



Easter message from Bishop Bradosky

Dear Disciples of Jesus throughout the North American Lutheran Church:

May the Lord bless your journey with Him through the Easter Triduum!

In the Easter Gospel reading from the 24th chapter of Luke, I was captivated by the words the angels spoke to the women as they stood inside the tomb looking for Jesus.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words (Luke 24:5-8 NIV).

According to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus clearly tells His disciples about His death three times prior to His crucifixion and resurrection. The first occurs just after Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:20 NIV). Peter responds, “You are the Christ, the Messiah.” Jesus not only tells them about His impending death, but He reminds them that following Him will mean self-denial and taking up their cross daily. What follows is the powerful event of the Transfiguration. They see Jesus in His glory.

Another time, on their way into Jerusalem, Jesus took His disciples aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered



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over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again” (Luke 18:31-33 NIV).

Again, after healing a demon-possessed boy and while everyone was marveling at all that Jesus was able to do, He told His disciples about His impending death (Luke 9:44).

In each of these passages Luke reminds us that the disciples didn’t understand. They couldn’t grasp the meaning of His words, and they were afraid to ask about it. Instead of trying to understand it, they began to argue about who was greatest! Jesus knew their thoughts and placed a child in their midst and reminded them: “For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest” (Luke 9:48 NIV).

By the time we get to this passage, Jesus has called His disciples, taught them who He is and the nature of His kingdom. The disciples have observed the power of His love to heal and transform the lives of others. They have been empowered with that same love and they too have touched the lives of others with preaching, teaching and healing in His name. Jesus wanted them to know the rest of the story.

He also realized that this would be a very difficult subject for the disciples to comprehend. It would touch them more deeply than any other teaching about the Kingdom. In an intimate setting, Jesus wanted to teach them about His passion, His suffering, death and resurrection. Those who have experienced the death of a loved one in which there was time for honest conversation about the end of life here know what that is like.

The end of His public ministry in Galilee was approaching, and Jesus wanted the disciples to have a clear picture of where He was headed – to Jerusalem and a cross. He tells them He is going to hand over His life or give His life.

Mark uses the word “betrayed” and that may make it seem as though what is about to unfold is simply the work of others. Judas has a part in this passion, but there is a far more powerful hand at work. No one is taking away Jesus’ life. Rather, Jesus is *giving* His life

for the forgiveness of sin, for the reconciliation of the world, for the salvation of all who believe.

Luke makes it clear that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying and were afraid to ask Him. It is not because the disciples were stupid that they didn’t understand. It is rather the shock of dealing with the reality of the imminent death of a dear friend and teacher, one who had become their Master and Lord, one who was the chosen one, the Messiah, the Savior.

After traveling with Him for just a few years, Jesus is telling them that there is an end coming that will be very difficult for them.

In the grieving process, first comes the shock and then denial. It is a normal reaction to resist letting the reality of the death of a loved one enter our lives. We refuse to accept it. We refuse to permit this new reality to displace our current reality. We deny it to avoid the pain and grief associated with it. The disciples were afraid to ask not because they didn’t know what Jesus said but because the implications were so overwhelming they were not sure they wanted to know more. They knew they should have asked, but emotionally the answer was not able to find a place in their hearts. So they said nothing about His teaching.

Put yourself in their place for a moment. You have been following Jesus for several years. He is now telling you what is in store for Him – suffering, rejection, death and then resurrection.

I know what question I would be asking: “If that is what is going to happen to Him and I am following Him, what is in store for me?” The denial would have expanded exponentially! There is so much behind their saying nothing. Their minds are spinning and their hearts are pounding with fear and apprehension. They are preoccupied with their own anxiety and grief.

Around 385 AD, St. John Chrysostom wrote these words about the disciples’ response to Jesus. “If ignorant, how could they be sorrowful? Because they were not altogether ignorant. They knew that He was

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soon to die, for they had continually been told about it. But just what this death might mean, they did not grasp clearly, nor that there would be a speedy recognition of it, from which innumerable blessings would flow. They did not see that there would be a resurrection. This is why they grieved.”

The problem with dealing with death is that it brings our lives to nothing, to a point of meaninglessness. It forces us to deal with a common denominator — we are all mortal. We will all die. No matter how much power, money or possessions we accumulate, the same end awaits all — the heart stops, we draw one last breath and life here ends. Regardless of how little or how much we have accomplished, we will die. Regardless of how popular or how unnoticed our lives are, we all face the same end. No one makes it out of this life alive!

Dealing with death is a struggle, but failing to deal with death is deadly. It leads to a fruitless struggle, the compromising of values and the manipulation of others. It creates a more profound meaninglessness than what we were trying to avoid in our denial of death.

The question about greatness is a very human response to the denial of death. We avoid the commonality of our annihilation by replacing it with a question about being someone great, as if our greatness could preserve us. Rather than the commonality that death forces us to face, we desire to focus on what will make us stand out, giving us a unique position above others, over others.

