



# 2024 NALC MISSION CONVOCATION ELECTS LEADERS, APPROVES BUDGET

The 2024 Mission Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church elected members of the Executive Council and Court of Court of Adjudication of the NALC and the Board of Regents of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS). The convocation was held online on Friday, Aug. 9. Nearly 300 delegates were able to vote and to join in discussion using their computer, tablet, or phone.



**Jeff Janke**



**Jay Jackson**



**Ken Reed**

The meeting was held online as part of the transition to holding convocations every other year. The business of the convocation was limited to elections and the approval of a proposed budget—the items necessary during the transition period.

Jeff Janke, a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Oregon, Illinois, and the Rev. Jay D. Jackson Jr., pastor of First English Lutheran Church in Mansfield, Ohio, were elected to three-year terms on the Executive Council.

The Executive Council functions as the board of directors for the NALC, providing leadership for the church between convocations.

The Rev. Ken Reed of St. James Lutheran Church in Newton, North Carolina, was elected to a three-year term on the Court of Adjudication. The Court of Adjudication hears appeals from disciplinary decisions and resolves questions of interpretation of NALC governing documents.



**Alliyah Blakeley**



**Mark Metze**

The Rev. Alliyah (Greaver) Blakeley, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Greenville, Ohio, and the Rev. Mark Metze pastor of Annapolis Lutheran Church in Edgewater, Maryland, were elected to five-year terms on the NALS Board of Regents.

*Continued on Page 2*

*Continued from Page 1*

Both pastors are graduates of the NALS and Trinity School for Ministry (now called Trinity Anglican Seminary) in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

The Board of Regents provides oversight, supervision and direction for the NALS Network. The NALS Network includes the Seminary Center at Trinity Anglican Seminary in Ambridge, Pennsylvania; and partner seminaries Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina; Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama; Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta; and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and Houston, Texas.

The term lengths—three years instead of four for Executive Council and Court of Adjudication and five years instead of six for the Board of Regents—were changed as a part of the NALC’s transition to having in-person convocations every other year.

The convocation approved a proposed \$4.4 million budget for 2025. This is a 15 percent increase from the \$3.8 million budget approved for 2024.

The Rev. Dr. Dan Selbo, NALC bishop, presented an oral and written report to the convocation.

Bishop Selbo explained his vision for the NALC’s future. “Here’s where I believe God has been leading us and who we are becoming. We are a church that renews its congregations, equips its people, and becomes a disciple-making body,” he said.

“Based upon our Core Values, our Lord’s Great Commandment and Commission, and seen through the lens of our mission—to love God, love each other, and pass on the faith—we are living into God’s highest purpose for us: A church that renews, equips, and becomes a disciple-making body,” he said.



***Bishop Dan Selbo presiding at the online convocation***

“We’re going to approach these two areas—renewing and equipping—purposefully, strategically, and fruitfully. We’re in the process of developing resources so that all our congregations, regardless of size or location, will be able to engage in those essential steps and receive the support they need to become stronger, healthier, and better prepared to carry out the work entrusted to us by Jesus,” Bishop Selbo said.

Bishop Selbo’s oral report to the convocation is printed on Pages 17-23 of the *NALC News*.

Maddie Benson, director of development, highlighted the impact of the NALC’s 20/20 Vision and the fundraising appeal that is a part of the vision. The appeal has received more than \$2 million of its \$5 million goal.

For more information on the convocation including reports and streaming video go to [lutheranweek.com](http://lutheranweek.com).

The 2025 NALC Mission Convocation will be held Aug. 6-8 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Lutheran Week activities will run Aug. 3-8.

# NALC ANNOUNCES STAFF CHANGES

The North American Lutheran Church has announced several changes to its staff.

The Rev. Dr. Amy Little, general secretary, will be on a medical leave of absence effective Oct. 1. She is undergoing treatment for cancer.

The Rev. Carol Fryer has been named director of missions. She previously served as missions specialist for the NALC. She will serve the NALC from New York, New York, where her husband, the Rev. Gregory Fryer, serves as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church.

The Rev. Tony D. Ede has been named director of equipping ministries. He previously served as a communications specialist. This new position will focus on Bishop Dan Selbo's strategy for equipping and renewing NALC congregations with a comprehensive set of practical, discipleship-oriented resources, courses, and coaching opportunities. Pastor Ede serves from the church office in Bedford, Texas.

Dianne Morton has been named director of finance. She manages the day-to-day financial operations of the NALC working with NALC treasurer Scott Kramer. She serves from the church office in Bedford, Texas.

Steven Neaton is transitioning into a new position on the communications team as relationship management administrator and registrar. This position will lead much of the NALC's expanding database, record-keeping, event registration, and archival work.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba finishes his work on NALC staff on Sept. 30. He served the NALC since the beginning of the church body in global missions leadership. He will continue leading several global missions from Ethiopia.

Anne Gleason will finish her work as financial administrator on



**Tony D. Ede**



**Carol Fryer**



**Amy Little**



**Dianne Morton**



**Steven Neaton**



**Anne Gleason**



**Gemechis Buba**



**Brad Hales**

Oct. 31. Anne has served in this role since the beginning of the NALC. She served the Word Alone Network and Lutheran CORE prior to the formation of the NALC.

**Continued on Page 7**

# KRAMER NAMED NALC TREASURER

Scott Kramer of Boerne, Texas, has been appointed treasurer of the North American Lutheran Church.

He has experience working in NALC leadership, having previously served on the NALC Executive Council from 2017 to 2023. On the Executive Council, he served on multiple task forces and committees including the Long-Range Planning Committee and Finance Committee. He was a key leader in the process that resulted in a central NALC office in Texas.



**Scott Kramer**

University of Utah. His hobbies include model railroading, antique tractors, and running marathons.

Scott is a lifelong Lutheran. He has been a member of seven Lutheran churches in five states, serving in urban, suburban, small town and rural settings. He has served as president, vice president and member of call, mission, endowment, administration and property committees.

He has also served on many corporate boards, public and private, from startups to companies on the major stock exchanges. He currently serves on the board of a major telecommunications company. He also manages Krdamer Lone Tree Farms, established by his great grandfather 134 years ago.

The treasurer is appointed by the Executive Council and is the chief financial officer of the NALC, overseeing the receiving and disbursing of all funds and assuring proper financial management systems and policies. Scott will work closely with Dianne Morton, director of finance, who manages the day-to-day financial operations of the NALC.

Scott and his wife Diane have been married for 50 years. They have two daughters and two grandchildren, all members of St. John Lutheran in Boerne, Texas.

He holds a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Missouri and an M.B.A. from the

Michael Johnson of Sedona, Arizona, served as NALC treasurer from 2020 to 2024. He was unable to continue as treasurer because of a serious accident.

In May, the Executive Council appointed Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., to serve as interim treasurer during the search for a new treasurer. Schwarz served as treasurer for the first 10 years of the church body.

# NEW NALC MAILING ADDRESS

The North American Lutheran Church has a new mailing address.

