

God on the move in Ohio

Oromo Evangelical Church of Columbus

By Pastor Jeff Morlock

The Oromo Evangelical Church of Columbus, Ohio, (OECC) is a congregation of Ethiopian immigrants who love Jesus and are committed to his Great Commission.

I came to know and love these brothers and sisters after they left their ELCA congregation in late 2011 and began meeting in a series of temporary locations, where they continued to make disciples among the over 6,000 Oromo Ethiopians located on the east side of our city.

As my wife, Patti, and I had just begun planting a new mission start, we were meeting in small groups through the week and were available when Pastor



Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions, asked us to preach, provide sacraments, and develop relationships in this exciting congregation. As we prayed and broke bread with Oromo elders in our home, we sensed their pain at being displaced again, after many had fled persecution from their country of origin.

Between 2011 and the present, the Oromo Evangelical Church has tolerated unsafe conditions in inconspicuous rented locations, yet their passion for the Gospel has caused them to become one of the fastest growing congregations in the NALC. Beginning with 10 Oromo immigrants in 1998, the OECC has now grown to over 120 communicant members and more than 90 children under the age of 16.



Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

About 35 percent of the members have arrived in the United States within the last year, and they have had great success in reaching and discipling Muslim converts in their community.

I learned of their desperate need for a new and permanent location shortly after I became Dean of the Southeastern Ohio Mission District in May of 2017. While the OECC had been saving money for this purpose, we realized that finding and purchasing such a location was going to be a God-sized project that would require partnership.

Accordingly, I approached the leadership of my congregation, Upper Arlington Lutheran Church, which came alongside to provide a sizeable financial grant as well as help in locating a church facility for sale in the right location — a former Baptist church on nine acres with a gym!

God's hand in providing a building was confirmed by the fact that the facility is located on Refugee Road — an address that speaks to who the Oromo are and the mission to which God continues to call them!

After much prayer with the Oromo people and several visits to the site, we were convinced that God was going to give the congregation this building as a center for immigrants in east Columbus, where services such as child care, after-school programs, English classes, and sports



Aerial view of the new property of Oromo Evangelical Church of Columbus, Ohio.



ministries would provide a platform for developing intentional relationships and making disciples.

Yet the purchase of the site was beyond what our two congregations could accomplish together. So we were led to share the opportunity with Bishop John Bradosky and NALC leadership, as well as with the Deans of the other four Ohio Mission Districts.

After a joint meeting in mid-November, Bishop Bradosky wrote a letter inviting participation and support from NALC congregations across Ohio. The campaign began in early December, conventionally the worst time of year for a financial appeal. Every congregation was invited to set aside one Sunday in Advent to highlight the need, inviting every family to become a Mission Partner in the endeavor, and every council to set aside a mission gift. A short-term loan and mission grant from the NALC were also secured during this time.

The Holy Spirit moved, and on Feb. 3, the Oromo Church closed on the site and received the key to their new facility. In two and a half month's time, Ohio congregations gave more than \$350,000 toward the building, and the Oromo congregation raised an additional \$42,000 in one night to make the dream a reality.

Making disciples who become disciple makers is the core identity of this congregation as they share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Their joy is evident

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

in all they do and say — not only in worship, but in their everyday lives. Such joy is contagious and attracts others.

The journey of OECC has been marked by sacrifice. Pastor Teshome Deingede and Pastor Kansa Deresa — the two pastors who faithfully serve this congregation — do so without any pay. While many members of our congregations struggle to give even three percent of income, most members of the OECC give far beyond a 10 percent tithe. Time is also given in abundance.

This sacrifice is not limited to members of the congregation. Many individuals outside the congregation — architects, realtors, business men and women, and passionate individuals — have donated more hours than could be tracked. Tremendous financial gifts have been given.

The Oromo congregation is now planning a dedication service and congregations across Ohio will join them in thanking God for this miracle,



praising him for his faithfulness, and praying toward all that God will accomplish in this new facility.

They are also receiving invitations to visit partner congregations who want to know them and learn more about their history and mission. One of our congregations, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio, has partnered to provide Vacation Bible School for the past three years.