Jesus clearly knew what the disciples were talking about, so He asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” They had been arguing with one another about who was the greatest. Jesus could tell at this point that they were still struggling with His teaching about His passion. Their response was a human response to the reality of death.

But Jesus did not miss the chance to influence their worldview. Life in His kingdom is different. In this world where people fail to deal with death, they seek to be the greatest. But in the Kingdom Jesus

proclaimed, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (*Mark 9:35 ESV*).

As Jesus trained His first followers, He called them, taught them about His identity and the nature and characteristics of His kingdom. They experienced the power of that Kingdom in Jesus’ ministry, preaching, teaching, healing and casting out demons. They had experienced the reality of the kingdom of heaven worldview and now the challenge is: Are they ready to begin to live in the reality of that Kingdom even now?

This invitation challenged Jesus’ disciples to live lives completely transformed by His reign, integrated into a wholeness that is possible only through Jesus. This new life and freedom are only possible through obedience to Jesus and all He commands. Such a transformed life becomes a model for others.

Jesus describes that new life in Him: Instead of the highest honor, pursue the things in last place, pursue being the least valued of all, pursue being the lowliest of all, pursue being the smallest of all, pursue placing yourselves behind others.

Dealing with death frees us for such a life! The implication for discipleship is obvious. The one who follows Jesus in the way of the cross must live a life of sacrifice and service.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: “The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death — we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die. ... But if we lose our lives in his service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, pages 89, 91).

Life in Christ starts with death. That is precisely what we proclaim in Baptism. Any Gospel that does not deal with the reality of death is no Gospel at all.

At every funeral we speak these words from Romans 6: “When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried with him by Baptism into death so that as Christ was raised by

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the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

From the beginning of our lives in Christ we are dead men walking. That is both Law and Gospel. We are dead men walking — dead to sin. We are walking — we are living a new life in Christ, even now! Failing to deal with death is deadly as it prevents us from true faith.

This reality frees us for the priorities of the kingdom of heaven, for ministry and mission, and for true discipleship, following Jesus.

We can live by faith or fear. Jesus invited His disciples to live with the reality of death without fear. This is where the reception of a child has its place. Jesus places the child in His arms and says, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Luke 9:48 NIV).

Children live totally dependent on the love of parents and adults around them. They are trusting and not naturally fearful. They learn distrust and fear, but a far more natural disposition of children is to trust, to depend on others and to live by faith.

The meaning of the symbolic action of putting a child in the midst of them cannot be grasped without recognizing the lowly place occupied by children in ancient society and a realization that the same Aramaic word means both *child* and *servant*.

A child in the Bible is a symbol of innocence, helplessness and vulnerability. I think the child in this text represents any helpless person but especially a humble fellow believer whom the true disciple is to receive. To “welcome” or “receive” means “to be concerned about, to care for, to show kindness to.”

Perhaps even more important in this text is that the child represented the disciples. Picture this image: The child is safe in the loving arms of the Lord of life, the Savior of the world. There is nothing to fear! This is perfect love that casts out fear. The child is also a

sign of promise for the future. We embrace others with the love of Christ to remind them that there is no need to fear.

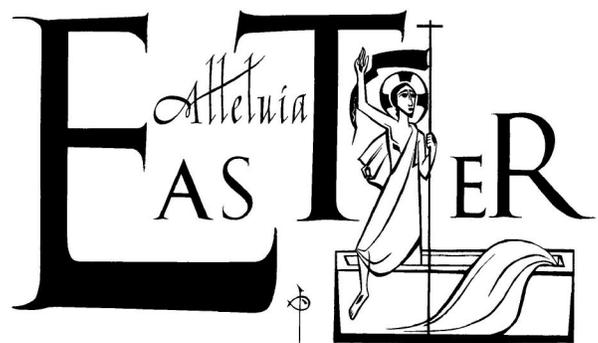
The disciples who were wrestling with Jesus’ teaching about His own death and resurrection needed this image of trust and certainty about the future. They did not yet have the experience of Easter. They did not have the image of the empty tomb or the presence of the resurrected Jesus, but Jesus gave them an image of a child in His arms. They had His love and they were to love others in the same way!

On that first Easter morning, the women heard the first proclamation of Easter from the angels: “He is risen!” The angels asked them to remember Jesus’ words about His suffering and death but also that on the third day He would be raised again. **“Then they remembered his words”** (Luke 24:8 NIV). Jesus’ words were true in life and death and are true for all eternity. The experience of the Risen Lord could not be disconnected from His words. He embodies the Word and, in the Word, you receive Him.

Dealing with death from this perspective, from the perspective of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, reminds us that we have a cause worth living for — which is the same as having a cause worth dying for.

