALC website: www.thenalc.org.



Discipleship Coaching Seminar to be offered

There will be a seminar for pastors who are interested in learning more about what it means to be "discipleship coached" on Monday, Jan. 30, prior to the NALC Pastors Conference in San Antonio.

Discipleship coaching is a way for a pastor to engage in three years of regular mentoring by a trained coach, who will assist the pastor in personal and professional reflection, assessment, goal-setting and accountability. The 7 p.m. Monday evening seminar will be at no additional cost to pastors attending the conference.

Those participating in the coaching seminar who commit to begin coaching will receive a scholarship to cover the cost of the first three months.

Those who wish to participate in the coaching seminar should register separately by contacting Maddie Benson in the NALC Ohio office at mbenson@thenalc.org or 614-777-5709 (toll free 888-551-7254) by Jan. 15.

Daily Bible Reading Guide

Reading the Word of God, a daily Bible reading guide, has been prepared for Lutherans to use over the next three years.

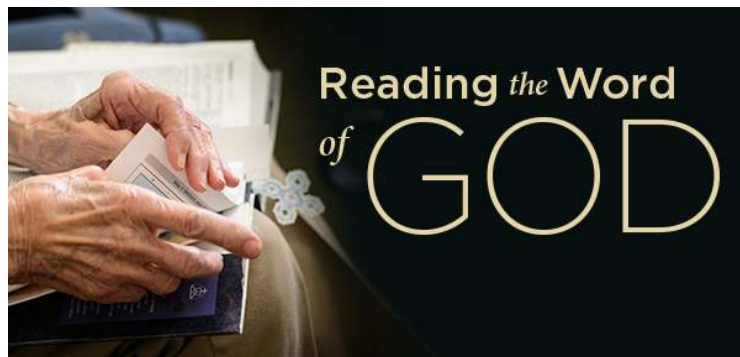
The reading guide was conceived and prepared as a result of ongoing discussions between representatives of the NALC, the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC), and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).

The reading guide includes monthly calendars with daily readings starting in January 2018 and continuing until December 2020.

As a companion to the daily Bible reading guide, 52 suggested readings — one for each week of the year — are offered from the book, *Luther and the Scriptures* by Johann Michael Reu (1869–1943), a German-born American Lutheran theologian who taught at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, from 1899 until his death.

“During ongoing discussions between representatives of the Lutheran Church—Canada, the North American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the participants agreed on two foundational matters. First, we came to a common understanding of the Holy Scriptures. In so doing, we adopted a document titled ‘God’s Word Forever Shall Abide: A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures’ (available online at www.thenalc.org/nalc-statements). That document has been circulated within our three church bodies to widespread approval. Second, we agreed that, to a great degree, the membership in each of our church bodies suffers from a declining familiarity with the Bible. We are reminded of the commendation of the Bereans, who ‘received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily’ (Acts 17:11),” the document states.

“In order to encourage the people of our church bodies in the daily reading of Holy Scripture, we have compiled a three-year plan of daily Bible readings and a year-long series of weekly readings on Martin Luther’s approach to the Scriptures. ... The plan provides a guide that will take the reader



through the entire Old Testament one time in three years, with the exception of Psalms, which are read twice each year. The New Testament will be read twice in the three years. A reading from the Old Testament, a psalm (or portion of a psalm) and a reading from the New Testament is assigned for each day.”

“The suggested readings are offered for one reason only: to enhance devotional life as an individual or a family daily examines, and is examined by, the Word of God and then responds in prayer to the heavenly Father. ... The most important purpose of the guide is to encourage a daily practice of reading and meditating on the Bible, God’s Word. Since the Scriptures as a whole are God’s Word, increasing familiarity with the various books is encouraged.”

“The translation of the Bible into the vernacular — into the everyday language of common people — was one of the greatest and most far-reaching accomplishments of the Reformation. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther posting the 95 Theses, we might also recall that following that event in the year 1517, other events ensured that the Reformation would leave a permanent mark on the Christian church. ... But we also cannot omit Luther’s translation of the Bible into German, with his publication of the New Testament in 1522 and the entire Bible in 1534. The German Bible and the Catechisms enabled the Reformation to extend deeply into the mind and life of the laity,” the document states.

Reading the Word of God — the daily Bible reading guide and the monthly calendars — are available online at www.thenalc.org.

How's your vision?