Another congregation that offers English as a Second Language classes has come alongside to provide a model that could prove helpful for OECC in the future. And the Oromo pastors and choir have been invited to lead the opening worship at our Ohio Mission Region Convocation in May.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 says, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many."

God is indeed on the move! He is teaching us in Ohio that we need each other in this one body, with Christ as our head. We need our Oromo brothers and sisters to teach us how to worship passionately, to persevere in prayer through adversity, and to rely on the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit for our life together.

But the Lord is not finished with this story. He is writing the next chapter even now, not only here in Ohio, but across our church. We can't wait to see what he has in store.



Pastor Teshome Deingede of Oromo Evangelical Church of Columbus, Ohio, shared the story of what God has been doing in the congregation he serves with the 2018 NALC Pastors Conference.



Dr. James Nestingen offered two sessions on preaching for Lent, Holy Week and Easter, looking at the epistle readings from the lectionary.

NALC Pastors Conference

January 30 - February 1

San Antonio, Texas



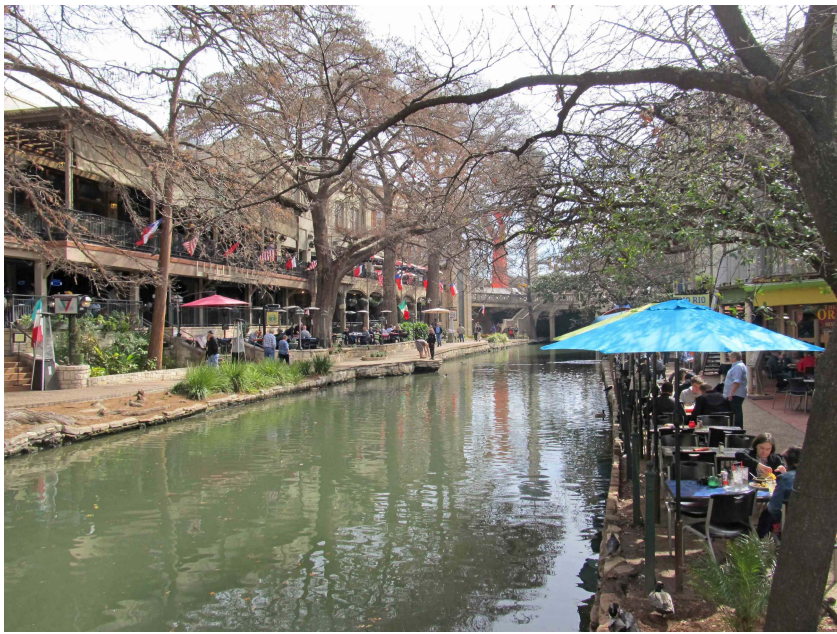
Bishop John Bradosky presided at Holy Communion and the renewal of ordination vows. He also blessed oil for use in NALC congregations.



About 200 people attended the 2018 NALC Pastors Conference.



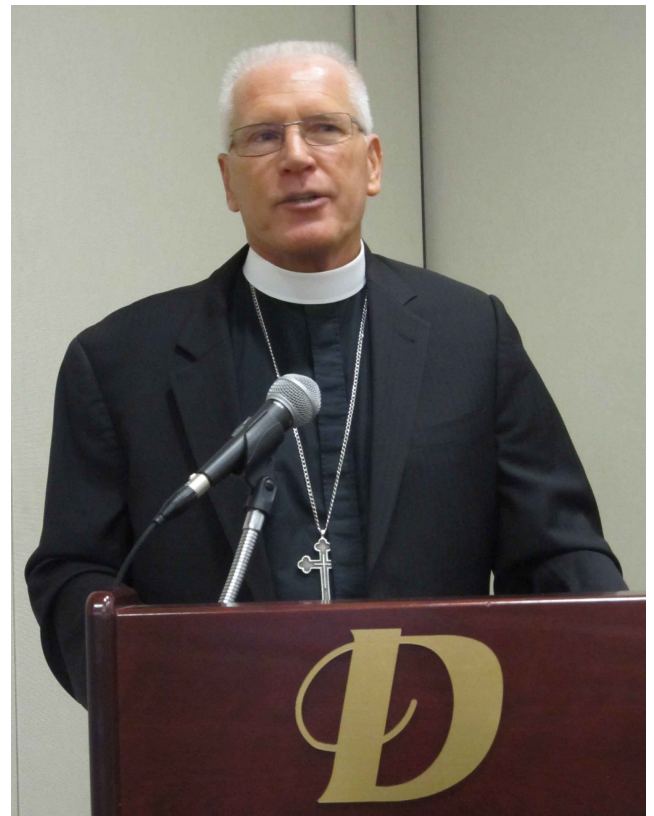
Pastor Ron Hoyum of Port Madison Lutheran Church on Bainbridge Island, Wash., led a workshop on working with difficult leaders. Pastor Dave Keener of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Evans, Ga., led a workshop on being a mission-driven pastor.



