

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

January 2018

High school student personalizes disaster relief as graduation project

Tyler Nordblom, a high school junior from State College, Pa., found a way to do a graduation project that made a huge difference in the lives of a family from Florida recovering from Hurricane Irma.

After seeing the terrible devastation and flooding in the news coverage of Hurricane Irma, Tyler decided to help some of the hurricane victims as his project. State College Area High School students are required to do a special project as part of the requirements for graduation.

Tyler wanted the project to be more personal and not just donate to disaster relief. He talked to Bishop Paull Spring, NALC Bishop Emeritus, who, like Tyler, is a member of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in State College. Bishop Spring put him in touch with the NALC Disaster Response Team.

Tyler quickly came to know of a family that was in great need of help, prayer and encouragement. NALC Disaster Response connected him with Barbara Warren, a member of Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, an NALC congregation in Winter Haven, Fla.

The Warrens' home was destroyed by a large tree that fell and crushed it during Hurricane Irma. Barbara Warren lived with her husband, Vincent, a disabled vet. He needs constant care for many daily functions, and Barbara could supply that help in their home with necessary equipment and systems in place to help.



The home of Barbara and Vincent Warren in Winter Haven, Fla., was damaged by Hurricane Irma. The family has not been able to live in their home since then. Tyler Nordblom of State College, Pa., raised money to assist the family as a high school project.

Their daughter, Jennifer, lived with them in order to help with the constant care. Jennifer has two daughters who are still in school. After the tree fell on the house, the family moved to a nearby hotel, for what they hoped would be a short stay until the house was repaired.

After a few days, it was evident they could not care for Vincent without the room and equipment in the house. He needed to go to a veterans hospital in Tampa, Fla. — over an hour away. After 57 years of marriage, the couple would be physically separated during this very stressful time of their lives.

Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

Jennifer and her two children were in one hotel room and Barbara in another. Daily conveniences were no more, uncertainties were plentiful, and many things were now very difficult. Cooking was not easy and family meals were a chore. Eating out for every meal is expensive and something the family had definitely not planned for. The family was first scheduled to be in the hotel until the end of October and then it stretched through Thanksgiving and until the end of the year.

Tyler was on board with helping the Warren family as soon as he heard their story. During this time of struggle, Tyler was concerned about getting the family funds and gift cards to help them as quickly as possible. He sent Target gift cards almost immediately to help pay for replacement school supplies and needs the family had.

Tyler asked what their favorite restaurants were and sent gift cards and funds for their favorites: IHOP, McDonald's, Wendy's, Subway and more.

Barbara said the girls would get home from school and they wouldn't know what to do for dinner, and then they started getting these gift cards. What a bright spot in the middle of a tough and lonely situation!

Then there were gift cards for Home Depot and Visa gift cards (they were such a blessing to fill up the gas tank). The cash donations were compiled and sent to the family.

Tyler was asked how he started raising funds for a family in need. He explained that he raised money within his home congregation, in his community, and within his own family. He started by standing up in front of his congregation and giving a short bio on the family and explaining what he was hoping to accomplish. He encouraged people to ask questions and sought answers. "A lot of people decided after talking with me a little bit that they wanted to help out the Warren family, so they made donations," Tyler said.



Tyler Nordblom

He also wrote a letter and took it to different community locations, like McDonald's, IHOP, and others, and received donations from the businesses. He spent a lot of time and work on these letters and his speeches so that people would understand the need of the Warrens and would want to give.

Tyler's family pitched in to donate funds and time to visit community locations, ship gift cards, and keep records of all the donations.

Tyler raised nearly \$3,000, and NALC Disaster Response matched some of those donations, so the family received about \$5,000.

"Before this project really got under way, I had a goal in mind of raising about \$3,000, and my mom thought that this was a bit crazy. But I had something in my mind, and it paid off." Tyler said. "The generosity of everyone that donated was very pleasing and amazing to see."

"When I was going door to door in my neighborhood, there was one gentleman that said he would be glad to give again if more money was needed for Christmas," Tyler said.

Tyler said he learned a lot of things during this project. One of them is that you feel much better when you do something out of the goodness of your heart and not because you have to. He also learned that when you put your mind to something, you can achieve that goal no matter what it is.

Tyler said he would not hesitate to do something like this again — and surely the Warrens would agree that he should. Barbara Warren expressed great gratitude to this young man that she and her family have never met. She enjoyed the fact that he is from Pennsylvania, as she is as well. Tyler's generosity and concern have meant a lot to a family in great need.

Tyler is an example of NALC Disaster Response in action. He responded to Christ's call to care for a neighbor in need, even when the neighbor is hundreds of miles away, in hurricane-ravaged Florida.