Dear Disciples of Jesus,

What do you see when you look toward the future? This is a perfect time to ask the question, "How's your vision?" Do your eyes grow weary staring down at emails on your computer screen, text messages on your phone, tweets or instant messages from your Facebook account? We are inundated by so many messages and perspectives that our vision becomes impaired and our thoughts confused. We may become distinctly aware that things are not always what they appear to be.

Advent reminds us that our vision depends on where we are looking. This time of anticipation reminds us to look up, for our redemption is near. As we anticipate the impending celebration of Christ's birth, our Scripture texts focus our attention on the future and Jesus' return.

"How is your vision" is not just a question about your eyes. It is a question of interpretation. How do you see it? When Jesus describes the many signs that signal his return and the fullness of his reign, what Jesus seems to be getting at is not *what* we see, but *how* we see what we see.

Our attitude determines what we allow ourselves to see and what we exclude from our vision. In those passages focused on the "end times," Jesus is preparing his disciples for the future with all its potential difficulties: those who will come in his name but lead people astray, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, plagues, famines, terrors, persecution, imprisonment, destructive relationships, hatred, days of vengeance. Some might conclude that it is better to keep looking down rather than looking out to see such overwhelming problems.

Preparation deals with our attitude — a way of living, a way of seeing. In aviation, the attitude of the plane is its relationship to the horizon toward which the plane is headed. The attitude is set by the pilot inside the plane. His or her attitude determines how the horizon is approached. The way we live carries us toward the future. This attitude is set by faith.



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

Today many who look toward the future are overwhelmed by fear, anxiety and depression. Medications are being prescribed and abused at an epidemic rate. Political conflict, terrorism and the threat of nuclear war create even more stress. This way of seeing the world and our future serves to frighten, intimidate and un-nerve people. However, I believe Jesus' words, as well as the book of Revelation, offer hope in the midst of such difficult circumstances.

Revelation has a rhythm of looking down and up — down at our situation and then up toward the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus proclaimed. There is great danger if we only look in one direction. The people in Noah's day only looked down. They couldn't see the storm clouds forming until it was too late. Noah looked up to God, and God directed him to look down, to build the ark and bring in the animals and his family.

Notice how many people are confused about Jesus. They look down, only seeing his humanity but never looking up to acknowledge his divinity. Some think it is better to just wait until they die and then see.

Jesus encourages us to look in a new direction. There is another way of seeing the world and our future that is consistent with the whole of Scripture. The promise of God in Scripture is that his kingdom and rule are drawing near — a rule of mercy, justice and peace. The rule of God is established and assured in the life, death, resurrection and reign of Jesus. Scripture, from beginning to end, bears witness to the fact that God is faithful in fulfilling his promises.

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Advent calls us to prepare not just for a holiday but for the future by trusting in God's promises to us in Jesus. This way of living is not the easy way out. The cross and empty tomb are its symbols. This living involves struggle, since our world often contradicts the vision of God. It means living against the evidence, living in contradiction to the world's vision of violence, injustice, immorality and broken relationships.

Jesus is telling us that God has a vision, a way of seeing. He has a vision for the future of his creation. His vision is called redemption — the fulfillment of his kingdom of mercy, justice, righteousness and peace, and all people living in a right relationship with Jesus. This future is just as certain as the coming of summer, which is signaled by trees coming out with leaves.

Faithfulness is a way of seeing the future, seeing the world through the vision of God. Faithfulness is looking up in the direction of God. Faithfulness is opening ourselves to God's vision so that God's vision becomes our own and shapes our lives. This eternal word of God's promises will never pass away. This word is a promise of Jesus to fulfill his mission, to make disciples of all nations. Jesus' life and death give expression to the value of each person and the hope he offers to each precious individual. He gave his life so that we might live forever with him.

Advent invites us to look at where we are headed to understand its meaning. God could have chosen to come in many ways that would confirm his awesome power and destructive capability, but when we look to Bethlehem we see his first appearance in the peace and helplessness of a little baby born in the humble surroundings of a cow stall. Jesus' words are not meant to bring fear. His love casts out fear. His words are meant to encourage us. It is the assurance of God's ultimate victory promised to his people fighting under seemingly hopeless odds and against opposition that is relentless. They are honest words about the difficulties of this life. The battle is fierce and long but not hopeless. The enemy is doomed to ultimate destruction and the intervention of Jesus is certain.