For what cause are we living? This is not a morbid question but one that brings the certainty of a life truly worth living in Christ. Everything else is illusory hope! Beyond our preaching and teaching let us be bold to live in the certainty of Easter! May we boldly proclaim this truth, teach this truth and disciple others to live such a life in Christ.

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!



Nominations sought for positions to be elected at 2019 Convocation

Bishop, Executive Council, Court of Adjudication will be elected

The NALC Nominating Committee is seeking the names of candidates for nomination to serve in positions to be elected at the 2019 NALC Convocation Aug. 8-9 in Indianapolis, Ind.

The Nominating Committee reports that nominations have been coming in for all positions. They currently have 12 nominees for bishop, three nominees each for the lay and clergy positions on the NALC Executive Council, and three nominees for the Court of Adjudication.

The Convocation will elect a new NALC Bishop as well as 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. Both pastors and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication.

Brief descriptions of the duties of each position are available at thenalc.org/nominate2019.

Congregations are encouraged to nominate 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 the leaders of their congregation to inform them of their openness to serving.

All nominations should be submitted by May 3. 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 Nomination Form available at thenalc.org/nominate2019 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.

To prepare for the nomination and election process for bishop, the Executive Council provided a packet of information to congregations in August. The packet includes a booklet of prayers encouraging NALC members to engage in a year of prayer and discernment leading up to the election.

The prayer booklet, nomination form and more information on the election process may be found online at thenalc.org/nominate2019.

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

Congregational annual reports

Congregations are reminded to complete their annual report to the NALC.

Congregations were sent an email with a link to an online form to report the status of the congregation as of Dec. 31, 2018.

Congregations are asked to complete the annual report by May 6. The report may be accessed online at thenalc.org/congregational-report.

Please contact Anne Gleason, agleason@thenalc.org, with any questions about completing the report.

NALC and East European Missions Network help build bridges in Ukraine

By Pastor David Breidenbach

Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor Gemechis Buba, assistant to the bishop for missions, travelled to the Odesa region of Ukraine at the invitation of East European Missions Network (EEMN) Executive Director, Pastor David Breidenbach.

Interfacing with Lutheran Church leaders, pastors and communities of faith was the primary reason for their March visit to Ukraine. Providing collegial support to indigenous pastors, through an EEMN Regional Learning Center Conference, was the practical way they were able to share a biblical foundation and tools for leaders to implement an intentional disciple-making model within their local ministries.

Ukraine is one of the east European countries that endured more than 70 years of Soviet, scientific atheist rule, which left multiple generations of



Pastors from the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine who participated in the conference pose with Pastor David Breidenbach, Pastor Gemechis Buba and Bishop John Bradosky.



Bishop John Bradosky teaching in Ukraine

spiritual orphans in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain.

There is no older generation of believers – no grandmas and grandpas, no fathers or mothers – to lead, teach and guide younger generations along the path of faith. The concepts of knowing a Father in heaven who loves you, having brothers and sisters in Christ, extending forgiveness to others, and the sure and certain hope in Christ are lost in a world cast in the long shadow of its atheistic past.

Almost 28 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, there is still only a small contingent of believers who are desperately trying to fan the flames of faith in a society that still functions largely in its Soviet past.

The visit by Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Buba was landmark and was healing in many ways.

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In recent years, there have been great struggles for power and sharp divisions that have polarized the Lutheran churches in Ukraine.

The German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine (DELKU) had been in great turmoil and subterfuge under now former DELKU Bishop Sergei Macheveski. Since his 2013 installation, the former bishop inflicted much damage to that church body; including defrocking pastors, attempting to revoke baptisms, seizing and selling church property for personal gain, and creating massive division by intimidation within the synod.

Such was his hold in Ukraine that, after a formal appeal was made by the large contingent of disenfranchised DELKU pastors to the Lutheran Church in Germany, an acknowledgment and approval by German Chancellor Angela Merkel was required before a new bishop could be consecrated and installed.

Thanks be to God, this was accomplished in Kiev, Ukraine, on Dec. 3, 2018. Pastor Pavlo Shvartz is the new presiding, interim bishop of DELKU. The synod will elect a permanent bishop during their autumn 2019 presidium.

Although there is still much healing to be done, DELKU is ready to move forward in what the Lord has for them. Bishop Pavlo is a genuine servant of the



The decaying Lutheran church building in Novogradovka which was taken by the Soviets and then returned to the church after the fall of Communism.



Pastor Gemechis Buba teaching in Ukraine

Lord who leads by example and has a genuine heart for mission and outreach to the communities they serve.

DELKU is one of three primary Lutheran church bodies serving in Ukraine. However, the previous DELKU bishop's wrangling affected every Lutheran church and polarized these communities of faith, which normally function within close proximity of one another.

The Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Ukraine (SELCU) functions in a Brethren-Lutheran tradition and is in full cooperation with the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC). While the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) is in full communion with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in North America (WELS).