Pastors were able to take in some of the sights of San Antonio during free time including the city's River Walk. The Pastors Conference was held at a hotel located on the River Walk.



The Alamo was a short walk from the conference hotel.



Bishop John Bradosky gave presentations on discipleship and leadership. He also led a meeting of the NALC Ministerium which included presentation of and discussion regarding the "Vision for a Pastor of the NALC" and a proposal from the NALC Structure Task Force. PowerPoint and PDF documents of the bishop's presentations are available on the NALC website.



Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, led daily prayer.



Bishop Paull Spring, NALC Bishop Emeritus, preached at the Holy Communion service.



Pastor Dan Selbo of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, Calif., and a member of the NALC's Discipleship Task Force, led a workshop on the NALC's Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative.

NALC to consider adding regional bishops to better serve congregations

The North American Lutheran Church will consider the possibility of adding regional bishops to better serve congregations and to enable congregations to carry out the mission of the Church.

The proposal from the NALC Structure Task Force was presented for discussion to the NALC Pastors Conference by Brian Sutton, chair of the task force and a member of the NALC Executive Council.

The proposal is not seeking to add an additional layer of structure to the NALC. Rather, the hope is that regional bishops will provide greater accessibility to assistance and guidance for congregations and a quicker response time from NALC staff. It is also hoped that the regional bishops will assist congregations and Mission Districts to engage in mission.

The preliminary proposal suggests dividing North America into four geographic regions with a bishop in each region.

In addition to creating regions and adding regional bishops, the structure proposal recommends that Mission Districts be about 10 to 12 congregations per Mission District. This sizing would enable mission, including support for congregations and pastors and cooperation in local mission efforts. It would also reduce the workload for deans in larger Mission Districts.

The growth of the NALC has made it difficult for Bishop John Bradosky and other NALC staff to provide the level of support to congregations that is desired by congregations and by the NALC's leadership. The bishop has had an overwhelming travel schedule — sometimes going for nearly 30 days at a time without a stop at his home. This sort of pace is unsustainable and not desired for future bishops.

The 2018 NALC Convocation will consider the proposal and the funding necessary to add the new positions. The hope is that the new structure will be in place by 2019 when the NALC will elect a new



Brian Sutton, chair of the NALC Structure Task Force, presented the restructuring proposal to the 2018 NALC Pastors Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

bishop. The regional bishops will be appointed by the new bishop and approved by the Executive Council and Convocation. Because they will be appointed staff positions, no constitutional changes are required. If approved, the regional bishops will be added as funding is available and may begin as part time.

The plan has been approved by the NALC Executive Council and endorsed by the Deans of NALC Mission Districts.

Sutton explained that the proposal would be “a lean responsive structure” that would provide “a sustainable, scalable, effective structure” and “enable pursuit of the Great Commission without constraint.” He also said that it would result in “a healthier lifestyle for staff” and in “consistent adherence” to the NALC's four Core Values.

Nominations sought for positions to be elected at 2018 Convocation

The NALC Nominating Committee is receiving the names of candidates for nomination to serve in positions to be elected at the 2018 NALC Convocation Aug. 13-17 in Denver, Colo.

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

The Convocation will also elect three members to the North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents for six-year terms.

Both pastors and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication and Board of Regents.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position are available on the NALC website.

Congregations are encouraged to suggest individuals for any of the open positions. Please confirm that individuals are willing and able to serve

prior to submitting their names. Those who feel called to serve in any of these positions are asked to contact their pastor and congregational leaders to inform them of their openness to serving.