Lutherans join in three-year effort to read the Word of God together

Lutherans in North America have begun a three-year effort to read the Bible together. *Reading the Word of God*, a daily Bible reading guide, has introduced a schedule of readings for NALC members and others to follow 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.”

Reading the Word of God — the daily Bible reading guide and the monthly calendars — are available online at www.thenalc.org. You also may sign up to receive the appointed readings for each day as a daily text or email or import them into your digital calendar. Details are available on the NALC website.

Seeds of faith grow into major gift for North American Lutheran Seminary

By Pastor Cathi Braasch

Seeds of faith planted over time have grown into a generous gift of more than \$295,000 to be used to help grow and develop the North American Lutheran Seminary.

The gift comes from the estate of the late Marie Post, a member of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Flanagan, Ill. Marie and her sister, Marjorie Post, also a member of St. John's, followed the seminary's development since its founding in 2013.

Marie was beginning the process of naming the North American Lutheran Seminary as beneficiary of two life insurance policies when she died suddenly on May 9, 2017, at age 72. Marjorie honored Marie's intent by naming the seminary as recipient of the insurance policies' proceeds as well as additional funds from the estate. The gifts totaled \$295,383.14.

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, President of the North American Lutheran Seminary, welcomed the gift as a "significant, strategic boost" to the seminary's growth and development.

"As an orthodox and confessional institution, the North American Lutheran Seminary is uniquely positioned to provide world-class, authentically Lutheran formation for pastors and other church leaders," Dr. Schifrin said.

"The generosity of these two sisters is a beautiful model for how all of us are called to live our lives. They were formed as faithful and loving Lutheran Christians, and God will continue to use their witness for generations to come. Marie and Marjorie have planted the seeds of a lasting, significant legacy for pastoral ministry. We could not be more grateful for their gift and their example," Dr. Schifrin said.

Continued on Page 5



Marjorie Post (center) and her late sister, Marie, are building a legacy of pastoral formation and leadership through a generous gift to the North American Lutheran Seminary. Marjorie Post recently told the story of the gift to Pastor Cathi Braasch (left), chair of the NALS Board of Regents Development Committee. Pastor Mark Knappe (right) serves the Post sisters' congregation, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Flanagan, Ill.

Continued from Page 4

Along with their other sister, Marilyn Post Groth, Marjorie and Marie grew up with parents who expected them to know Scripture and Luther's Small Catechism by heart. The three girls were baptized and confirmed at St. John's — the fourth generation of their family to call the congregation home. Those seeds of faith, planted by faithful pastors and parents, grew into the desire to raise up the next generations of orthodox, confessional Lutheran pastors.



Marie Post

"Marie was a conservative, traditional Lutheran who knew her catechism," her sister Marjorie recalled. "She had a lifelong love of learning."

"An educator by profession, Marie saw the necessity of a new North American Lutheran Seminary, one based on solid orthodox, confessional teaching," said Pastor Mark Knappe. The sisters learned about the emerging North American Lutheran Seminary during a Bible study led by Pastor Knappe and follow-up conversations with him.

The legacy of the Post sisters' home congregation is already bearing fruit with a son of St. John's, Ryan Henkel, being formed for ordained ministry in the NALS Master of Divinity program.

"We're going to need more pastors in the years to come and we need to prepare now for that need," Marjorie said.

The Post sisters' generous gift will help to do just that.

Do you share the Post sisters' passion for raising up the next generations of pastors and church leaders? Are you thankful for the pastoral care and church leadership that you have received from evangelical, orthodox, confessional Lutheran pastors in your lifetime? Then, please consider including the North American Lutheran Seminary in your current or estate giving plans. Contact Dr. Schifrin and the seminary's development team at 724-266-3838, ext. 205, or by email at NALSheritagefund@tsm.edu.

Pastor Cathi Braasch is a member of the North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents and chair of its Development Committee.

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, will be available.

The 2018 Lenten devotions will 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.



The booklet will be available in the NALC Walk of Faith app for Apple or Android devices.

For those who prefer a video format, the devotions will be 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 @NALCLEN to 614-682-8693. To receive the daily devotions via email, visit: www.remind.com/join/nalclent.

We invite you to live with Scripture during the season of Lent and beyond using "From Ashes to Easter."

Life Conference precedes March for Life

The 2018 NALC Life Conference was 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 discussed how you can answer God’s call to protect human life from conception to natural death.

The conference began with lunch followed by three pro-life speakers and concluded with worship led by Bishop John Bradosky.