The NALC is the first foreign church body represented that does not desire to manipulate and control the local church in Ukraine. Unfortunately, this had been the experience of our Ukrainian hosts, with other North American church bodies, and is why it took EEMN three years to gain the trust necessary and to coordinate a visit by the NALC.

The first full day in Ukraine was spent getting familiar with the lay of the land and beginning to try and understand the depth of the recent difficulties and challenges that have been inflicted on the local church communities.

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Pastor Breidenbach arranged with DELKU Synod President, Pastor Aleksandr Gross, a tour of the Odesa region in order to see, first hand, how congregations in small villages are being affected and to learn just how resilient are these people of God!

The three were able to spend time visiting the villages of Petrodolina and Novogradovka, both of which have had their Lutheran church properties seized and their congregations displaced to temporary settings for worship and community.

The village of Novogradovka is also home to a rapidly decaying Lutheran church building that had been closed by the Soviets, remodeled to look more “secular,” and then turned into a house of culture, as a disco and movie theater.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, hundreds of Lutheran church buildings throughout Europe and Russia were returned to their communities. Unfortunately, no money was available to rebuild or maintain the structures, and many have been lost to the elements and years of neglect.

Just outside of Odesa, they were also able to visit the SELCU seminary, which is a large, modern facility



This small storage container is used as worship space for the congregation in Petrodolina.



David Breidenbach, Pastor Gemechis Buba, Pastor Aleksandr Gross and Bishop John Bradosky pose in front of church in Petrodolina that is currently unavailable for use by Pastor Gross’ congregation.

that offers housing for up to 30 students, and yet currently has only one student enrolled.

Although the former DELKU bishop has been officially removed from office, Sergie Machevski continues to exert political and legal control over the properties that he seized.

Church polity is very complicated in Ukraine and allows for Sergie to “legally” own the congregational properties he seized, even though they are technically church-owned property of DELKU.

All of them, including the property belonging to the congregation in Petrodolina that Pastor Alexandr Gross serves, are tied up in government red tape. It could be many more months before they are returned to the congregations. In the meantime, many are worshiping in homes, apartments or, in the case of the congregation in Petrodolina, a tiny storage container.

On Tuesday, March 9, an historic meeting occurred as the new DELKU bishop, the bishop of SELCU, and a bishop’s representative from ULC sat down and talked, at the same table, for more than five hours!

A meeting of these three church entities had never happened before and was arranged solely because NALC Bishop Bradosky, Pastor Buba and Pastor Breidenbach were in Ukraine to teach and propose ideas about ministry cooperation and partnership.

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The venue allowed for the bishops to ask pressing questions of one another and for all participants to share the common vision of our Lutheran heritage and the sufficiency of God's Word. There were many smiles and pats on the back, as well as a genuine spirit of new beginnings. The visitors from North America were even able to suggest cooperative use of the large SELCU seminary building that remains mostly empty.

Wednesday through Friday afternoon, the EEMN Regional Learning Center Conference was hosted in the small coastal village of Zatoka, which is on the Black Sea. Members from both DELKU and SELCU (including both bishops) attended the conference, where they focused on learning the foundations of biblical disciple-making. They were also joined by Pastor Valery Hryhoryk, NALC global worker and EEMN ministry partner from Belarus.

Over the course of the three days, which included worship, learning and breaking bread together, Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Buba alternated teaching topics that addressed questions surrounding our biblical identity, what being a disciple looks like, the biblical mandate, and what are the keys to establishing a disciple-making culture.

Pastor David led the group through practical application, self assessment and putting their plans to paper for making the shift to an intentional



Bishop John Bradosky answers questions at the pastors' conference in Ukraine.



Pastors of the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Ukraine pose with Pastor Gemechis Buba, Bishop John Bradosky and Pastor David Breidenbach.

disciple-making model. At the end of their time together, Bishop Bradosky taught an inspiring sending session on the kerygma.

While the topics covered may seem unremarkable for preachers and teachers of the Word to dwell on, for most in attendance they had never heard nor learned these foundational concepts for building a healthy ministry.

The blessings were abundant and flowed both ways, as there have already been requests and suggestions for future collaboration and partnering in the Gospel in Ukraine.

Pastor Oleg Schewtschenko, from SELC, sent this follow up message to Pastor Breidenbach:

David, thank you so much for bringing good teaching and healing to Ukraine once again. It is so amazing to have you come over and encourage the ministers of the churches! This time your visit was very good for our bishop! Like never before he was so open to the teaching and to the work of EEMN (and NALC). He was so blessed with the teaching of the conference and is asking when we can have all three of you over to teach that in SELCU.

To God be the glory! Amen.

Pastor David Breidenbach is executive director of the East European Missions Network (EEMN), a Ministry Partner of the NALC. You can learn more about the ministry of EEMN at eemn.org.