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

To submit a name, please complete the Candidate Submission Form available on the NALC website and return it to the Nominating Committee.

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

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

Renewing and reviving the aging church

The local congregation is “graying” at a rapid rate. Over 10,000 people each day are turning 65 years of age. Instead of lamenting the “aging of the church,” we need to embrace it and help older adults grow in their discipleship of Jesus.

Through “second half ministry” a congregation can be renewed and “re-fired” for mission.

Join us on the first Tuesday of each month at 11 a.m. ET for a free webinar.

On the third Tuesday of each month at 8 p.m. ET, we will be offering a brief word of encouragement and “power up” via Facebook Live.

Details for Webinars and Live Events:

Tuesday, March 6 at 11 a.m. ET
<http://bit.ly/2rfPPyh>

Tuesday, March 20 at 8 p.m. ET
www.facebook.com/groups/NALCMissionDriven

Tuesday, April 3 at 11 a.m. ET
<http://bit.ly/2DsHL1S>

Tuesday, April 17 at 8 p.m. ET
www.facebook.com/groups/NALCMissionDriven

Recordings of the webinars and live events will be available on the NALC Network.

For more information contact Pastor Brad Hales at pastorhales@hotmail.com or 540-825-1376.

Vision for an NALC pastor

Dear Disciples of Jesus,

Over the past year, our staff has been working on a “Vision for a Pastor of the North American Lutheran Church.” Our purpose was to not only establish expectations for our candidates for ministry, but also to encourage all of our pastors to examine their own lives and ministries by seeking opportunities for renewal and transformation.

Lent is a great time for such self-examination, prayerful discernment and seeking opportunities for repentance and amendment of life. “Vision for a Pastor of the North American Lutheran Church” has been approved by NALC staff, Mission District Deans and the Executive Council. It was also presented at our Pastors Conference in San Antonio.

We are already beginning work on the next document, “A Vision for Congregations of the North American Lutheran Church.” It is not only pastors who need to engage in self-criticism, but each of our congregations as well. It is my prayer that this document will be helpful in guiding the Lenten discipline of pastors and all the baptized who are part of the Body of Christ in the North American Lutheran Church.

What follows is a summary of the presentation I made at the Pastors Conference.

Pastors cannot offer to others what they have not first received. It is critical that our pastors have a life-giving relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ. A faith-filled life provides confidence in justification through faith in Christ, trusting in his forgiveness through his sacrificial death on the cross. Such faith is demonstrated in obedience to Jesus in daily decisions, consistent spiritual growth and a commitment to mature in the faith. Depending on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, pastors will intentionally engage others in conversation regarding their faith in Jesus Christ daily.

In addition to living faith-filled lives, pastors of the NALC live their lives in ways that express the treasure of relationships as the most prized



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

possessions in life. They understand that it is only in the context of such relationships that they have the opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only do they seek to deepen relationships with individuals within the congregation, they are intentional in seeking out relationships with others in the culture with divergent views and lifestyles, following Christ's example. On the other hand, it is also critical for pastors to develop relationships with other faithful Christians who are biblically and confessionally orthodox. Valuing others means appreciating their unique spiritual gifts and being open to learning from them. They are God's gift to us. To love others with Christ-like love requires expectations of mutual accountability and responsibility.

Pastors of this church are committed to their own spiritual growth and maturation through daily reading, study, reflection and meditation on the Scriptures, permitting Christ to speak through his Word in ways that transform and renew. Their prayer life includes time for confession, thanksgiving, intercession, praying the Scriptures, listening to the Lord's voice, and reflecting on both time in the Word and prayer through the discipline of journaling. Taking time for personal or family worship using a variety of forms and music is also critical for spiritual growth.

Another critical capacity for pastors of the NALC is their ability to teach the faith or engage in catechesis. This requires a thorough understanding of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith contained in Holy Scripture. We are not called to invent a new faith, but we are called to interpret the

Continued on Page 9

faith handed down to us through the faithful interpretation of the Word throughout the centuries inspired by the Holy Spirit. Such faithfulness is also expressed in our Lutheran confessional heritage and must be integrated into our preaching, teaching and living. Pastors preach and teach in ways that encourage and equip others to live the faith and share it with others. They are constantly seeking ways to assist others in living out their vocation, applying their faith to daily living. Preaching and teaching are always focused on knowing Jesus and transforming our worldview from this world to the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus proclaimed.