All mail for the NALC, including all financial gifts, should be sent to:

North American Lutheran Church  
2113 Harwood Road, Suite 309  
PMB 409  
Bedford, TX 76021-4703

This address is a mail service that receives and handles the NALC's mail. This is not the physical address of the NALC office which is located at a different location in Bedford, Texas, about a mile away from the mail service center.

For those who would like to visit the NALC office, the physical address of the office is available by contacting the office. That address isn't regularly published to avoid confusion for mailing purposes.

# ALL PRAISE AND THANKS TO GOD

## LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI

*This is the first in a series of columns on worship and music by the Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin, president emeritus of the North American Lutheran Seminary.*

Have you ever wondered *why* we do *what* we do when we gather for worship? You may have also noticed that *how* we do something has the power to communicate the content of *what* we do in a variety of ways.

This new NALC News column hopes to help us to understand the *why, what, how* (and maybe even the *who, when, and where*) of our weekly and daily gatherings as we give glory to God with “hearts and hands, and voices” (“*Now Thank We All Our God*,” LBW #534, vs. 1).

In the months to come, we’ll take a small look at every part of the liturgies for Holy Communion and Holy Baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. But today, I’d like us to learn about a phrase that’s often used when speaking about the Church’s liturgies, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. It’s shorthand for a Latin phrase that was written in the fifth century by the theologian, Prosper of Aquitaine, *ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. Don’t worry if you don’t read Latin! It means in essence, “that the law of praying establishes the law of believing.” Or, as I like to frame it, as the Church prays, so she believes.

Even though the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* came into popular use in the 20th century through liturgical scholars, Prosper was actually commenting on 1 Timothy 2:1-6. Prosper condemns the heresy of the semi-Pelagians. Semi-Pelagians believed that humans, rather than God had to make the first move toward their salvation. In this way of thinking, salvation depended on our actions, putting humans in charge of all things, especially giving us power to wield the law to our own advantage. Rather than thanking God for His gifts of love and mercy, when we put ourselves in charge we turn the Gospel into a new law.



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## ALL PRAISE AND THANKS TO GOD

REV. DR. AMY C. SCHIFRIN  
NALC PRESIDENT EMERITUS

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1 Timothy 2:1-6 calls us to prayer, and names some of the forms of prayer in the Sunday liturgy, “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings.” These structures of prayer in the gathered assembly all have Christ, the mediator, at the center. We are not coming to prayer on our own, for He is already praying for us. He prays without ceasing. He is ever present when His Word is proclaimed, and He is with us as His body is placed in our hands. Through Christ Jesus we are joined to the heavenly liturgy. The source and destination of our supplications is God, our Father, and it is through His only begotten Son that the law is fulfilled (Matthew 5:17), and that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is brought to prayer (Hebrews 2:17-18).

As the Church prays, so she believes, because our liturgies are designed so that we might not only experience God making the first move, but God making every move toward us, breaking open our hearts, so that we, at last, will joyfully give Him thanks and praise.

***The Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schifrin is a retired NALC pastor living in Montrose, Colorado. She served as president of the North American Lutheran Seminary from 2013 to 2019. She has taught music and liturgy on the college and seminary levels in addition to serving as a pastor in both Canada and the United States. She has a Ph.D. in liturgical studies and homiletics from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.***

# NALC DISASTER RESPONSE

By Mary Bates  
Disaster Response Coordinator

As children returned to classrooms, a common interruption during their first week back is a fire drill. It's important that as students get back into routines at their schools, that they are reminded what to do in case of an emergency. September is National Preparedness Month in the United States.



Are you prepared for a disaster?

Have you ever considered staging a "drill" to help your family prepare for a possible disaster? If you needed to evacuate your home, how quickly could your family get out? What would you take with you? What would you do with a pet? Do you have a first aid kit ready? What essentials should you take with you? Medicine? Insurance papers? Water? Food? Money? Does the car have a full tank? Are there multiple exits in your home? Have you established a meeting place for your family in case you get separated? What about valuables?

The NALC Disaster Response Task Force encourages you to have a family meeting and talk about what everyone should do in case of a disaster.

Residents and visitors to the Carolina Coasts are always attentive to potential tropical storms and hurricanes that have the potential to make their way toward the coast. But the category of a storm isn't always a predictor of damage or flooding. That was certainly the case as historic rains flooded homes, roads, and vehicles making water rescues necessary.

More than a foot of rain, accompanied by gusting winds and thunderstorms, created havoc. Flash flooding continues to impact homes, businesses and roads. New Hanover County, North Carolina, received more than 18 inches of rain, and Hood

Creek in Brunswick County recorded its highest water level ever at 14 feet.

NALC Disaster Response is thankful for Kings Mountain's ability to respond with flood buckets, and other emergency relief supplies to Bolivia, North Carolina (to be taken to Winnabow, which is currently underwater). Deliveries to the Wilmington area are scheduled in the days to come. Please keep those in crisis and our teams of volunteers in your prayers especially as darkness rolls in, and flooding continues.

NALC Disaster Response is responding to Hurricane Francine and also to current or ongoing needs from disasters in 16 states. We will be responding to Hurricane Helene which made landfall in Florida on Sept. 26 and has caused damage in several states.

We, too, are staying on top of our preparedness. Some of our warehouses are well stocked and ready to go, while others are needing to be filled up again. NALC congregations and mission districts have been outstanding in their contributions of disaster kits, recovery equipment, financial support, prayers, gift cards and volunteers. Thank you so much for your partnership in being God's presence with those in crisis.

***Continued on Page 7***

# ONLINE CLASS ON REVELATION

The North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) will offer an online adult education class on Revelation this October. The class is entitled “Engaging Revelation.” The class will meet at 7 p.m. ET on Thursdays.

Last October the seminary offered a class on Revelation; this class will continue the study. You do not have to have attended the first class to join this one. New participants are welcome.

The class will be taught by the Rev. Dr. Mark Braaten, Southern Area assistant to the bishop for the NALC. Pastor Braaten’s Doctor of Ministry degree is in Revelation studies. He has taught on the book of Revelation for 30 years. He is the author of two books on Revelation, *Come Lord Jesus: A Study of Revelation* and *Engaging Revelation*.

This class will look at four topics in Revelation. The class will read the biblical texts, look at what the texts said in their original context, and explore what they say to us today.

Here is the schedule:

Oct. 3—The Dragon, Beast, 666, Revelation 12-13.

Oct. 10—Why I Don't like the Theory of a Rapture.

Oct. 17—Armageddon, Revelation 16 and 19.

Oct. 24—New Jerusalem, Revelation 21 and 22.



**Mark Braaten**

For more information or to register to [thenals.org](https://thenals.org).

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## *Continued from Page 6*

We look forward to your on-going donations and encourage you to stay diligent in all your efforts. Disasters come at unexpected times and those we serve depend on our readiness. We give thanks to God for enabling us to serve in our communities.