Speakers and their topics were:

+ “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 participants took part in the Memorial for the Preborn service in Washington D.C., and joined thousands of others for the March for Life from the Washington Monument to the U.S. Supreme Court building.



NALC Life Conference speakers, Dr. Robert Benne (left) and Pastor Melinda Jones (right) pose with conference organizer Pastor Dennis Di Mauro.



Annual reports from congregations

NALC 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. The deadline for filing reports is Feb. 13.

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

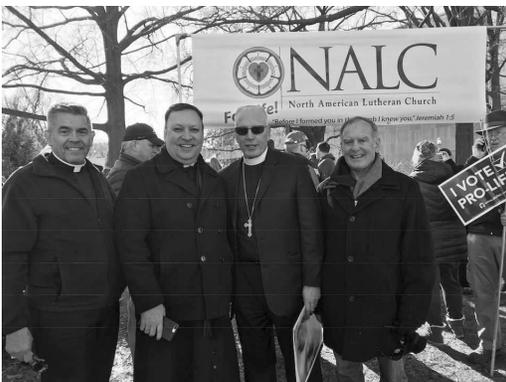
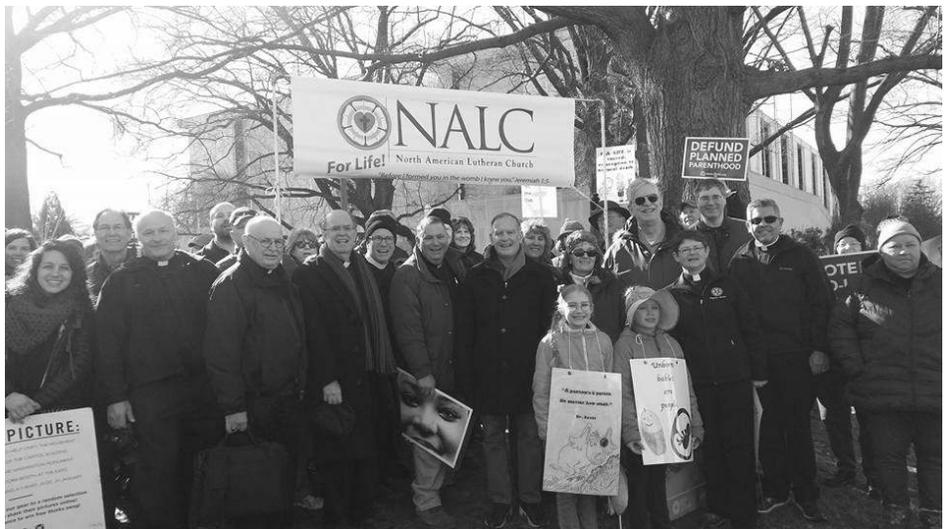
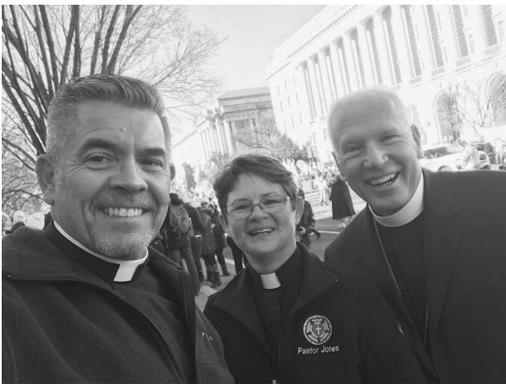
Contact the NALC Administrative Office at 651-633-6004 or nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org if your congregation did not receive the report or if you have any questions about how to complete it.



March for Life

January 19, 2018

Washington, D.C.



Epiphany – Image vs. Identity

Dear Disciples of Christ Jesus,

The season of Epiphany marks one of the most critical seasons for teaching the faith. Our readings are focused on proclaiming Jesus' identity. Knowing who Jesus is is essential for beginning the journey of following him. The lectionary Scripture readings during this season provide us with true insight into what "The Light" exposes.

The word *Epiphany* literally means to make manifest. Following the Christmas season that proclaims Jesus' birth and his presence, the Church proclaims who Jesus is.

The wise men proclaim him a king. In fact, Jesus is the King of Kings, Lord of all creation.

John the Baptist announces Jesus as the Messiah. In his baptism, the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to be the Son of God.

Jesus calls his disciples to follow Him. As they follow him, the disciples experience the power of his Kingdom that broke into our world through him.

In these texts, Jesus heals the sick and casts out demons. The disciples experience the power of Jesus' mercy, compassion and love opposing the spiritual forces that wound, corrupt and destroy people. His power is greater than all the evil in the world combined.