Lutheran Week 2019 is Aug. 5-9

Lutheran Week 2019 will be held Aug. 5-9 at The Westin Indianapolis in downtown Indianapolis, Ind. This year's theme is "Walking by the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit," based on Galatians 5:16-23.

Lutheran Week is the annual gathering of the North American Lutheran Church. The events of Lutheran Week include the Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium, Women of the NALC Annual Gathering, Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology, Mission Festival and Convocation.

NALC Mission Festival and Convocation are Wednesday, Aug. 7, through Friday, Aug. 9. The \$250 registration fee for the Convocation and Mission Festival includes four meals — dinner on Wednesday and Thursday and lunch on Thursday and Friday.

The Mission Festival will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 7. The Mission Festival will include a worship service, keynote address, as well as presentations and breakout sessions.

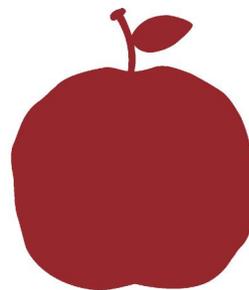
Mission Districts will meet separately from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Wednesday.

The NALC Convocation will be held Thursday, Aug. 8, and Friday, Aug. 9. The Convocation is the annual meeting of the NALC.

Among the highlights of this year's Convocation will be the election of a new bishop for the NALC and a banquet honoring Bishop John Bradosky for his service to the Church. The banquet will also feature entertainment by Canadian musician Steve Bell and English poet Malcolm Guite.

The Convocation begins at 8 a.m. on Thursday and will conclude with a service of Holy Communion including the installation of the newly-elected bishop of the NALC. The closing worship is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. on Friday.

Special guests for Lutheran Week include leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and



Walking *by the* Spirit
with the Fruit of the Spirit
LUTHERAN WEEK 2019

the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

Carl E. Braaten-Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology will be offered on Tuesday, Aug. 6, from 1 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and on Wednesday, Aug. 7, from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Registration fee of \$150 includes lunch on Wednesday.

Women of the NALC Annual Gathering is on Tuesday, Aug. 6 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Registration fee of \$100 includes lunch on Tuesday.

Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium will be on Monday, Aug. 5, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and on Tuesday, Aug. 6, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Registration fee of \$80 includes lunch on Monday.

Hotel rooms are available at a discounted rate of \$149 a night. The discounted rate is available Aug. 1-13. A link to registration is provided on the NALC website.

Parking in downtown Indianapolis is expensive. Alternative parking options are being explored. Information about parking options will be posted on the NALC website as it becomes available.

You may register for any or all of the events of Lutheran Week at thenalc.org/lutheranweek.

Braaten-Benne Lectures to focus on work of Holy Spirit

The 2019 Carl E. Braaten and Robert D. Benne Lectures in Theology will focus on the work of the Holy Spirit under the Lutheran Week theme, "Walking by the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit." The annual theological conference is Aug. 6-7 at The Westin Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Ind.

Registration fee for the lectures is \$150 and includes lunch on Wednesday, Aug. 7. You may register for the lectures and the other events of Lutheran Week online at thenalc.org/lutheranweek.

Dr. Robert Benne will address the Holy Spirit and Christian life. Dr. Benne was Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion and chair of the Religion and Philosophy Department at Roanoke College in Salem, Va., for 18 years before he left full-time teaching in 2000. He founded the Roanoke College Center for Religion and Society in 1982 and served as its director until 2012. Upon his retirement, the college renamed the center in his honor. He is the author of several books including *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*; and *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics*. The annual lecture series is named in his honor.

Dr. Paul Hinlicky will explain how the Holy Spirit "disappeared in Lutheranism." Dr. Hinlicky is the Rev. J. Marshall Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College. He is the author of several books including *Luther for Evangelicals: A Reintroduction*; *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* and *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics*.

Dr. Craig Keener will address the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. He is the F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky. He is the author of 25 books including *Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* and *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost*. His IVP *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* has sold more than 500,000 copies.

Dr. Matthew Levering will focus on the Holy Spirit and salvation. Dr. Levering holds the James N. and Mary D. Perry, Jr. Chair of Theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake in



Robert Benne



Paul Hinlicky



Craig Keener



Matthew Levering



Derek Nelson

Mundelein, Ill. He is the author of more than 20 books including *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*; *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation* and *Was the Reformation a Mistake?*

Dr. Derek Nelson will speak about the Holy Spirit and the stuff of life. He is Professor of Religion and Stephen S. Bowen Professor of the Liberal Arts, at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Ind. He is the author or editor of 10 books including *A History of Christian Theology*; *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther* and *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Hinlicky co-edited *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*.

North American Lutheran Seminary partners with Lutheran colleges to educate future NALC pastors

By the Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee

The North American Lutheran Seminary (NALC) is working to make formation for pastoral ministry — an intrinsically complex and demanding commitment — more practical and affordable for those who have been called.