Our Volunteer Training Center in Caldwell, Ohio, is available to for retreats and meetings. Contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response coordinator, at 740-509-1132 or [disasterresponse@thenalc.org](mailto:disasterresponse@thenalc.org) to schedule a time for volunteer training, mission trips or to ask about how you can serve.

Flood buckets, disaster response kits and supplies should go to your area disaster warehouse or sent to: NALC Disaster Response, 16500 Noble Ave., Caldwell, Ohio 43724.

Monetary donations may be made online at [thenalc.org/giving](https://thenalc.org/giving) or mailed to:  
North American Lutheran Church  
2113 Harwood Road, Suite 309  
PMB 409  
Bedford, TX 76021-4703

# STAFF CHANGES AND OPENINGS

## *Continued from Page 3*

Pastor Brad Hales finishes his work on the NALC staff on Sept. 30. Pastor Hales has served on the NALC staff part time since 2018 in a variety of roles including director of domestic mission and most recently as director of church planting and aging ministries. Pastor Hales will continue to serve as pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, Virginia.

The NALC is seeking people to fill three positions on the communication staff: a full-time communications specialist; a full-time communications specialist and seminary liaison; and a half-time communications assistant.

More information on these positions is available at [thenalc.org](https://thenalc.org).

# DENIS AND ELA SHALLARI, NALC GLOBAL WORKERS IN ALBANIA

*By Angela Breidenbach*

*Missions Support and Development Coordinator*

I would like to introduce you to Denis (i.e. Dennis but pronounced like Denise) and Ela Shallari. They are a young ministry couple living and serving in their native land of Albania (modern day Illyricum). They have been received as a NALC global workers through Spiritual Orphans Network (SON).

Albania was once a strong Christian region; however, it was taken under Ottoman rule in 1385 and remained so until 1912, during which time Islam was forced upon the people. It is interesting to note that when talking to Albanians about the Ottoman occupation, they have a visceral reaction, but don't correlate Islam with what was imposed upon them.

In fact, for most Albanians, the fact that they are Muslim means that they are Albanian. So, in essence they have become cultural Muslims. For the majority of Albanians, this means that they identify as Muslim and continue to carry out the customs associated with Islam, but most do not practice their faith (or are even literate). To further complicate this mission field, Albania was under communist rule from 1946 to 1991, where essentially, the government or state took the place of God.

All of this has left a people without initiative, without purpose and without hope.



*Denis and Ela Shallari*

Denis and Ela are currently part of a ministry which is part of Spiritual Orphans Network (SON) called Hope for Diber. Recently, they have felt called to expand their reach and are working to form a new non-governmental organization (NGO— like a non-profit) in a more populated region where they will live among the people as Christians.

One of the many aspects of their new ministry will be to come alongside the Roma people. This is a much-needed outreach as the Roma population is significantly marginalized all over this part of the world. Once formed, this NGO will also be a part of SON.



# DR. HANG NGUYEN NU, NALC GLOBAL WORKER IN VIETNAM

*By Pastor William Moberly  
Awakening Lives to World Mission*

Dr. Hang Nguyen Nu has been received as an NALC global worker through Awakening Lives to World Mission (ALWM).

ALWM is blessed to be in partnership with Dr. Hang and her Vital Links Vietnam medical and evangelism ministry. My wife and I returned in late June from another visit working alongside this powerful and fruitful ministry. Dr. Hang has demonstrated a clear call and creative resolve in working with churches in poor, rural Vietnam for nearly 20 years. We have been formally partnered together since summer, 2018.

Literally thousands of people have heard the Gospel, and hundreds have come to faith through the work of Dr. Hang and her husband, Mr. Hai, since 2005 in the medical-evangelism outreaches they organize at rural churches through Vital Links. Several pastors have told me that this is their best outreach every year.



*Dr. Hang Nguyen Nu (left), coworker, and Mr. Hai*

In addition, she has a passion to rescue the unborn at risk for abortion in this communist nation. Vietnam has one of the highest abortion rates in the world. Along with five other volunteers, they have seen more than 280 children born because their mothers heard the Gospel, came to living faith, and decided to give their babies the gift of life! Many go home with the birth mom, but Dr Hang and her husband raise more than a dozen of them themselves!

ALWM has had adequate funding since we merged in 2018 to sponsor the medical outreaches and have a part-time project manager, even as we marvel at the impact of the ministry in health care, clean water projects and more. Although at an age in SE Asia when retirement is common, Dr. Hang and Mr. Hai shared their vision in late June to expand their ministry further north into mountainous areas in Vietnam, as well as multiply their ministry so that it can continue after her. As she shared her expanding sense of a fresh call, I realized that becoming an NALC global worker would be a way to see that vision move forward.

# MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES AFFECTING OUR YOUTH TODAY

*Following is an excerpt from an article by the Rev. Teresa E. Peters, NALC director of youth and family ministries, printed in the spring issue of "Simul," the online journal of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary. The full article can be found at [semilc.org/simul](https://semilc.org/simul).*

Today in higher numbers than ever youth are struggling with their mental health. To be blunt, youth in North America are experiencing a mental health epidemic. They are dealing with so many things: anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and actions, same-sex attraction, gender ideology, eating disorders, and more.

The statistics are staggering. Research shows that one in six youth in the United States are now experiencing a mental health condition. Canada's numbers are not much different.

But why are we seeing so many more young people affected today than ever before? While I am not an expert in mental health, I have spent numerous years working with children, youth, and young adults as a parent, a youth leader, and a pastor. The fact is that the world today is a different place. North America is now a post-Christendom society. In contrast to previous generations, we now have social media, which has become an integral part of modern life, connecting people globally. While it offers benefits like communication, self-expression, and community-building, it also poses risks.

Then there is the sexual revelation. While many would say this took place in the 1960s or 1970s, I would argue that even a larger sexual revolution has taken place recently with society's acceptance and even encouragement of alternative lifestyles, sexual preferences, and practices that are embraced by our culture and governments. These things and many more are contributing to the mental health struggles of our young people.

But this does not mean that there is no hope. The church, the Body of Christ, can help treat this mental health epidemic. Studies have shown that some aspect of spirituality in one's life, ranging from being involved in a faith community, to prayer, can positively correspond with good mental health. And frequent church attendance also has beneficial outcomes. Looking specifically at mental health, there was a 33 percent reduction in depression incidents and a lower risk of suicide for those regular attending worship services.

So we need to continue to encourage church attendance and involvement among our youth. We need to openly discuss topics such as the pitfalls of social media, the gift of sex within a godly marriage, and the importance of a strong nuclear family. We need to help by not ignoring the mental health epidemic that is occurring in our world. It is not just happening outside our church walls, it is affecting Christian youth as well. Many youth in our faith communities are hurting and they need the Body of Christ to care for them. We need to face reality, normalize their experiences, and equip our youth. We need to give young people the help they need when they are experiencing mental health issues.

They need to know that Jesus loves them and cares about the things they are dealing with, be that depression, anxiety, thoughts of suicide, questioning their sexuality or gender, eating disorders, struggles with friends and family, or anything else. Young people need to know that the church, their faith community will stand with them and support them. The church needs to be a mental-health friendly space.