In our texts, we also see the human side of Jesus. He is exhausted at times and gets away to be alone and pray. He is clear about his mission and theirs — to proclaim the Good News of his Kingdom to neighboring towns, throughout all of Galilee and Israel and to the ends of the earth. Jesus leads his followers to move forward, not to stay where it is safe and easy, but to move to places where people are hurting and in need, where they have not yet heard or believed in Jesus. Matthew quotes the great words of the prophet Isaiah: "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined" (*Matthew 4:16 NLT*).



From the Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky

This light also exposes the risk of following Jesus. John the Baptist is arrested and executed. Plans are interrupted and Jesus moves from place to place to avoid those forces that seek to destroy him or subvert his mission.

The season of Epiphany is about the Light that overcomes the darkness of life. It overcomes the darkness, but it does not take away the risk.

If Jesus' plans were interrupted because of the darkness in this world, should we expect anything less in the lives of those who follow him?

What I have experienced in ministry over the years is that plans are often interrupted. We can waste much of our life filled with regret and disappointment. What I have also learned is that there is nothing in my life that is off limits to him and that, when he disrupts my plans, he may be trying to accomplish his plans that are far better. They are far more fulfilling plans in which he calls us to overcome our self-absorption by being absorbed into his life.

Jesus has a way of interrupting our lives when he wants more for us and for his Church. That is precisely what he did with those first disciples. He interrupted their plans with a far better plan. Whether they were cleaning their nets or bringing in revenue for Rome at the tax office, Jesus interrupted their lives with an invitation, "Come and follow me." When the Gospel is rightly proclaimed today, people will hear the same invitation from Jesus. They will also be forced to wrestle with all that it means to respond obediently, to take that first step away from our self-absorbed life to life in him.

Continued on Page 9

Continued from Page 8

Sometimes our persistent sinful nature causes us to hold onto those things that are unhealthy for us even when we know there is hope in a different direction. We would rather maintain the familiar condition and disease than pursue the changes necessary for greater health and wholeness of life.

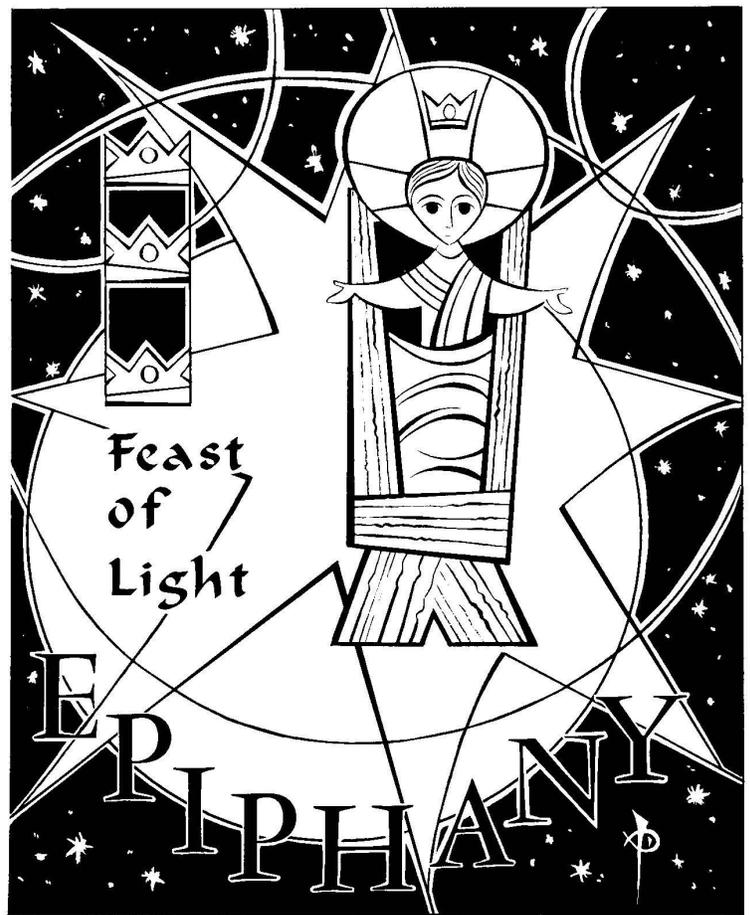
In my own life, I have found that Jesus only asks me to give up the things that control me, that are harmful to me, that keep me from holding onto him.

Making decisions about the future is never easy. No matter what decision we make, it exacts a toll from us no matter how glamorous or lucrative the world makes it seem. The light of Epiphany makes it clear that we can expect no less when we are following Jesus. We are all spending our lives for some cause. The question is for what cause are we giving it away? For ourselves or for Jesus and his mission.