Our pastors are also expected to have a thorough understanding of worship, the liturgy in its various forms, as well as the capacity to design and lead others in worship focused on Jesus Christ. In preparation for preaching, pastors must also demonstrate their ability to engage in exegesis, utilizing the biblical Hebrew and Greek languages. Sermons must integrate both Law and Gospel, be Christ-centered, hope-filled, and express a pronounced passion for Christ in the proclamation.

Worship focused on both Word and Sacrament is a constant reminder of our baptismal identity as well as God's promises to us in Baptism. The Eucharist is the central focus of Christian community as Christ comes to us through the bread and the wine. The power and mystery of his presence renews and transforms us as he invites us into his presence and then fills us with that same presence.

Pastors of the NALC are also responsible for developing and leading a community conducive to the mission of making disciples. This community must develop a reputation of loving others for the sake of Christ and sharing the truth of Christ with others so that they too might come to believe in him. The building blocks of this community are life-to-life relationships. Through Christian fellowship and shared experiences, we create opportunities to intentionally invest our lives in the lives of others, encouraging their spiritual growth and development.

This community acknowledges the spiritual gifts of others and encourages their use for building up the Body of Christ. Such a community promotes healthy stewardship in all areas of life, resolves conflict on

the basis of biblical teaching, engages in healthy communication, supports and develops healthy leaders and infrastructure for fulfilling the mission Christ gave to his Church, "to make disciples of all nations." This community is always looking beyond itself, participates in the larger and broader expressions of the NALC and is always willing to partner with other biblically and confessionally orthodox Christian churches, communities and individuals. This community is constantly modeling behaviors that reflect the nature of a disciple-making community.

As a part of their commitment to the Great Commission of Christ in Matthew 28, pastors of the NALC are engaged in a coaching or mentoring relationship and actively engaged in coaching others. While using a variety of resource materials, disciple-making pastors maintain the true focus of discipleship as Jesus initiated and modeled it by using Scripture as the primary resource.

Pastors of the North American Lutheran Church are:

- + Faith filled.
- + Highly relational.
- + Engaged in personal spiritual growth.
- + Demonstrate their capacity for catechesis (teaching the faith).
- + Competent in leading worship.
- + Committed to developing a disciple-making community.
- + Models of discipleship both as one being discipled and one who is discipling others.

Preparing others to fulfill such a vision for pastoral leadership in the NALC will require the pursuit of outcome-based education in our seminary. It will necessitate the establishment of new measures by the Candidacy Committee and clear communication of these expectations among all who are involved in the process of preparation for Word and Sacrament ministry. For NALC pastors already serving, such a vision will provide direction for establishing meaningful courses in continuing education.

While this vision is primarily focused on pastors, there are implications and direct connections in every category for all the faithful. It is my prayer that it is a source of conversation, prayer, personal discernment, confession and transformation during your Lenten journey.



Cassandra Boehringer was ordained on Feb. 11 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Ga. She is called to serve St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Lexington, S.C., as associate pastor.



Jason Dampier was ordained Jan. 28 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Gastonia, N.C., where he serves as associate pastor.

Ordinations



Roger Hull was ordained Dec. 3 at Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Wilkesboro, N.C., where he serves as pastor.



Gary Braeuer was ordained on Sept. 29 at St John's Lutheran Church in Ardrossan, Alberta, where he serves as pastor.



David A. White IV was ordained on Sept. 9 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, where he serves as Pastor of Family, Youth and Children's Ministries.



Christopher Wendel, was ordained on July 23 at First United Lutheran Church in Hammond, Ind., where he serves as pastor.

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference to feature Malcolm Guite and Steve Bell

“Truth, Beauty, and the ‘True Myth’ — Thinking with the Inklings and Beyond” is the theme of the 2018 Canadian Rockies Theological Conference April 10-13 in Canmore, Alberta.