As ministry leaders, we need to take a closer look at how both adult members and leaders interact with the youth of the congregation. Do young people only share their accomplishments, good

*Continued on Page 11*

# YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY UPDATE

## **“The Cross: Where Word and Witness meet!” NALC Young Adult Inner-City Mission Trip**

Come and be a part of something life changing! Young adults ages 18 to 30 are invited to join other young adults from across North America for a week-long gathering to study the Word and Witness to some of the most vulnerable, physically, socially, and spiritually in Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 1-6, 2025.

Participants will have the opportunity to serve in schools, shelters, food banks, and soup kitchens, and on the street.

The cost to take part is only \$50, plus personal travel to Winnipeg. All costs for accommodations, food, and transportation at the gathering are being sponsored by the Canadian Mission District. If the cost of travel is prohibitive, speak with your mission district about the availability of a scholarship to help.

Registration deadline is Feb. 1, 2025. Contact Pastor Teresa Peters at [tpeters@thenalc.org](mailto:tpeters@thenalc.org) to apply.

### **YALL Peer Ministry Group Young Adult Lutheran Leaders**

Are you 18 to 30? Would you like to study the Word together and get to know other young adults who are also disciples of Jesus Christ?

Join on Zoom Sunday evenings at 8 p.m. ET. Contact Pastor Teresa Peters at [tpeters@thenalc.org](mailto:tpeters@thenalc.org) to get the Zoom link. Invite others you think would like to attend.

### **Youth and Family Ministry Online Training**

Youth and Family Ministry online training will be held at 6 p.m. ET on Wednesday, Oct. 23. Contact Pastor Teresa Peters at [tpeters@thenalc.org](mailto:tpeters@thenalc.org) for more information.

The theme of this event will be music in Christian Education. Music can create a lasting impact on the brain and memory, especially on emotions and



## YOUTH AND FAMILY

REV. TERESA PETERS  
DIRECTOR OF YOUTH  
AND FAMILY MINISTRY

emotional connections. In this presentation Kristin Dawson, a music therapist and diaconal ministry candidate, will explain how to use music in Christian education with children and youth in an engaging way. Come out and learn the why, where, and how of using music in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, youth group and much more. Contact Pastor Teresa Peters at [tpeters@thenalc.org](mailto:tpeters@thenalc.org) to get the Zoom link.

## MENTAL HEALTH

### ***Continued from Page 10***

grades, awards, game-winning home runs, and the like? Or do they also share their challenges, their disappointments, and their failures? Young people today need to know that sharing struggles, anger and/or disappointments, and asking for help makes them stronger, not weaker.

We need our churches to be supportive safe places that allow our youth to open up and share honestly about their challenges. We need to train and equip faith mentors and partners with the tools they need to have not just the easy conversions, but the difficult ones as well.

In the language of the Church, we need to catechize our young people so that they will not only know that Jesus loves them but also that He will show up for them. This way they will see themselves as exactly who they are, children of God, and they will receive the love, comfort, and peace that only He can provide.

# NALC CLERGY RETREAT TO FOCUS ON LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

The 2025 NALC Clergy Retreat will focus on the Lutheran Confessions. The retreat will be held Jan. 28-30 at the Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.

“This year’s theme, ‘Generous Confessionalism,’ invites us to explore the Lutheran Confessions as a pathway into the riches of our faith, rather than merely a stronghold against challenges,” organizers explained.

“The plenary sessions, led by distinguished theologians and pastors, will delve into how the Confessions guide us in navigating the vast landscape of Scripture, tradition, and culture, fostering a dynamic and living faith that invigorates pastoral ministry, mission, and Christian spirituality.”

Organizers describe the retreat as “a sanctuary for spiritual renewal and pastoral enrichment.” Throughout the retreat, there will be opportunities to engage in theological reflection, daily prayer, solitude, and communal interaction.

Speakers and topics of the lectures for the retreat include:

**Confessions as a Way in Riches** by Dr. David Luy, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology for the North American Lutheran Seminary and Trinity Anglican Seminary in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Dr. Luy has a Ph.D. from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and a bachelor’s degree from Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.

**Confessions and the Scriptures** by the Rev. Dr. Orrey McFarland, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Edmond, Oklahoma. Dr. McFarland has a Ph.D. and M.A. from Durham University in Durham, England and a bachelor’s degree from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

**Confessions and the Christian Tradition** by Dr. Alex Pierce, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology for the North American Lutheran Seminary and Trinity Anglican Seminary. Dr. Pierce has a Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame; M.Div. and M.A. from Trinity Evangelical



*Lara Bhasin*



*David Luy*



*Orrey McFarland*



*Alex Pierce*

Divinity School and a bachelor’s degree from Northwestern College (now called the University of Northwestern) in Roseville, Minnesota.

**Confessions as Missional Engagement with Culture** by the Rev. Lara Bhasin, assistant pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in New York, New York, and a full-time high school English teacher in Yonkers, New York. Pastor Bhasin has an M.Div. from the North American Lutheran Seminary and Trinity School for Ministry (now called Trinity

*Continued on Page 13*

*Continued from Page 12*

Anglican Seminary); and a master's degree in philosophy from Fordham University and a bachelor's degree from Columbia University, both in New York City. Pastor Bhasin was ordained as an NALC pastor in 2023.

A meeting of the NALC ministerium with Bishop Dan Selbo will be held on Wednesday. There will be an opportunity for questions and discussion during the meeting.

The retreat concludes on Thursday with a service of Holy Communion which will include the reaffirmation of ordination vows and the blessing of oil for use in congregations.

There will be breakout sessions on a variety of topics on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. Topics include "Retooling Lutheran Basics (Revisiting Lutheran Theology for the Parish Beyond the Seminary Years);" "Discerning Your Call to Ministry (Discernment is an Ongoing Process)" and "Teaching Catechism in the 21st Century."

A retirement seminar also will be offered during one of the breakout times.

There will be two language-specific gatherings for pastors during the clergy retreat. There will be gatherings for Oromo and Amharic-speaking pastors and Spanish-speaking pastors.

There will be an opportunity for feedback from pastors and deacons on proposed amendments to the NALC constitution on Wednesday evening. A task force has been preparing a revision of the NALC constitution which will move a lot of content from the constitution into bylaws. Proposed amendments also include some significant constitutional changes. The input will help the NALC Executive Council address any concerns before proposing the text of bylaws and amendments to the 2025 NALC Mission Convocation.

Separate gatherings for clergy couples and clergy spouses will be held at 7 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 27. These gatherings are designed to be opportunities for support and fellowship.



## *Generous Confessionalism* NALC 2025 CLERGY RETREAT

The retreat will be preceded by Pastoral Development Days and the First Five Pastors' continuing education event Jan. 24-26. The two experiences will be combined this year.

Pastor Development Days is a continuing education experience designed to help newer pastors build relationships and work on their preaching skills. Registration fee is \$75.