As we prepare for the NALC's annual campaign in the month of May, we say thank you again for the generosity of individual and congregational donors who have helped to provide full-tuition support for many students in residence at our Seminary Center in Ambridge, Pa. Your love, prayers and financial gifts are making seminary education possible for our future pastors.

The NALC is now entering into partnerships with faithful undergraduate institutions in order to steward your gifts in the best way possible.

In this spirit, we envision a closer integration of the undergraduate and postgraduate (seminary) phases of education, in order to eliminate unnecessary repetition and reduce the time and cost to complete the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree, without either sacrificing academic rigor or minimizing the importance of the relational and formational aspects of a residential seminary education.

Toward this end, we have established cooperative arrangements with three Lutheran undergraduate institutions: Concordia College New York in Bronxville, N.Y.; Concordia University St. Paul in St. Paul, Minn.; and Grand View University, in Des Moines, Iowa.

The NALC will count certain undergraduate courses — taken at appropriately advanced levels — toward the master's degree for students who continue to the NALC from these schools.



In addition, specific NALC courses taken by undergraduates may count toward the bachelor's degree from our partner institutions.

A student majoring in theology at any of these schools could fulfill the introductory requirements for the M.Div. from the NALC. All of the course equivalencies are specifically identified in the agreement between each undergraduate institution and the NALC.

A student at Grand View University or Concordia University St. Paul taking the full slate of courses with NALC equivalencies could complete a B.A. in theology and an M.Div. in a total of six years (four at the undergraduate institution and two at the NALC) plus internship, instead of the typical seven, with the resulting cost savings.

A student at Concordia College New York could graduate with a B.A. in theology, a B.S. in business and an M.Div. in five years (three at Concordia and two at the NALC) plus internship.

We believe that these cooperative arrangements represent a significant way to address the practical concerns of prospective seminarians, as we do our part to serve the identification and training of a new generation of evangelical, orthodox and confessional pastors and workers in Christ's Church.

We seek to bear Luther out: "I appeal once more to all Christians, especially the pastors and preachers,

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Friends of Madagascar Mission

Throughout the history of global mission work from churches in North America, beginning in the 19th century, we have seen the great mission outreach organized for the most part by mission societies.

In the 20th century the mission work was taken over by church denominations. It became institutionalized.

As we enter the 21st century, we are once again experiencing a return to mission societies claiming a greater role in Christian mission work around the globe.

It is in this climate of change, in how mission work is being done today, that the Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM) was begun. We believe we have a unique role in the future of mission, particularly in Madagascar at this time.

We began our fundraising activities in 2011, and each year we continue to grow in giving from our generous donors. For this we give thanks to God!

We are blessed to share an update from Pastor Andriamihaja Jean Norbert, the coordinator of FOMM evangelists in the Betroka Synod of the Malagasy Lutheran Church.

Pastor David Lerseth
Friends of Madagascar Mission

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"
— Romans 1:16 ESV

God is still at work! The setting for this story is among the Bara People. The work among them is very difficult. They are not only cattle thieves, but they are deeply involved in witchcraft and demon possession. This makes it harder to reach them with



Some of the 123 people baptized at Ambatomanga, Madagascar, as a result of the work of an evangelist from Friends of Madagascar Mission.

the Gospel. However, as Paul wrote, "And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained" (2 Timothy 2:9 NLT).

The story of the village of Ambatomanga is a story of the grace and love of God toward the lost. Being a village of the Bara tribe and holding strongly to their customs and culture, it seems impossible that 123 people would surrender their lives in one day to the lordship of Jesus Christ. But there is not a heart so hard that the Gospel cannot break it down. The story of the village of Ambatomanga is proof that the Gospel is the power of God to save.

Two evangelists supported by Friends of Madagascar Mission — Jourmana Mananjary and Bruno Auguste — first visited the Ambatomanga village together. Rema, a Bara man from Ambatomanga, was the first one to receive them and open the doors of the village to their evangelization. He prepared the meetings and the place for the evangelists to work. After the first visit, evangelists Jourmana and Bruno asked the Betroka Lutheran Church Synod to accept an invitation to support them in the work of evangelization in the village of Ambatomanga.

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On November 19, 2016, Pastor Rasolondrazany Manoela, Betroka Synod president; Pastor Tomoera Alexandre, the leader of the evangelism department; and Pastor Mara Jacob, together with 61 Lutheran Christians, went to Ambatomanga to visit and preach the Gospel to them.

In the afternoon, they had worship and shared testimonies about Jesus and what He has done in their lives. In the evening they showed the film, "The Final Judgment." The film describes the last day of a person's life and the judgment of God. The Bara people from the village of Ambatomanga, after seeing this film and hearing the preaching, started to repent and wanted to be baptized. The next day we saw a great miracle and harvest. The seeds produced great fruit: 123 Bara people surrendered to Christ and were baptized.