The Rev. Dr. Malcolm Guite, Chaplain of Girton College of the University of Cambridge, England, is the featured speaker.

Dr. Guite will collaborate with musician Steve Bell throughout the conference and hold a joint concert on Thursday evening. Both were featured at the 2016 NALC Convocation.

The Inklings was an informal literary discussion group associated with the University of Oxford, England, in the 1930s and 1940s. Members included C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Conference organizers offer the following titles and descriptions of Dr. Guite’s presentations:

Tolkien, Lewis, and the True Myth. *Malcolm revisits the momentous conversation between C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien on Addison’s Walk, showing how it helped bring Lewis to faith and drawing out what it might mean for us in our own time.*

Why Do We Hunger for Beauty? *Malcolm will introduce the “Theology of Beauty” starting with Plato and moving on to Augustine, and then be in conversation with Steve about the Christian artist’s response to beauty in the world and in the making of their art. Steve and Malcolm will illustrate with occasional poems and songs.*

Imaginative Apologetics: How beauty in art and myth can help us prepare the way for Christ. *Malcolm will reflect on the importance of beauty in Lewis’ life and conversion, and lead a discussion of how we might prepare the way for Christ in our own life and work.*

Behind the Inklings, Coleridge, Nature, and the Gospel. *Drawing on his recent book, “Mariner: A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge,” Malcolm will*



Steve Bell and Malcolm Guite

tell the story of how Coleridge (a huge influence on the Inklings) recovered his faith, in part by responding to beauty in nature.

In the Image of the Trinity: Christian Collaboration. *A joint session with Malcolm and Steve. The Inklings all collaborated, set ego aside, critiqued, and contributed to one another’s work. In this session Malcolm and Steve will talk about how our understanding of God as Trinity, as a loving communion of persons each addressing and giving to the other, forms the foundation for all good human interaction. This will be illustrated by stories of their own collaboration and with songs and poems arising from it.*

Panel discussion. *Where do we take it from here? How can the example of the Inklings, and the songs and stories they have shared enable us to proclaim and share Christ and the Kingdom more widely?*

Those who attend may receive Continuing Education Units from the North American Lutheran Seminary, a cosponsor of the event.

More information on the conference is available on the NALC website — www.thenalc.org.

NALC Disaster Response update

After four hurricanes struck the United States, from Texas to Florida to Puerto Rico, the majority of our NALC congregations stepped up to help.

Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Fla., reached out to its members and the larger community which was struck by high winds and heavy rain from Hurricane Irma.

Throughout the Sonshine Mission District, our congregations continue to assist impacted families as they rebuild their homes. Volunteer housing is being provided by Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Fla.

To schedule your mission trip to Florida during 2018, contact Mary Bates at 740-509-1132 or disasterresponse@thenalc.org.

Volunteers are already scheduled in Texas throughout 2018 at Peace Lutheran Church in Rosenberg, Texas.

Hurricane Harvey impacted over 12 million people. The South Texas Mission District, North Texas Mission District and many others are providing volunteer teams to rebuild homes on the Gulf Coast. More volunteers are needed; contact Mary Bates to schedule.

Mary just returned from the Central Pacific Mission District regarding the wildfires in California. She is in the process of working with our congregations there to establish volunteer sites.

For more information, contact Mary at any time. We thank everyone for their support and prayers.

FEMA assistance eligibility to include churches

The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has changed a long-standing policy to now include churches among the types of private non-profits that can qualify for federal disaster assistance.

This means NALC congregations can seek FEMA funds for building repairs in federally declared disasters. In the past, churches could not qualify if their “primary” purpose is religious activity, such as worship or religious education. That restriction has been eliminated.

A few things to note:

+ Congregations must be covered by a 501(c)(3) ruling such as the NALC’s “umbrella” group ruling in order to qualify for FEMA assistance. NALC congregations are covered by the “umbrella” ruling only if they have applied to be included in it. Congregations can be admitted into that group ruling immediately upon request, but they need to provide certain documentation. Congregations should contact Anne Gleason in the NALC Administrative Office to see if they are included or to request to be added to the list.