The First Five Pastors' Continuing Education is intended for pastors in their first five years of pastoral ministry. All costs of this portion are covered by the NALC for new pastors.

"As we come together to explore the depths of our confessional heritage, we seek not only to deepen our understanding but to cultivate a spirit of openness and enrichment from the broader Christian tradition. This retreat is not just a pause from ministry but a space for encountering the inexhaustible wells of God's grace, enabling us to return to our congregations with renewed vigor and insight," organizers said in promotional materials.

All NALC pastors and deacons are encouraged to attend the clergy retreat each year. Congregations are asked to provide sufficient financial support to enable their pastors and deacons to attend.

The registration fee for the retreat is \$150. To register or for more information go to [thenalc.org](http://thenalc.org).

# MISSION UPDATE FROM PASTOR VALERY HRYHORYK, GLOBAL WORKER IN BELARUS

*By Pastor Valery Hryhoryk  
NALC global worker in Belarus*

Dear brothers and sisters,  
greetings to you in the name of  
the Lord from Belarus.

The weather in Belarus this fall is very sunny, and we praise the Lord for all His goodness. We are grateful that we live in a comparatively peaceful country, taking into account the war in our neighboring country Ukraine. The war is still in progress, and many people die and even more are injured. People have been displaced from their homes and have had to flee to other places where it is safe.

We pray that Belarus will not actively take part in the war and pray for peace to come as soon as



possible. Please pray with us too. The economic situation here remains difficult as Belarus is under economic sanctions from the United States and Europe because of Belarus' connections with Russia.

Sometimes it is hard to understand how a Christian Church can support a war. The Russian Orthodox Church supports Russia in the war. On the other hand, the Ukrainian government has banned the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Many believers have lost access to their church buildings. I think that facts like this remind us about the necessity for the Christian Church to have a closer relationship with God and to remember His commandments to love one another and not to kill.

**This summer a new religious law was adopted in Belarus** that requires re-registration of all religious organizations in the country. This law was the result of events during the revolution in 2020 when some



*Continued on Page 15*

*Continued from Page 14*

church leaders of different Christian denominations protested against the actions of the government, when people were beaten up and put in jail for political reasons. It is clear that not all congregations will receive re-registration and will be banned in Belarus. Please pray for our congregations to be re-registered as all non-registered religious activity is prohibited.



**One of the central events this summer was, of course, our annual summer Bible camp for children and youth.** We are grateful to God for the opportunity to gather children and youth from all over Belarus and to come to the beautiful place of Dolsha. The weather was great and the campers could enjoy the lake and sun. God was glorified!

The theme of the camp was “Heroes of Faith.” We had many children attend camp for the first time. It was a great joy to see people who attended the camp in past years. They have their own families



now and their children are attending the camp. It is great to have succession in the Lord’s business. What a joy to understand how many good seeds were sown over the years and to see the results! Thank you, Lord! A video from the camp will be available on the ALWM website.

**Please continue to pray with us for the building project at the Bible camp in Dolsha.** We continue raising funds for that project. The Bible camp building will allow us to have ministry to children and youth all year round. Right now we live in tents during the camp and are heavily dependent on weather conditions. Also the building will be used for refugees and different educational events for the Church.

**Ministry to the handicapped remains a priority.** Traditionally we helped invalids to organize sport events and a fishing competition. Thank you for praying for the leader of the regional organization of invalids. Please continue to pray for Eduard (in green shirt) and the organization he leads. His health requires constant attention. Pray for this friendship to continue as such a relationship is a great witness to God and His love.

**We are grateful to the Lord for the building that we use for our literature ministry.** It requires constant support and attention. We are grateful for the funds that are available for this purpose. Please pray with us for new opportunities and new openings for book distribution. God speaks through books!

*Continued on Page 16*

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A good book is a silent preacher of His Word. The main method of distribution remains by mail. The war in Ukraine has diminished the amount of books going to Ukraine, Moldavia, and Georgia.

**It is our joy to announce new releases of songs on public platforms.** Music ministry is very important in the situation we are in. We were able to perform our songs on local TV. This was a great opportunity to make ourselves known as Christians in the city and beyond. People can hear about the importance of having faith in God and spiritual life, that this life is not the end and that there will be another life after death. Praise the Lord for this opportunity!

**Market mission** is a project with the aim to have additional financial support for BLMF's ministry in the future. We have installed a meat bar on a local market.



Our prayer is to try to get additional financial support for the ministry. It is a long-term project, therefore, we ask you to pray for it. As any business, it has different stages of development. Also we use the marketplace as a place for witness. Many people come to us, and we have opportunities to establish handshake relationships with people for future spiritual talks. Marina (the woman in the picture) received her first Bible from us.

Marina is a sales woman next to our meat bar point. She is interested in spiritual things, but she is only



now learning of the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Our congratulations to brother Jostein Bildoy who became a director of European Lutheran Sunday School Association (ELSA). BLMF is a member of ELSA. We are praying to be able to take part in the next conference which will be held in Albania in 2026, We could not attend the ELSA conference last year in Denmark because of the travel restrictions connected to the war in Ukraine. Please pray for this coming conference and for us to have opportunity to attend. Sunday School work and ministry to the children is the future of any church.

We continue to serve the Lord and give thanks to Him for you, our faithful supporters. Without you our ministry would be hardly possible in this mission field. May the Lord continue to bless you as you bless others for His everlasting glory.





# BISHOP'S REPORT TO CONVOCATION

Thank you to each of you for your support, your encouragement, and your prayers for me and our staff and for the work we are doing together in the name of Jesus. I continue to be humbled by the many ways in which I see and experience how you are keeping us in prayer and supporting our shared ministry.

Thank you also for your faithful ministry and for your commitment to serving the people in your congregations and communities. The work you are doing is touching lives in ways you may never see or know. The impact of our collective work, guided by the Lord Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit, is changing lives now and for eternity. For that, I thank God each day.

I want to share with you some of progress we have made in this past year in moving forward with our vision, some of the things we'll be working on between now and the end of this year to address the challenges we face, as well as some of the exciting opportunities God is putting in front of us in the years ahead.

Soon to be entering our 15th year as a church body, I truly believe our Lord has something special for us to be about, positioned as we are in the center of the Lutheran theological spectrum, and primed and prepared as I believe we are for a new chapter in our shared life that will be used for His purposes and to His glory.

## **The Opportunity We Have**

This world needs Jesus. This world needs what only our Lord can give. Nothing can replace it. Nothing comes close to what God has done for us and accomplished and promised to us in His Son.

The tragedy is that much of this world doesn't know it. Many have no idea what they are missing and what's possible and how. All they know is that something is missing and that there must be more to this life than what they've experienced and seen.



## FROM THE BISHOP

REV. DR. DAN SELBO  
BISHOP

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It is our calling as the Church to let the world know. That's why we're here. That's our mission. There's a tremendous opportunity in front of us! Despite the many challenges we face, the opportunities we've been given to witness to what God has done are even greater! That's why we will continue to work as hard as we can, doing all that we possibly can, to be faithful to the calling and the commission given to us in Christ.