On the same day, the chief of the Malasos (chief of cattle rustlers) gave his life to Jesus. His name is Jean Claude. He is also the elder of the village. For now the work in Ambatomanga is growing. After five months, the number of Christians is increasing. They are worshiping every Sunday morning below the trees, sharing the Gospel and being light among darkness. Because of this we sent an evangelist, Ralahimanana Hugo de la Patience, to live full time in the village and to teach and lead them.

Glory, honor and power be to our Lord God, now and forever. Amen.

Families, individuals and congregations may support an evangelist in Madagascar through Friends of Madagascar Mission, an NALC Ministry Partner. The cost of support is \$700 a year (\$600 for salary and \$100 for continuing education events). All sponsors will receive the name of an evangelist, a photo, normally one letter a year and at least one report of the evangelist's work. The need is great. We have requests for around 50 additional evangelists. Why? Because the people are hungry for the Word of God. For additional information about the work of Friends of Madagascar Mission or to partner with them, please visit madagascarmission.org.



A local witch doctor who became a Christian poses with Pastor Rasolondrazany Manoela, Betroka Synod president.

Seminary

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that they not try to become doctors too soon and imagine that they know everything. ... Let them constantly read and teach, learn and meditate and ponder. ... If they show such diligence, then I promise them – and their experience will bear me out – that they will gain much fruit and God will make excellent people out of them" (*Large Catechism, Preface*).

We are grateful and excited to be working with our current partners, and we are actively developing further partnerships of this kind with other institutions.

You can help us by letting students in discernment know about these opportunities. We would be very happy to answer questions or to direct inquiries to our partners. And we ask you to continue praying for the NALS and for all whom the Lord will be bringing to our community for the sake of the Church's witness to His kingdom.

The Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee is the Interim Director for Recruitment and Partnership for the North American Lutheran Seminary. Learn more about the seminary at thenals.org.

Polarization or reconciliation?

Part 2 - Compromise and Sacrifice

News Flash: There is tension and conflict in every Christian congregation!

Maybe that's not news to anyone. Many who live in Christian community are frustrated and disappointed to discover that all people within the Body of Christ do not live in peace and harmony.

Many distance themselves from the church because they cannot live with the reality of disagreements and discord.

Last month, we discussed polarization and reconciliation within the local congregation. We ended our Ministry Matters article in March making this point:

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God ... if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7, 11 ESV). Jesus said, also at the Last Supper, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35 ESV). In a church body that is focused on the Great Commission, discipleship and disciple-making, it is clear that we are to be known by our love for our Lord, love for one another and love for the world. Anything less hinders our witness to the world. Anything less is a barrier to discipleship and disciple-making. Anything less implies we are not Jesus' disciples! Because God loves us, in Jesus Christ our Savior, let us love one another.

Reflecting upon our conversation last month, it seems there is something else that should be said about handling tension and conflict within the church — there must always be sacrifice and compromise!

In a church body that was formed because we are not willing to compromise with regard to biblical teaching and the truth and authority of God's Word, it sometimes seems that "compromise" is a bad thing.

Certainly, we are right in not compromising the faith that has been delivered to us. Certainly, we want to



Ministry Matters

Rev. Dr. David Wendel
Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

hold fast to the Word of truth. As Luther so famously stated at the Diet of Worms:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason — I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other — my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

When the Word of God is at stake, unless convinced by Scripture and plain reason, we will not compromise or sacrifice God's truth. Here Luther stood, and here we, humbly, but boldly stand.

However, most conflict and tension in the church has nothing to do with God's truth, but with human wants, desires and needs! In these, we must always be prepared to make sacrifices and to compromise.

At a recent gathering, someone asked, "Can there really be resolution of conflict in congregations? It seems the only solution is that someone ends up leaving!"

It is true that often in congregational conflict, rather than seek positive resolve, someone leaves the congregation — either going to another congregation or distancing oneself from the Christian community in frustration and disappointment.

This usually happens because no one addresses the tension and conflict immediately and directly,

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allowing those involved to become polarized and entrenched with little chance for honest communication and reconciliation.

When addressed openly and honestly from the start — as soon as the conflict arises — there is a real chance for resolution. However, resolution of conflict in the congregation, as in all relationships, requires compromise, which sometimes also means sacrifice.

Whether conflict in the church is about choice of music, worship service times, budgetary matters or the color of the carpet, none of these are of such magnitude that there cannot be compromise. If the goal, truly, is to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Ephesians 4:3 ESV*), it would seem all within the Body of Christ would be willing to engage in honest, open communication aimed at consensus through compromise, which often requires sacrifice.

What is the definition of “compromise” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary?

1. *Settlement of differences by arbitration or by consent reached by mutual concessions.*
2. *Something intermediate between or blending qualities of two different things.*

“Mutual concessions” means sacrifice. It means each party sacrifices and gives up something in order to reach agreement or consent. In congregational conflict, it is best if all parties in the conflict make “mutual” concessions. Sometimes, however, to reach consensus, one may sacrifice one’s firmly held opinion or desire.