Finally, Jesus gives us these words to teach us and challenge us to prepare and to be watchful for his coming again into our midst. Jesus knew that when a crisis is over the common human inclination is to relax, but Jesus calls us to vigilance. He invites us to live with a vision of faith, expecting his coming, to live with anticipation, to live with a proper perspective of what is really important in life. We are not to be so burdened by the concerns and affairs of the world that we forget our faith and our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. We who spend so much time looking down need to look up again!

Advent is a time of visualizing what we cannot yet see. It is believing in a vision for the future with such faith and confidence that it shapes how we live in the present. Advent, in many ways, is like being pregnant. It is about hopeful expectation, waiting, watching and preparing. As with every pregnancy, it requires a substantial change in our lives. It demands a reordering of our priorities. It calls our attention to the details of our lives, what we eat, how we rest. It requires training, exercise and practice for the conclusion of the process. There is no promise that it will be fast and easy. On the contrary, it will be laborious and painful. Without doubt, we know the day will come and we live with that certainty.

As we celebrate Advent, we look up and out to a horizon that is the completion of the redemptive process. Jesus is coming again. We can be certain of that fact. As with the anticipation and preparation for a new member of the family, the child makes a place in the mother's womb and the entire family has to make a place for the child in their hearts. The best way to prepare during this Advent season is to make sure there is a place in our hearts where Jesus is making his home. Unless he dwells within us we cannot pass on this wondrous gift to others. The genuineness of our Christmas celebration is more than the music or the preaching. It is the witness of our lives in which Christ dwells. This Advent preparation involves each and every one of us.

So may this Advent season be equally filled with a clear vision of Christ's promises for the future and his presence in our hearts through Word and Sacrament.

Temples and Priests

Before and after Christ's resurrection

This is the fifth in a series of articles on temples, priests and church buildings by Pastor Mark Chavez, NALC General Secretary.

Last month, we looked at our care for and the function of our church buildings, the secondary temple structures. This month we look at our care for the primary temple structures, our bodies built as living stones upon the cornerstone of the new temple, our Lord's body.

At first glance, it looks like we spend a lot of time and money on caring for our bodies. The plethora of commercials selling fitness routines and equipment, healthy foods and diets, and medicines is overwhelming. There is good reason to take good care of our bodies — physically, emotionally and spiritually. However, to whose glory are the ads directed? Ours or God's?

What if we approached care for our bodies from a different angle? Begin thinking about all the things we do to prepare our chancels and altars for Holy Communion. Think about all we do in worship when we receive our Lord's body and blood. In both the preparations and the celebration we are careful to be reverent and to praise and glorify God. We try to keep our attention on Jesus, and his incredible gift of taking away our sin and giving us new life in him.

What if every morning as we clean and dress ourselves, we did it with the same thoughts and intentions as if we were preparing a chancel and altar for Holy Communion? Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit — the Triune God dwells within us and we in Him, so why not be just as careful and reverent in how we prepare our bodies daily to go out into the world?

What if each day as we feed and exercise our bodies, we think primarily of being well fed and well trained temples of the Holy Spirit? Why wouldn't we spend as much time as possible in reading, meditating and praying in God's Word? Jesus tells us, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every

word that comes from the mouth of God" (*Matthew 4:4*). Luther's explanations in the Small Catechism of the third commandment and preparation for Holy Communion drive at the same point.

Conversely, think about all the things we would never think of doing in preparation for Holy Communion. Think about all the things we would never do in worship in or around the chancel. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, yet we do many things with our bodies that we would never do in our chancels. Why is it that we are so concerned with reverencing the sacred space and time in Holy Communion, and give little thought to reverencing the sacred space and time in our bodies the rest of the week?

What if each day in our homes, schools, neighborhoods and workplaces we thought of approaching our sisters and brothers in Christ with the same careful preparation and reverence as we approach our chancels? Think of all the things we would do and say in the presence of our Lord around his table, and then do the same with each other in Christ.

Conversely, think of all the things we would never say or do in our Lord's presence in the chancel. Yet we say and do those things to other members of his body. We do it in our homes, schools, neighborhoods and workplaces. We do it in our church buildings, even on Sundays! Why is it that we interact with the living stones in the temple of our Lord's body in ways that we would never think of interacting with him, the cornerstone?