## **The NALC 20/20 Vision**

Turn back the clock just a few years, and remember some of the history that has led us to where we are today. In 2019, remembering our Core Values and our commitment to our Lord's commandments and commission, we developed a 20/20 Vision that outlined the goals and priorities of our shared work. At our first online convocation four years ago, we presented that Vision. Unsolicited, a motion came from the floor to adopt it as presented, which resulted in an overwhelming vote of support for moving it forward, which is exactly what we have been doing ever since.

That's why, for the past four years, we have been working tirelessly to implement the plans and strategies set forth. Even as some of our progress was slowed down with the pandemic, God has been faithful to His promises and has never slowed down in carrying out His work.

## **Progress We Have Made**

As I look back on where we have been, where we are today, and where I believe the Lord is leading us,

*Continued on Page 18*

it is abundantly evident that God has been blessing our work. When the NALC first began 15 years ago, there was no promise that we would be here today, let alone any certainty that we would grow. But we are here, and we are growing, and the Lord has blessed our work every step of the way.

It has also been 10 years since the start of our North American Lutheran Seminary. When the 2013 Convocation voted to establish a seminary, no one could have predicted how far, in these first 10 years, we would have come. We now have a seminary network in place, with partnering seminaries on six campuses. We have a strong and growing faculty, serving full time and as adjuncts.

This fall semester, we have 54 students preparing for ordained ministry, including 27 new students since our last convocation. We also have a process in place to ensure that all our students graduate with low student debt, with a full awareness of our Core Values, with a complete understanding of our Lutheran theology and what drives us in our mission to speak and proclaim the name of Jesus, along with a deep and abiding desire to live as and to make disciples of Christ.

We are also making significant progress in building a pipeline of potential seminary students to carry us into the future. Through our shared commitment to planting seeds in the hearts of those who we believe have the gifts to serve as pastors, and as a result of the good of our Director of Vocational Discernment, Pastor Jeff Morlock, we now have the names of more than 300 men and women discerning a call to pastoral or diaconal ministry. Not all will enroll in seminary, and even with those who do, it'll take time for them to complete their studies. We're not there yet. But we're looking to the future, building for the future, investing in the things today that are crucial for our tomorrows.

Last month, we held our first-ever continental-wide Youth Gathering in Boerne, Texas. It was a wonderful celebration, a tremendous success. More than 300 students and leaders were there to be challenged and encouraged in their faith walk with Christ. It set the stage for a deeper and more

focused emphasis in the future upon raising up the next generation of disciples of Jesus.

It's the same when it comes to the mission work we are doing, the mission footprint we are working to put in place and to expand in response to our Lord's calling. We now have 10 mission starts, along with 20 missions in formation. We have 78 mission partners connected with the NALC, including, through our sending agencies, an expanded number of global workers who are preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ worldwide. Two years ago, we had 12 global workers. Today we have 22. We hope to have 25 by the end of next year.

Lest we forget, our goal is not for us to be making these mission and ministry connections solely on a denominational level. The challenge we've put in front of ourselves has been for every one of our 500+ churches to make direct and personal and supportive connections with at least one local, one continental, and one global ministry or mission.

Disciple-making is always relational, as is the mission work we share. If that hasn't happened in your congregation, I'm challenging you to make it happen. Those relational connections will not only bless the people and the ministries and missions you support, but they will also be a blessing to you. God will honor and bless those relationships.

We're also working to increase the level of support we are providing to our congregations. Just over two years ago, we added our five area assistants to the bishop. That faith step has not only made it possible for me, in my role, to stay on top of the pastoral needs we have, but it has also increased the support offered to our 36 mission district deans and, thereby, increased the support we now give to each of our 512 NALC congregations.

It's no different when it comes to the commitment we've made to provide regular pastoral support to every one of our churches. Whether large or small, rural or urban or suburban, part-time or full-time calls, all of our congregations need to hear the Gospel. All of our people need regular and consistent pastoral support. Our commitment is to provide that support and to meet that need.

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Since last year's convocation, 35 calls have been filled. There are currently 43 full-time vacancies and another 27 part-time vacancies needing to be filled. Those numbers are consistent with where things have been for the past few years.

Now, we could spend the rest of our time talking and thinking and praying about how we might address this challenge. If we did, there would be as many good ideas as we have people in this online gathering. Until we begin graduating more seminarians and ordaining more pastors, the challenge will not go away. Suffice it to say that it's not going to happen without a shared commitment from all of us, and a willingness from each of us to adjust our expectations and to expand our understanding of what it means for us to be the Church.

In some cases, smaller and vacant congregations need to work with other small and vacant congregations to become two or three-point parishes. In other cases, medium-size or larger churches need to allow their pastors to occasionally be away from their own parishes, to offer pastoral support to another parish in their mission district that needs help. In all cases, we need to be open to doing what our Lord Jesus has called us to do and to respond to the needs of the parts of the Body that could use our help. When one part suffers, the whole Body suffers. When one part rejoices, we all win. If we're serious about being the Body of Christ together, then we must find ways to work together to address this ongoing need.

Bishop John Bradosky, who has rejoined our staff this past year, is working with our area assistants and mission district deans to identify and address the specific needs that exist. When they reach out to you for help, I'm asking you to hear their requests as a call from the Lord. And for those congregations that need assistance, I'm encouraging you to adjust your expectations and make the changes that are needed. If we're going to solve this ongoing challenge, it's going to take all of us being willing to sacrifice.

Before sharing with you what we're planning for the next few years, allow me to share a few thoughts

about what we might expect in the year ahead and what I believe we all need to do to stay focused in our ministries.

Next summer, one of our predecessor church bodies, the ELCA, is planning a reconstituting convention, working to make a number of significant changes which will, most likely, increase the differences that currently exist between our church body and theirs. My prayer is that God will use their gathering to further His kingdom, and that the differences that now exist between us, and that led to the formation of the NALC, will not keep us apart from each other as sisters and brothers in Christ.

At the same time, I would not be surprised if the number of churches interested in joining the NALC in the coming year increases. Nor would I be surprised if that increase in numbers pushes us to adjust how we support each other and work together to ensure that the first things in our ministries remain the first things. Suffice it to say that we are currently taking steps to be as prepared and supportive as we possibly can be if and when an increased number of congregations outside of our NALC fold reach out.

Now, a few words about staying focused in our ministries. My friends, this is nothing new. We all know how this works. When faced with challenges and opposition from those in our lives and our communities who think differently than we do, it's easy to become defensive. When someone pushes on us, the natural reaction and inclination is to push back. In our culture today, with the Christian witness being attacked from nearly every direction, my encouragement to all of us is to always react and to witness from a posture of humility and grace.

We cannot expect an unbelieving neighbor or friend or co-worker to act and to think as a believer until they are. In the same way, we cannot expect an unbelieving culture to change and to begin following Jesus without first modeling and witnessing to that culture with the love, the compassion, and the heart that is ours in Christ.