One of the greatest tragedies facing churches today is that we have worked so hard to make the Christian faith anything but challenging. We have labored hard so that people will say yes to easy faith, low commitment, membership that grants us multiple rights and privileges, to an organization that can easily become a self-indulgent institution, bent on self-preservation even if it means compromising the faith for the sake of proclaiming a gospel of its own invention, that is really no gospel at all.

In spite of those misguided efforts, I am convinced that people today are looking for real Christianity. They want to be challenged. They want to hear the call of Jesus to become his disciples, and they want to know how to begin the journey. People are hungry and thirsty for Jesus. They are searching for direction, meaning, purpose, worth, value. They want what only the Kingdom Jesus proclaims can provide — life and community in him, through his body, the Church. When people experience life in Jesus, they are no longer focused on what changed or what they gave up, as it is meaningless and insignificant in comparison to what they now possess, new life in Christ.

The revealing light of Epiphany shines like a laser. It is a powerful but very narrow beam of light that proclaims Jesus as Messiah, Savior, Lamb of God,



the One who opens the Kingdom of Heaven to all who believe in him.

The revelation to the Magi, the declaration at his baptism, his rejection of evil, the obedience of his disciples, the authority and insight of his teaching, the power of his miracles and the mystery of his transfiguration all reveal the truth of his identity.

The faith we live, proclaim and share with others is not about mere information. It is about a truth that is so compelling and so powerful that it not only reveals Jesus but transforms us. He reveals who he is so that we might receive our true identity through him.

During this season of Epiphany, I am always reminded of the difference between image and identity. It is impossible to exist in this culture and not be concerned with our image. We are constantly bombarded by media that heightens our sensitivity about how others will perceive us. How we appear, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the car we drive, our home, our furniture, the

Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

technology we use, the people we know, our social circles — all focus our lives on our image.

We can become so preoccupied with image that we have no time or energy to focus on the far deeper, far more critical issue of our identity. I don't know about you, but, when it comes to making difficult decisions, I have asked, what will other people think? Sometimes I have tried to dodge a decision Jesus is calling me to make by asking what will please the greatest number of people. That sounds caring on the outside but it doesn't go very deep!

The world keeps telling us the task of life is to create our own unique sense of self, to make a name for ourselves, to create a reputation for ourselves, to become self-fulfilled. That path leads only to following our self — self-centeredness and selfishness that are not only unhealthy but destructive eternally.

Discipleship is not about image. It is all about identity. Our identity is in Christ. It is not in man-made institutions or organizations no matter how well intended. In Baptism, we take on the identity of Christ as we accept the name "Christian." The sign of the cross marks us forever. This is the beginning of defining who we are. We learn from Jesus who he is and, in him, we find out who we are — children of the heavenly Father, citizens of the Kingdom of God, followers of Jesus. As Paul reminds us, in him (Jesus) we live and move and have our being! We are called and claimed by the infinite One who gave his life for us, who proclaims our infinite worth and value by his death and resurrection for us!

Jesus did not give his disciples a doctrine. He did not give them a theology. He did not give them a building, constitution, structure, institution, and not even a methodology for success. He gave them only one thing. He gave them himself with a gentle call, "Come and follow me!"

Brothers and sisters, that is all we have, but it is all we need, for it is everything! It is all we are, and it is more than anything else we could hope to be, followers of Jesus. Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying that those worldly things are unimportant, but they are not the most important thing for the body of Christ. He is.

The oneness Jesus prays for his disciples to experience in the 17th chapter of John is not an organizational unity or a matter of institutional loyalty, but the oneness of identity, "that they may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." The identity of Jesus is in the Father. The identity of the Father is in Jesus. Jesus is praying that his identity will be in us and that our identity will be in him. That is his promise and our only hope.

In this season of Epiphany, focused on Jesus' identity, we discover again our own identity in him as his followers and as a community of his disciples. The light of Epiphany shines on Jesus, his mission and all the risks associated with it, clearly symbolized in the cross.

It is my prayer during this revealing season that we manifest our identity in Christ Jesus, emboldened for his mission fully aware of all the risks associated with following him in this world.

With his identity rooted in "Christ Alone," Luther would write, "With the zeal of a missionary, I dedicated the rest of my life to telling others the good news of salvation by grace through faith. For now, I knew that I stood before God with Christ's righteousness and with Christ's courage."

May we do the same. Forget the image and gain the identity in Christ, focusing on substance rather than the surface of real life in him.

Have a blessed Epiphany season!

It is good to be with you following him.