Consensus-building does not mean everyone gets what they want. It means everyone seeks the common good and everyone is willing to make mutual concessions to reach what is best for all. If only pastors, church leaders and individual members would keep that in mind, conflict resolution in the church would come more frequently and easily!

One of our pastors gave me a copy of the book they were using in their congregation. It’s *I Am a Church*

Member, by Thom S. Rainer. In this little book, there is a chapter titled, “I Will Be a Unifying Church Member.” That chapter is followed by the chapter titled, “I Will Not Let My Church Be about My Preferences and Desires.” To be a unifying church member, rather than one who divides, one will necessarily understand that “church” is not about “my preferences and desires.”

Rainer states, “Christians can sometimes act just like those demanding children who want things their way. Temper tantrums in churches may not include church members lying on the floor kicking and screaming, but some come close. But the strange thing about church membership is that you actually give up your preferences when you join. Don’t get me wrong; there may be much about your church that you like a lot. But you are there to meet the needs of others. You are there to serve others. You are there to give. You are there to *sacrifice*.”

In a survey of “inwardly focused congregations” completed by Rainer’s research team, they found 10 dominant behavior patterns in congregations that were largely self-serving and not mission-driven. They found these common patterns:

1. Worship wars — people fighting over their personal music preferences and order of service.
2. Prolonged meetings dealing with minutia, rather than the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.
3. Focus on the facility, the protection and preservation of rooms, furniture, and other parts of the building and grounds.
4. Program driven — focus on programs as an end, rather than a means.
5. Inwardly focused budget — expenditures focused on needs and comforts of members, rather than reaching beyond the walls of the church.
6. Inordinate and unreasonable demands for pastoral attention.

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NALC Disaster Response update

Disasters are occurring throughout the United States – West Coast fires and flooding, Great Plains flooding and tornadoes, Midwest tornadoes and East Coast hurricanes.

NALC congregations are involved with donations management of material goods, volunteer coordination of disaster volunteer teams and, most importantly, Christian spiritual care.

Is your congregation ready to respond to a disaster? Do you have a disaster plan? Do you have information as to how NALC Disaster Response can assist in times of disaster?

Plan now and be ready. Check for more information at thenalc.org/nalc-disaster-response and go to ready.gov for FEMA's Preparedness Manual.

Donations of material goods may be sent to NALC Disaster Warehouse, 810 Main St., Caldwell, Ohio 43724. See the NALC website for needed items.

Financial donations may be given online or sent to: NALC Disaster Response; 2299 Palmer Dr., Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112.



Members of NALC congregations who responded to tornado disasters in Texas pose for a photo with truck filled with supplies to help with disaster response.

Regular updates on current disaster responses are being posted at thenalc.org.

Volunteers are needed for several disaster response efforts. Contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response coordinator, for more information as to how you can help at disasterresponse@thenalc.org or 740-509-1132.

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7. Attitudes of entitlement – members expect and demand special treatment.

8. Greater concern about change in the church, rather than the work of the Gospel to change lives.

9. Anger and hostility – members are regularly angry, regularly expressing anger toward pastor, church staff and other members.

10. Apathy toward evangelism – more concerned about their own needs than the spiritual needs of others in community and world.

The goal for each of us who are church members – disciples and followers of Jesus Christ – is to be a

unifying member within the body. We do that by not allowing our personal preferences and desires to influence our thoughts, words and deeds within the congregation. We are members of the body called to serve, to give, to sacrifice and, yes, sometimes, to compromise! We are members of the body for the sake of mission – to reach others with the Good News of Jesus' saving death and resurrection! Anything else is a distraction and a hindrance to that mission.

Remember, life within the Body of Christ is life in community, and life in community naturally leads to disagreements, which sometimes leads to conflict and division. Let us not become polarized but let us always seek reconciliation and restoration, for the sake of our witness to the world!

Youth and Family Ministry

By Gary and Laurie Pecuch

It's Ventures in Youth Ministry registration time! To register visit thenalc.org/lutheranweek.

Join us Aug. 5-6 in Indianapolis, Ind., for our third Ventures in Youth Ministry Symposium. This is a time of gathering youth ministry folks together for learning, sharing and renewal.

We will meet that Monday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Tuesday 9 a.m. to noon. We will have presentations and discussions around the topics of developing spiritual disciplines and ministry skills into young people and adult volunteers.

Registrants will be encouraged to bring and share best practices. We will also meet in affinity groups so you can meet peers from around the country who



work in similar situations. We are strongest when we learn from each other.

The last monthly webinar session for this school year is May 14. Here is the registration link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8091298768071890689>

Hoping to connect with you soon.

Gary and Laurie Pecuch serve the NALC as youth ministry coaches. You may contact them at families@thenalc.org.

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