Systematically segregating our presence with Jesus in the Lord's Supper from the rest of our daily lives is unhealthy and dangerous. We will soon celebrate our Lord's incarnation and will praise Him as Immanuel (God with us). Does our behavior bear witness to his constant presence with us and for us?

Next time we will focus on our interaction as temples of the Holy Spirit with the rest of our neighbors — the unchurched and those who do not have faith in Jesus.

Life Conference precedes March for Life

The 2018 NALC Life Conference will be held Thursday, Jan. 18, at Annapolis Evangelical Lutheran Church in Edgewater, Md.

The theme of the conference and of the 2018 March for Life is “Love Saves Lives.” The conference will discuss how you can answer God’s biblical call to protect human life from conception to natural death.

The conference will begin with lunch followed by three pro-life speakers and conclude with worship led by Bishop John Bradosky. All NALC members and the public are welcome.

Speakers and their topics are:

+ “The Joys of Mary - Luke 1” by Pastor Melinda Jones of Advent Lutheran Church in North Charleston, S.C.

+ “Biblical Aging” by Pastor Brad Hales of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va.

+ “From Atheism to a Witness for Life — The Strange and Inspiring Case of Mary Ann” by Dr. Robert Benne of Roanoke, Va.

The next day features the Memorial for the Preborn service at 8:30 a.m. at DAR Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. Clergy should plan on vesting and participating in this service.

After the service, participants will gather with other Lutherans at 11:30 a.m. on the grounds of the Washington Monument to join in the March for Life.

You can learn more about the March for Life at www.marchforlife.org. For more information contact Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at 703-568-3346 or dennisdimauro@yahoo.com.

Support the North American Lutheran Seminary

Your year-end tax deductible gifts can help the North American Lutheran Seminary provide world-class, authentically Lutheran formation for future pastors and leaders of the North American Lutheran Church.

The students, faculty and Board of Regents join in giving thanks for your generous support in these exciting early years of your seminary’s mission. As the student body grows, so does the need for additional faculty, course offerings and outreach to prospective students.

As you plan your year-end giving, please know that your generosity now helps assure that the NALC will have the solid, confessional shepherds needed for our mission-driven congregations to “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

To donate, send checks made out to the North American Lutheran Church, with NALS noted on the memo line, to: North American Lutheran Church; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112-2202.



Donations can also be made online through the NALC’s website — thenalc.org — using the button for donations. Be sure to designate the North American Lutheran Seminary when you give.

Gifts of appreciated stocks are also an excellent way to support the seminary. For more details, contact the North American Lutheran Seminary at 724-385-8000 or aschifrinn@thenals.org and ask to speak to our development team.

Pastor Valery Hryhoryk's work in Belarus

By Pastor Valery Hryhoryk
NALC Global Worker

Dear brothers and sisters, greetings in the name of Christ! This is my first official update as an NALC global worker from the mission field in Belarus. It is a great privilege for me to become a part of the mission-driven Lutheran church body of the NALC.

This summer was full of events. We pray that the Lord shall receive all the glory as the result. This summer we hardly had any warm weather. The temperature was surprisingly lower than usual, with much rain. Our Bible camps were not in the usual place, in Dolsha. This was a great blessing. Instead of living in tents, the kids lived "under the roof," so to say. We had three Bible camps in three different places. The Lord, by his wisdom, decided it should be this way.

In Saldus, Latvia, we had a marvelous Bible camp for the children from Belarus. A team of American brothers and sisters came to tell Belarusian and Latvian children about Jesus and the Bible. The Bible teaching was in English. The camp was international and that was exciting. The children learned about God's love, grace and mercy through the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers. It was exciting to see the Latvian kids making friends with the kids from Belarus. Singing together, playing sports together and reading Bible stories was so much fun.

As for the kids from Belarus, we had an outstanding event for some of them. Five children participated in Holy Communion for the first time in their lives. The angels were rejoicing in the sky for this happy event. The children formed personal relationships with Christ.

The second camp for the youth was organized for us by our friends in Sweden. A group of 11 people visited a beautiful place in Sweden called Prasebo. We took the opportunity to visit our friends in the local Lutheran congregation. I was asked to share the Word of God, which I did with great pleasure. Also, two young people from Belarus were baptized. What a glorious event! Thank you, Lord!



The third camp was organized by Kristina and Tomas, EEMN missionaries to Belarus from Slovakia, for 20 young people. A group of youth from Slovakia came to Belarus to participate in the Bible camp. The purpose of the camp was evangelism and education. Seminars, quests, sports, fishing, witness — all of this was to God's glory during the camp. Times of prayer and fellowship around the bonfire were extremely valuable. Thank you, Lord, for this friendship.