Luke, Chapter 15, is a good reminder of what matters to our Lord—the lost sheep, the lost coin,

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and the lost son. The Church exists for the sake of seeking the lost, of finding the lost, and of responding in love when they come home. Let us never forget, in our efforts to reach the lost for Christ, that we were all lost and without hope until our Lord found and claimed us on the cross.

### **The Next Three Years**

And so, where are we headed, and what do we need to make it happen? Let's talk about where we are going, how a number of things we've been doing are coming together, and about where we'll be focusing our energies in the next few years. I'm not only encouraged by what has been happening, but excited about where I believe God is leading us, and how we have the privilege of partnering with Him in His work.

Let's start with our Core Values. Our Core Values are the fundamental beliefs that guide the NALC's behavior and decision-making. They represent what is most important to us, where we place our energies. They are biblically based. They serve as a foundation for how we live and work together. They are the principles upon which all of our actions are based.

**We are Christ Centered.** Jesus is at the heart and the center of everything we do. We are here to serve Him. We are called and claimed to live as His people.

**We are Mission Driven.** What drives us is the mission entrusted to us by Jesus, the Great Commission given to us in His Word.

**We are Traditionally Grounded.** Our life together is rooted in the authority of God's Word, the three Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions—how we see the world, our faith, and our calling from a Lutheran perspective.

**And we are Congregationally Focused.** We believe the primary work of the Church happens in the life and ministry of the local congregations. That's where the people gather, where the Word of God is shared, and where we live out our faith and our vocations in daily life.

As we look to the future and consider the work we are called to do, these four Core Values will enable us to see clearly and help us stay aligned with what is most important about our unique identity and calling as a family of faith. We must always look to the future through the lens of what is at the core and the heart of who we are.

In the same way, when we think about our future and where we're heading, we always need to be looking to the future through our sense of mission. Simply put, our mission is a brief description of our purpose. Why do we exist? What are we called to achieve? And here's where we need to be unwaveringly consistent.

Our mission is given to us by God, defined for us in God's Word. It's not something we have the option to reconstruct. It's the Great Commandment. It's the Great Commission. It's the call to discipleship, the proclamation of the Gospel. Loving God, loving our neighbor, following Jesus, proclaiming to the world what God has done for us in Christ, and helping and encouraging others to do the same. That's our mission. That's why we exist and what we are called to do.

So, we have our Core Values and our Mission. We'll never accomplish anything lasting if we're unclear about what's most important and why we exist. That clarity is essential. But it's not enough. To it, we need to add the crucial partner component of our response to what's at the core—our living out and engaging in the mission God has given us. That's leads to our vision—to where we believe God is leading us.

Here's where it gets exciting, because I believe God has been preparing us, in the first 14 years of our life together, to turn the page to a new chapter, in year 15 and beyond, where we will begin to see some significant growth taking place and fruitfulness happening.

And so, what's our vision? Here's where I believe God has been leading us and who we are becoming. We are a church that renews its congregations, equips its people, and becomes a disciple-making body. A church that renews, equips, and becomes a disciple-making body."

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Now, to some extent, that's true of us already. We've been doing this for years. Things like aging ministry, life-to-life discipleship, "fresh eyes," and others. In many ways, it's already been happening. But it's beginning to become more of who we are, where we are going, and where we'll be focusing our energies in the years ahead: renewing, equipping, and becoming a disciple-making church.

Now, those words could be nothing more than words that don't have much meaning if they remain only words. But when taken to heart and applied and put into an action plan and strategy, they can be life changing.

Let me explain how we're coming at this, starting with renewal of our congregations. This is where the basic questions get asked and answered: Questions about purpose. Questions about identity. Questions about where things are today and where the Father is leading us in our tomorrows. In other words, given the context of our congregational situation, what's happening in our church and community, what do we believe the Lord is calling us to do? If the goal is to become a disciple-making body, what does that mean for us in the context of where we are today?

The renewal phase is to assist our congregations in answering those questions because until those questions are answered, there's no way to move forward. We need to take a step back, take a careful and a prayerful look, and ask ourselves those questions. Where are we at today? What is God leading us to do in our tomorrows? Some of our churches are already doing that. Many others are still trying to figure it out. Until we figure it out and know where we're heading, there's no way we're going to get there. We need to understand where we're going. That's the first step: Renewal.

Then comes the second step. Once we've answered the questions of identity and purpose and where we believe the Father is leading, then we need to ask ourselves what we need. That's where the equipping comes in. What do we need to make it happen? What do we not have that is needed for this renewal to take place? What kind of "equipping"

needs to happen with our people and in our congregation to get to where we are being led?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer to that question. It might be in the area of youth ministry. It might be in developing an outward focused ministry to the community. It might be in better worship, a more welcoming atmosphere. It might be developing leaders, how to run a productive Church Council meeting. It could be many things. The equipping phase has to do with providing resources to assist with whatever is needed.

And third, the becoming part of this vision is not a third step that's taken after the renewal and equipping have happened. Rather, it's the result of having been renewed in our vision, reminded of who we are and why we exist, figuring out what God is leading us to do, finding the resources we need, and then doing it.

In other words, when we implement the plan, when we actually start doing what the Father is showing us and what the Lord has called us to be about, the becoming happens simultaneously. The becoming is the result of understanding our purpose, putting it into action, and beginning to share what God has done for them (and for us) in Christ with our friends, our families, our community, and our coworkers.

When that starts happening in our lives and in our churches, we don't have to worry about becoming anything, because we will already be what God call us to be: a disciple-making church body—a family of believers that is not afraid to talk about their faith, live out their faith, and invite others to come onboard.

Now, we're going to approach these two areas—renewing and equipping—purposefully, strategically, and fruitfully. We're in the process of developing resources so that all our congregations, regardless of size or location, will be able to engage in those essential steps and receive the support they need to become stronger, healthier, and better prepared to carry out the work entrusted to us by Jesus.

Here's where the crucial development in the next few months is going to happen. We're going to be

doing this in such a way that congregations and leaders will not have to wait to sign up for one of our staff members to visit or for the next mission district event or workshop or mission convocation to take place. Rather, we'll be developing resources and support that can be used by all our churches in at least three different ways.

First, we'll be developing "Do It Yourself" resources. Resources that can be used in the local congregations and led by pastors or lay leaders. There will be enough information for you to take and to use on your own. There will be a process to follow, a road map to make sure you're not missing any steps along with a way to build in the accountability that is needed to ensure that it happens. It's one way in which we can support, equip, and resource all our NALC congregations at the same time.

Second, we'll be developing what you might call a "Do It Yourself Resource, With Support." We'll be raising leaders throughout our church body who will be trained to walk with you through the process, to help you along the way, and to hold you accountable to the work to which you've committed. They'll be there to assist you as you do the work in your local setting, to help you as you take the steps to help yourself.