Bishop John Bradosky

Mark Ryman accepts call to Sola Publishing

Pastor Mark Ryman has accepted a call to serve as Online Resource Editor for Sola Publishing.

Pastor Ryman finished his work as NALC Communications Coordinator on Jan. 1. Among his significant projects were overseeing a redesign of the NALC's website and coordinating daily online devotions.

Temples and Priests

Before and after Christ's resurrection

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

Last month, we focused on caring for our bodies, temples of the Holy Spirit, with as much care and reverence as we do for a chancel. In the last part of this series, let's return to something we touched upon in part three — “every baptized believer is a mobile delivery vehicle for the living God's presence on earth.”

What if we take seriously and literally that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we are all priests? What if we intentionally trust that wherever we go, we are not alone? Scripture promises that when we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three persons of the Holy Trinity dwell in us and us in them.

Carmen LaBerge, author of *Speak the Truth: How to Bring God Back into Every Conversation*, takes Scripture's promise seriously. She writes, “In His sovereign desire that all the world should know the grace offered in Jesus Christ, God has set divine appointments for us to keep every day” (p. xviii). The people who meet us every day are not just meeting us, they are meeting the living God dwelling in us, and hence they are divine appointments.

Most of us might back away in fear from thinking of daily encounters with other people as divine appointments. We know our weaknesses and limitations, and insist we are not up to the task. We are like Moses at the burning bush, “You've chosen the wrong guy, Lord. No one will listen to me. I'm not a good talker.”

We inevitably turn in on ourselves and think it's all about us. However, it's not about us. As Pastor Brad Hales and Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Va., say, “It's all about Jesus!” The most important person in our daily divine appointments is the living God, not ourselves. Therefore, Carmen LaBerge urges us not to attempt to mute God in these conversations.

Jesus promises that in the most frightening divine appointments, being handed over to authorities and put on trial, there's no need to fear:

When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:19-20)

In John's Gospel, our Lord, immediately before his betrayal and arrest, repeatedly promises the Father will send the Spirit:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ... But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:16-17, 26)

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27)

These powerful promises have sustained Christian martyrs for centuries. In 2015, ISIS beheaded 21 of our Coptic brothers in Christ, Egyptian construction workers, when they refused to renounce Jesus as their Lord. They died praising God and praying for their executioners.

With promises like these from our Lord, why not trust the Holy Spirit to do his work and bear witness to Christ in our daily conversations? The Church multiplied in the first century without stationary structural temples because the Holy Spirit worked through mobile organic temples, Jesus' disciples, his priests. Since the mid-20th century, the Church has multiplied in Africa and Asia with relatively few stationary temples, but many mobile temples and priests. What are we waiting for in North America?

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise” (*Psalms 51:15*).

Created Male and Female

An Open Letter from Religious Leaders

Dear Friends:

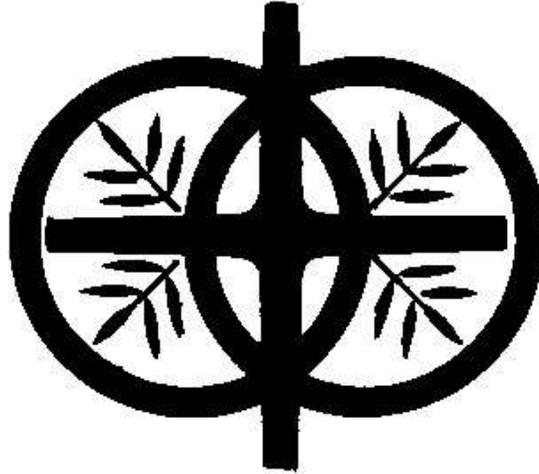
As leaders of various communities of faith throughout the United States, many of us came together in the past to affirm our commitment to marriage as the union of one man and one woman and as the foundation of society. We reiterate that natural marriage continues to be invaluable to American society.

We come together to join our voices on a more fundamental precept of our shared existence, namely, that human beings are male or female and that the socio-cultural reality of gender cannot be separated from one's sex as male or female.

We acknowledge and affirm that all human beings are created by God and thereby have an inherent dignity. We also believe that God created each person male or female; therefore, sexual difference is not an accident or a flaw — it is a gift from God that helps draw us closer to each other and to God. What God has created is good. “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

A person's discomfort with his or her sex, or the desire to be identified as the other sex, is a complicated reality that needs to be addressed with sensitivity and truth. Each person deserves to be heard and treated with respect; it is our responsibility to respond to their concerns with compassion, mercy and honesty. As religious leaders, we express our commitment to urge the members of our communities to also respond to those wrestling with this challenge with patience and love.