+ FEMA distinguishes between critical and non-critical services. For NALC congregations, generally the only way they might qualify as offering critical services is if they operate a parochial school. Such congregations can apply for disaster relief aid from FEMA directly.

+ Congregations which do not offer critical services (as defined by FEMA) can still obtain FEMA disaster assistance, but they must apply for a disaster relief loan from the US Small Business Administration (SBA) first. After the SBA makes a decision on that loan application, then the congregation can apply for disaster assistance from FEMA — either to cover their total need, if their SBA loan application was denied, or to cover any demonstrated need amount in excess of the amount provided by the SBA loan.

Please note that this is a general summary of the recent FEMA action. Individual circumstances may affect a congregation’s eligibility for assistance. More information is available in FEMA’s Public Assistance Program Policy Guide at www.fema.gov. A variety of resources for churches are available online at www.fema.gov/faith-resources.

The NALC: Clergy *and* Laity

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. — 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 ESV

For many years, pastors and lay members of our congregations complained about the delegate and voting procedures in previous Lutheran church bodies. There was little representation from congregations and those who were elected were specifically told, “You are not to represent your congregation — you are here as a ‘voting member,’ not a ‘delegate.’”

Some decisions were made that did not reflect the will of the church body as a whole, and the process became politicized as those advocating for a particular agenda formed voting blocs to push through certain resolutions and elect preferred nominees.

Greater representation from the whole body is a protection and guard against agenda politics in the Church and is intended to prevent the formation of parties, voting blocs and associations aimed at politicizing elections and decision-making within the Body of Christ.

The North American Lutheran Church created a structure and constitutional form that intentionally involves representation at the Convocation from each congregation — both clergy and lay — together with a congregational ratification process that requires changes to the constitution, teaching statements, and formal ecumenical relationships to be approved by two-thirds of our congregations.

So far, the ratification process has worked well. It assures that decisions made by the Convocation have the support and approval of a super-majority of those in the NALC, or they are not ratified. This is an important aspect of being Congregationally Focused — one of our four Core Values.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

Another aspect of that core value is the provision for each congregation to send lay representation to our annual NALC Convocation.

Our constitution states (emphasis added):

*Delegates with voting privileges at a Convocation shall be the ordained ministers of the NALC **and at least an equal number of laypersons.** Each congregation of the NALC shall elect one lay delegate to the Convocation for every 750 baptized members, or fraction thereof, of such congregation. ... In the event that the total number of lay delegates elected pursuant to the preceding sentence is less than the total number of ordained ministers, the Executive Council shall apportion additional lay delegates based on the relative size of the congregations of the NALC. To the extent appropriate to maintain good order, and subject to any action by the Convocation, the Executive Council may adopt procedures relating to the timing of delegate selection and to verifying the credentials of all delegates. (Article 7.02)*

All members of the Convocation are delegates and as such represent their congregations.
(Article 7.03)

It is significant in the NALC that ordained ministers and laypersons shall be present and voting in “**at least an equal number.**” It is also important that our constitution states, “**all members of the Convocations are delegates and as such represent their congregations.**”

Continued on Page 14

One would think that such stipulations would be cherished and valued as NALC pastors and laity realize that this reflects the nature of the Body of Christ — that while one body, there are different parts, each as important as the others. One would think every congregation, regardless the cost in time and money, would make it a priority to always send pastor and lay delegate to the annual Convocation to fully participate in the life, mission and ministry of our church body. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

At our recent Executive Council meetings, it has been shared that at each NALC Convocation, last minute adjustments and recruitments have been made trying to reach the 50 percent lay representation. So far, we have never reached that balance in representation. From 2014 to 2017, there have been an average of 20 percent more clergy present and voting than lay people. This is a significant percentage and can certainly impact voting at Convocation.

Because so many congregations register their delegates near the week of the Convocation, it has been a scramble to call congregations, speak to pastors, trying to find enough spouses or other visitors who will be present during Lutheran Week who are willing to serve as delegates to get us to the 50-50 threshold.

This can mean that some congregations have several delegates, while other congregations have no one present and voting as a representative. At the same time, some congregations are willing to allow their pastor to participate as their representative, with no lay persons as delegates.