The book ministry is very important for the post-Soviet states. The camp in Latvia was an excellent opportunity for us to deliver a good number of books in Russian to the Latvia Lutheran Church. A gift that we received for the children's work, just before the trip, helped us to pay for the transportation. We were able to rent a big bus for 21 people. The border can be a problem, but the Lord was gracious to us and we had no questions asked about the books. Thank you to all who prayed. Thank you, Lord, for the gift that we received, in good timing, just before the camp, from your people, to make this Bible camp possible.

A theological seminar took place in Vitebsk. The seminar was dedicated to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and its biblical grounding. Our friend and theologian, Valery Volodin, was our teacher. The participants were representatives from

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Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship congregations. The participants were reminded of the historical background of the Reformation, the role of Luther in this important historical event, and its importance for the Church and the modern world. More importantly, we were reminded of the biblical grounds on which Luther built the Reformation: the main principle of salvation by grace alone and other *solas* and theses. The time of fellowship and prayer is very valuable at these events. Therefore, we are grateful to God, and our Swedish friends, who made this seminar possible. After the seminar, there was a church service with Holy Communion. We pray that this, and other educational events, would be for the glory of God, for the strengthening of God's glorious kingdom and the restoration of Lutheranism in Belarus.

We continue with the youth gatherings on Thursdays, building handshake relationships with the youth in Vitebsk. We watch educational movies and then discuss them. It is great that we can exchange views and, as Christians, acknowledge the biblical position on everything that is going on in our lives. Movies are very good starting points for such discussions.

We took part in a charity project, called Vitebsk SOS. The project is connected with the children from the orphanage in Gorodok (40 km from Vitebsk). Children in orphanages usually feel abandoned and are very sensitive to the world. A little attention and love means a lot to them. The purpose of the project was to show love. God loves these kids! The children's ages ranged from five to 16 years old.

Golden Gate music group took part in the annual international music festival, held in Vitebsk. It was a great opportunity to witness to many people about God and spiritual things. Please thank the Lord for this ongoing opportunity.

Registration of the garage congregation was denied for the fifth time. The authorities say that they do not believe that we want to register a Lutheran congregation. They do not understand why Belarus citizens want to be Lutherans (a German religion). It looks like we need to take another approach in



regard to registration. We are planning to visit some officials in the capital to explain the situation. Please pray for a good outcome to these visits.

+ Please thank the Lord for all BLMF partners and all the projects this summer. Everything that was planned was accomplished. May the Lord's name be glorified.

+ Please pray for the general mission fund, as at this moment we have a deficit of about US \$500 every month.

+ Continue to pray for the registration of the garage congregation.

+ Pray for the book ministry: distribution and production of the new material.

+ Pray for the renovation fund for the church building in Mazolovo.

+ Pray for the campsite building project in Dolsha.

+ Pray for new opportunities for Christian witness.

+ Pray for the new partners in ministry.

Dear NALC church members, I invite you to become a partner in this ministry. Please prayerfully consider this opportunity, as the destiny of the whole nation of Belarus is at stake. Be blessed!

Please see my testimony from the 2017 NALC Mission Festival in Nashville, Tenn., at <https://vimeo.com/225498017>

Order and peace, not confusion and chaos

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”
— 1 Corinthians 14:33 RSV

At any given time, it seems that about 10 percent of our congregations are in some state of tension or conflict. In our relationships with other Lutheran and ecumenical partners, this appears to be a reality in all denominations. The Body of Christ in the world today is an all-too-human body filled with pastors, leaders and laity who are at the same time saints and sinners.

It was the same within the congregation in Corinth in the early Church, causing Paul to engage with them in the “Corinthian correspondence,” as he sought to address their conflict from afar.

In particular, the Corinthian congregation was divided over the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the practice of speaking in tongues in worship. This “Spirit-language” was often offered within the divine service as unintelligible praying with no interpretation, so that it was not edifying to the body as a whole. Considerable division arose in the congregation between those who had the gift of speaking in tongues and those who didn’t, and whether there was a place in worship for such uninterpreted speaking and praying.