Children especially are harmed when they are told that they can “change” their sex or, further, given



hormones that will affect their development and possibly render them infertile as adults. Parents deserve better guidance on these important decisions, and we urge our medical institutions to honor the basic medical principle of “first, do no harm.” Gender ideology harms individuals and societies by sowing confusion and self-doubt. The state itself has a compelling interest, therefore, in maintaining policies that uphold the scientific

fact of human biology and supporting the social institutions and norms that surround it.

The movement today to enforce the false idea that a man can be or become a woman, or vice versa, is deeply troubling. It compels people to either go against reason — that is, to agree with something that is not true — or face ridicule, marginalization, and other forms of retaliation.

We desire the health and happiness of all men, women, and children. Therefore, we call for policies that uphold the truth of a person's sexual identity as male or female, and the privacy and safety of all. We hope for renewed appreciation of the beauty of sexual difference in our culture and for authentic support of those who experience conflict with their God-given sexual identity.

Sincerely Yours:

This open letter, released on Dec. 15, was signed by a wide variety of religious leaders in the United States. NALC Bishop John Bradosky; Bishop Paull Spring, NALC Bishop Emeritus; and Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, were among the signers. The letter including the list of signers is available at www.thenalc.org.

LWR Farmers Market Coffee

In his 69 years, José Martínez has lived through a lot.

In the 1970s, war in Nicaragua forced his family to leave their hometown and move to San Isabel. He and his wife have 10 children — five sons and five daughters.

By the 1980s, José had begun growing a small amount of coffee as a part of a cooperative that he compares to the army, because he was told what to do on his farm and wasn't allowed to manage himself. In 1986, through land reforms, José received a parcel of land of about seven hectares (about 17 acres), and

immediately gave a small piece of land to each of his children and they, too, began to grow coffee.

José says that before he became a member of the SOPPEXCCA cooperative — Lutheran World Relief's long-time partner in Nicaragua — he experienced many unfair practices in the coffee business. He'd lost money with other cooperatives, and at times had to sell his coffee to middlemen who did not pay good prices.

As a member of SOPPEXCCA, he says, he manages his own farm. He's his own boss. That's important to him because, he says, "when you go and work for someone — if you're sick, you'll need to take sick time, and you won't have enough money, but if you work your own land, you can produce your own food for your own table."

And he does, indeed, produce food for his table — and a great variety of it! José now grows coffee, cocoa, plantains, and yucca. Some of his crops support his family's needs and the surplus he sells for income.



José is proud of his coffee, and very committed to quality. He boasts that he only sends the highest quality, ripest coffee to SOPPEXCCA. This is the coffee you have the opportunity to taste through the LWR Farmers Market, a new line of coffee sourced directly from farmers participating in Lutheran World Relief projects. Every delicious cup helps transform poor communities that depend on their coffee crop to feed their families. Farmers like José are given a stable, predictable, and higher price upfront for their beans and are partners in the coffee business.

José is deeply invested in his family and community. But if you ask him what he is *most* proud of, it's the legacy he's leaving to his children, through the land he's given them. "They can harvest it themselves, because they own it," he says.

Taste the care and hard work José, and the farmers of SOPPEXCCA, put into every coffee bean included in LWR Farmers Market Coffee.

Visit www.lwrfarmersmarket.org to make an LWR Farmers Market Coffee purchase and support farmers like José.

Church leadership new year's resolutions

Do people continue to make new year's resolutions? Studies show those who do often abandon them by about the second week of January.

Of course, there's nothing biblical about making resolutions to change our lives, reorient priorities, and make a difference as we begin a new year of grace. However, there is something biblical about discipline — being intentional, faithful, obedient disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. And intentional discipleship doesn't happen without intentionality — specific, clear goals that motivate us to move forward in faith and life.

Recently, a church council president shared that he often takes these Ministry Matters articles to council and uses them for devotion, direction or inspiration. For those of you who make use of these articles in this way, here are some suggestions for new year's resolutions for congregational leaders!

1. Be mission focused! It's surprising how many church councils and pastors spend more time on budgets, bottoms (in the pews) and buildings (as the saying goes) than the mission we have been given to share the good news with those who are struggling, lonely, living in darkness. We say we are mission driven in the NALC, but our actions often indicate that we aren't. Begin every council meeting and every committee meeting, first, with reading and study of Scripture, and then ask, "What is God saying to us about mission in this Bible passage; what is our mission, and what are we doing to fulfill that mission and share the Gospel?"

2. Be Christ centered in all that you do! A congregation that is losing members, experiencing decline in worship attendance and financial support has often lost its Christ-centeredness. As I've said before, every church council meeting should begin with at least 30 minutes of Bible study. How can pastors and church council leaders be Christ-centered leaders if they are not deeply into the Word of God? The role of the leadership team — council and pastor — is to model Christ-like behavior in discussions, deliberations and decisions.