While it is worthwhile having all NALC pastors present and participating, that is not what it means for the NALC to be Congregationally Focused. Congregations consist of pastors and lay persons — both are essential to the Body of Christ — locally and within the NALC as a whole.

How do we solve this problem?

The Executive Council is considering several strategies to address the shortfall in the participation of lay persons at Convocation.

However, the simplest solution is for each congregation to make a commitment to full participation in the life and ministry of the NALC by sending a lay delegate to the NALC Convocation.

Yes, it is important for pastors to attend, and most pastors look forward to the theological lectures, Mission Festival and Convocation which are all part of the annual Lutheran Week.

Yes, all realize the cost of sending a lay person to the NALC annual Convocation and asking the congregation to cover the cost of travel, hotel and registration. And yet, having at least one lay member of each congregation present and benefitting from the Bible studies, presentations, Mission Festival, and decisions will greatly benefit the local congregation.

The expectation should be for the pastor and lay delegate to return home and share a wealth of inspiration, information and insight into our shared mission and ministry in the NALC.

Lay participation at the Lutheran Week and Convocation is an investment in the life, health and well-being of the congregation.

At the same time, our Convocation is diminished when we have less than full lay participation from all our congregations.

Our constitutional stipulation that each and every congregation have representation at the annual Convocation is unusual in North American Lutheranism, to say the least. Most Lutheran bodies have representation from regional judicatories, not individual congregations.

Our congregational focus is part of the DNA of the NALC, and our hope is that all will appreciate this fact and participate in Mission District gatherings as well as in the annual Lutheran Week.

Please plan now for at least one lay delegate to attend our upcoming NALC Lutheran Week and Convocation, Aug. 14-17 in Denver, Colo. The theme will be *“The Holy Spirit; Calling, Gathering, Enlightening, Sanctifying.”* Our theological lectures begin on Tuesday, Aug. 14. The Mission Festival

Continued on Page 15

Lenten devotions from Pastor Wendel



"From Ashes to Easter," a Lenten devotional booklet by Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, is available online.

The 2018 Lenten devotions follow the daily Bible reading calendar being used throughout the NALC, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Lutheran Church—Canada.

The Lenten devotional booklet is available for download from the NALC website. It is also available in the NALC Walk of Faith app for Apple or Android devices.

For those who prefer a video format, the devotions are available on Facebook (in the NALC group) and on Vimeo at <https://vimeo.com/thenalc>.

The daily Lenten devotions on Facebook and Twitter can easily be shared with family and friends.

To receive the daily devotions via SMS, please text @NALCLENT to 614-682-8693. To receive the daily devotions via email, visit: www.remind.com/join/nalc.

Annual reports from congregations

Congregations are reminded to complete their annual reports to the North American Lutheran Church. A link to the 2017 Congregational Report form was sent to congregations by email on Jan. 23.

If congregations complete this report, the NALC will be able to report accurate membership statistics.

Contact the NALC Administrative Office at 651-633-6004 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org if your congregation did not receive the report form or if you have any questions about how to complete it.

Take advantage of some good stuff. Make sure someone in your congregation is:

+ Tuning in to the monthly webinars on the second Tuesday of the month at 2 p.m. ET.

+ A member of the NALC Youth Leaders Facebook page.

+ Connected to the faithwebbing.com website.

+ On the faithwebbing.com email distribution list.

+ Planning on attending the NALC Youth Ministry Symposium in August.

+ Going to the Nexus Institute (for youth) in June www.thenexusinstitute.org.

+ Considering attending a Quake Event <http://quakeevent.com>.

Questions or need more information? Contact us.

Gary and Laurie Pecuch have served in youth ministry for more than 35 years at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio. They serve the NALC as youth ministry coaches. They provide a variety of resources for NALC congregations free of charge through their website, faithwebbing.com. You may contact them at faithwebbing@gmail.com.

Continued from Page 14

and Convocation begins mid-day, on Wednesday, Aug. 15, and concludes Friday, Aug. 17 at about 5 p.m. A full agenda and registration materials are available online at www.thenalc.org.

Each congregation and every lay member is a valued and important part of the Body of Christ in the NALC. Please ensure that you are represented at the 2018 NALC Lutheran Week!



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