Add to that what appears, from Paul’s writing, to be additional issues among worshipers, and we see that the community was fractured and fighting. Paul reminds them that this is not God’s intention for Christ’s Church at worship, “for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.” Other translations have it “For God is not a God of disorder, division, chaos, but of peace.”

There is nothing more detrimental to the health, well-being and, yes, the mission and ministry of a congregation than confusion, disorder, division and chaos.

Congregations experiencing such things often wonder why it is that they never receive new members and why visitors may worship once but never return. Do they need to ask? Few want to be



Ministry Matters

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part of a community of faith where there is no peace and harmony.

While Paul is writing specifically about spiritual gifts and their use and abuse in the worshipping community in Corinth, what he says should be a reminder to every congregation in every church body — God desires order, not disorder, in his Church. Our God is a God of peace, not of chaos.

What guidance is there for congregations in conflict, wishing to avoid conflict, seeking to be at peace and ordered in a Christ-like manner?

First, follow your constitution. While congregational constitutions were not given by God on Mount Sinai, they are practical tools for structuring congregational life in community. Although not to be used as a hammer to beat members into submission, constitutions provide helpful guidance about responsibilities, practices and procedures intended to provide for healthy relationships, communication and decision-making. Constitutions also provide specific instruction about how to deal with conflict and disagreement, as well as issues related to difficult pastors, councils or members. Yes, every congregation, at some time, may have a difficult pastor, council or member. Sometimes, congregations have “bullies.”

Second, allow Scripture and your constitution to instruct you about how to deal with bullies in the congregation. In many circumstances, congregational leadership teams don’t know how to address the reality of bullies in their congregation, so they ignore the situation or try to placate the

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bullies, allowing them to dictate what will or will not happen in the congregation. Sometimes bullies are “shadow” leaders, attempting to manipulate decisions and behavior from the sidelines, and sometimes bullies may be elected members of the council. Of course, pastors may try to bully people as well.

Hear and heed, then, our Lord’s instruction and the wise counsel of Scripture. Love one another, as he loves us. Forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven times. Forbear with one another. Do not bear false witness. Speak the truth in love. In extreme cases, follow our Lord’s instructions in Matthew 18:15-20, which is usually the process prescribed in congregational constitutions.

Third, don’t be a bully! We sometimes feel so strongly about situations and circumstances in our beloved congregations that we don’t realize we are seeking our own wants, desires and agendas, rather than the good will of the congregation as a whole. Councils and congregations work best when they seek, first, to build consensus.

Consensus-building is aimed at helping the group decide, as a group, what is best for all. This means, at some point in the consensus-building process, that my will — my preference — yields to the will of the group. The goal in consensus-building is not for me to get my way, but for us, together, to determine what is best for all.

This is often lost on church leaders who bring worldly, secular notions into church leadership. This does not mean that there should be no disagreement, or that an individual may not seek to persuade the group as a whole. It does mean that, at some time, individuals willingly yield to the decision of the group. In this way, we move forward with decision-making in a way that brings unity, harmony and peace.

Finally, pastors and councils must remember that they are, together, a leadership team within the congregation. The NALC Model Constitution for Congregations states (Chapter 12.04):

The duties of the Church Council shall include the following:

+ To maintain supportive relationships with the pastor(s) and staff and help them annually to evaluate the fulfillment of their calling or employment.

+ To be examples individually and corporately of the style of life and ministry expected of all baptized persons.

+ To promote a congregational climate of peace and goodwill, and, as differences and conflicts arise, to foster resolution of such conflicts according to Biblical principles.

Together, the pastor and elected members comprise a leadership team, the council, sharing the above responsibilities. This requires abiding deeply and regularly in the Word of God. It means praying fervently for one another, for each and every member, and for guidance and direction. It also requires straightforward, loving communication, regular assessment and evaluation of ministry, goal-setting with specific, clearly defined action steps, and plenty of time spent in consensus-building. All with mutual love, respect, forbearance, forgiveness and yes, good-natured laughter and joy. Which brings us to the reason for this message — offered in the *Advent/December issue of the NALC News*.

And the angel said to the shepherds: “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace...’ (Luke 2)

God’s intention is that we live in the community of faith, the Church, full of great joy and peace. Our God is a God of order and harmony, not of division and chaos. Congregations that acknowledge tension and conflict and deal with them appropriately and in a healthy, Christ-like manner will thrive. People will want to be part of a Christian community where love, peace and joy are present. Let’s expect nothing less from ourselves, our congregations and our church.



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