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

3. Use Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*) as your devotional Bible studies for church council meetings in 2018. This sermon is loaded with as much practical advice for Christ-like living and leading as any section of the Bible. Take time to read each passage; reflect on it deeply. Fully discuss the meaning. Assign the verses to be read at next month's meeting so that all members of the leadership team can read, reflect and study those verses before they are studied at the next meeting. Have each council member keep a journal with responses based on each council meeting's Bible study devotional time — seeking insights that speak specifically to their role as congregational leaders.

4. Plan a council retreat to focus on Matthew 18 — the whole chapter. Make a list of Jesus' instructions for his disciples — what does he intend? Include "child-likeness" and humility; resistance to temptation and sin; love for those who are lost; how to deal with sin and conflict; forbearance and forgiveness. Reflect on how you are doing in these areas as a congregation and a leadership team. What is the current reality? What is God's will for you, based on this chapter? What are some action steps that will help you as council and congregation to fulfill God's will more fully? Share these with the congregation in newsletters, bulletins or congregational meetings.

5. The NALC model constitution for congregations indicates that it is the council's responsibility "to maintain supportive relationships with the pastor(s) ... and help them annually to evaluate the fulfillment of their calling." Helping your pastor to evaluate the

Continued on Page 15

fulfillment of his or her calling is different from conducting an employment or performance review. Agree as a leadership team that each quarter, the council and pastor will make time to ask, together, “how are we fulfilling God’s call for us to be leaders of this congregation.” Ask the pastor and each council member to first reflect on how they are fulfilling God’s call. Next, ask how the leadership team can assist each member of the team in responding to God’s call more fully. Agree on clear, specific action steps that may be reviewed at the next quarterly meeting.

These are not difficult resolutions, but they are steps that can help a church council leadership team to be faithful, spiritual (of the Holy Spirit) and forward-moving! We pray the year 2018 will be one of exciting, energized mission and ministry in the name of Jesus!



Youth and Family Ministry

2018 is a step-up year for faithwebbing.com and the NALC. There are several exciting projects to be implemented.

For starters, don’t forget the monthly webinars at 2 p.m. ET on the second Tuesday of each month.

Then, consider joining us in August during Lutheran Week in Denver for the second annual Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium. This year’s keynote speaker is Thomas O’Neill, former president of Youth Encounter. Check out the NALC website or contact us for details.

2018 will also bring the opportunity for online youth ministry courses, a specific training event for adults who work with young people and round two of our year-long coaching experience.

Need some help with a youth ministry concern? Contact Gary and Laurie via faithwebbing@gmail.com

LWR provides resources for Lent

Walk with Lutheran World Relief during the season of Lent and announce to the world that the hope of Christ makes a new season possible: a Season of Hope. LWR has prepared a suite of resources to energize congregations for global good, including:

- + A special homily series featuring pictures and stories of the families you reach with LWR.
- + Step-by-step instructions to assemble Personal Care Kits for families in need around the world.
- + Weekly devotionals by Lutherans in the U.S. and LWR staff.
- + Palm Sunday bulletin insert and children’s activity sheet.

Visit lwr.org/lent for these and other resources to make a positive impact on families living in some of the world’s poorest communities!

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

“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 special concert during the conference. Both were featured at the 2016 NALC Convocation.

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

More information is available on the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference Facebook page.



NALC

North American Lutheran Church

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TWIN CITIES, MN
PERMIT NO. 7007

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Christ Centered + Mission Driven + Traditionally Grounded + Congregationally Focused

NALC Contact Information

NALC Ministry Office

3500 Mill Run Drive
Hilliard, OH 43026-7770
888-551-7254 (toll free)
614-777-5709
bseifert@thenalc.org

NALC Administrative Office

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202
651-633-6004
nalc.mnoffice@thenalc.org

North American Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, president
aschifrin@thenals.org

Bishop

Bishop John Bradosky
jbradosky@thenalc.org

General Secretary

Pastor Mark Chavez
mchavez@thenalc.org

Missions

Pastor Gemechis Buba
gbuba@thenalc.org

Ministry and Ecumenism

Pastor David Wendel
dwendel@thenalc.org

Please send donations to the office in New Brighton, Minn.

NALC News

Published by

North American Lutheran Church

3500 Mill Run Drive
Hilliard, OH 43026-7770

Phone: 614-777-5709

www.thenalc.org

Pastor David J. Baer, editor
news@thenalc.org

*Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.*