And third, we'll be developing a more in-depth approach for each of these areas, which will allow you to receive in-person coaching and involvement from people who have been trained and prepared for that purpose. This will be a more hands-on approach, from a person committed to spending time with you and the people in your community. It's a greater commitment and investment, no doubt, that will almost certainly produce increased results.

Now, why are we approaching these next steps in our vision in this way? I could give you a lot of reasons. Let me focus on two.

1. Because as we grow, as we increase in numbers as a church body, we need to approach our strategies in new ways. If we continue to offer the same approaches, where only one or a few of our congregations can be served at a time, it'll take a

long time before all of congregations are served. There was a time for that, and it worked well. It was a much-needed step to get us to where we are today. I'm thankful that it happened, as well as for the people who made it happen. It's now time to broaden the approaches we're taking as the numbers and needs continue to grow.

2. Because I believe the number one challenge facing our churches in the 21st century is not church growth but church health. If we try to build and grow a Christ-honoring church without being healthy, we'll fail. In contrast, if we take our Lord at His Word, place our trust in His promises, and do what He's called and commissioned us to do, then the growth of the Church is not on us but on Him. And that's where it needs to stay—renewing, equipping, and becoming a disciple-making church body.

Just think about some of the promises our Lord has made and some of the passages in which we are reminded of how this all works: John 15, the Vine and the branches—stay attached to Jesus and you'll bear fruit. Cut yourself off from Him and try to do this on your own, and it won't happen. We need to stay connected to Jesus and lean on Him, if we have any hope of bearing fruit and being faithful.

The apostle Paul's words to the Church in Ephesus. God has equipped the people of His Church; "some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers." For what purpose? To do it themselves? No, but to "equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ."

And, again, words from our Lord, in Matthew 16: Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God is followed by our Lord's promise that "Upon this rock I will build my Church." We are the Body of Christ, and together, trusting in Jesus, He will do in our midst what He promised to do.

And finally, the Great Commission itself: "Go into all the world and make disciples; baptizing and teaching and instructing them" in all that you have learned from Jesus. And the promise is "that you will never be left on your own."

**Continued from Page 22**

All of that to say, the direction we are taking in these next few years is nothing new. It's consistent with where we've been, where we are today, and what we've been doing from the start. It is, however, moving us forward into a new chapter, with new opportunities, in which we continue to trust and believe God is leading.

Based upon our Core Values, our Lord's Great Commandment and Commission, and seen through the lens of our mission—to love God, love each other, and pass on the faith—we are living into God's highest purpose for us: A church that renews, equips, and becomes a disciple-making body.

Over the next few months, we will be building this out, with the goal of putting together and sharing a clear plan for the next few years of our life together. For now, I ask for your prayers, for your support, and for your continued faithfulness to our Lord and our shared ministry, as we keep our eyes fixed upon Christ.

Before closing, there are several people I would like to recognize. First, I want to publicly thank our NALC and NALS staff for their hard work and their ongoing support. Their faithful leadership and commitment to working as a team enables us to serve our congregations and pastors, mission and ministry partners, in efficient and effective ways. Some of them are new to our staff this year. Others have transitioned or will be transitioning away in the next few months. All of them are partners in the Gospel, loved and cherished members of the Body of Christ.

I also want to thank our mission district deans. Our deans serve as an extension to my office by providing support and care for the pastors and congregations in their respective mission districts. They serve without compensation, while, at the same time, in most cases, serve their own congregations as well. My words can only begin to express how thankful I am for each of them, for the work they do on our behalf, and for the support they receive from their congregations in allowing them the time needed to serve.

Thank you, also, to those who are currently serving in positions of elected leadership. Especially, thank you to those who are soon completing their terms: On the Executive Council, Mrs. Lynn Kickingbird and Pastor Carl Rasmussen; on the Board of Regents, Pastor Wendy Berthelsen, Pastor Dennis Di Mauro, Mr. Bruce Randolph, and Mr. Roger Weyersberg; and completing his term on the Court of Adjudication, Mr. Samuel Duncomb.

Finally, I'd like to take a moment to read the names of those pastors who, during this past year, have been called home to the Lord and have now entered the Church Triumphant. Following the reading of their names, we will take a moment of silence to remember and honor their earthly ministry and lives, and then share in a word of prayer.

The Rev. Robert W. Pflueger  
The Rev. Marilou Brook  
The Rev. Derald H. Edwards  
The Rev. W. Bennett Harris  
The Rev. Edwin R. Fidler  
The Rev. David H. Andreae  
The Rev. John Moffett  
The Rev. Sandra L. Towberman

*Almighty God, Heavenly Father, we praise you for the work you have accomplished for us in Jesus and for the hope and promise and assurance we have in him. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit and for ways in which we have been led to faith and brought together in your Church. For those saints no longer with us in this life, and now eternally with you in your heavenly kingdom, we give you our thanks and our praise. We thank you for the years they had in this life, and for the many ways in which their lives were used by you for purposes that carry on into eternity. Be with their loved ones, those who are still here, surrounding them with your Holy Spirit and assuring them of that Great Day when we will all be together in your Kingdom. Between now and then, strengthen us in our faith, assure us of your love, and keep us always united and focused upon the work entrusted to us in Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

To all of you, once again, thank you for your prayers, for your continued support, and for your commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It remains a joy and an honor and a privilege to serve as your bishop.

# NALC EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ACTIONS

Here is a summary of the actions taken by the NALC Executive Council at its May and July meetings:

- + Accepted with regret the request from Rev. Dr. Eric Riesen to step down as president of the North American Lutheran Seminary.
- + Approved a credit card policy for the NALC.
- + Adopted a resolution to open a bank account in Texas.
- + Appointed Ryan Schwarz interim treasurer to replace Mike Johnson who is unable to serve because of an accident.
- + Approved a search committee for a new treasurer.
- + Approved a recommendation from the Mission Vetting Team to include Blessman International and The Crescent Project as NALC mission partners.
- + Approved the 2024 lay delegate apportionment for the 2024 Mission Convocation.
- + Recommended approval of the proposed 2025 budget to the 2024 Mission Convocation.
- + Recommended approval of the proposed 2024 Mission Convocation Agenda.
- + Recommended approval of the proposed 2024 Mission Convocation Rules of Procedure.
- + Received report from the Candidacy Committee: 13 students received into the NALC Network. 17 students have entered candidacy. Six students have been endorsed. Five students have been approved for ordination.
- + Approved the following persons to serve on the 2025 Nominating Committee: Pastor Dawn Rister, Pastor Joyce Dix-Weiers, Pastor Mark Wilhelm, and Stephanie Hollenback.

+ Extended appreciation to Lynn Kickingbird and Pastor Carl Rasmussen for their service on the Executive Council as their terms conclude.

+ Announced that the 2025 Clergy Retreat will take place Jan. 28-30 at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.

+ The following congregations were received into the NALC:

- St. Peter Lutheran Church, Medicine Hat, Alberta
- Grace Lutheran Church, Ridgecrest, California
- Zion Lutheran Church of Metropolitan, Flech, Michigan
- Messiah Lutheran Church, Roscommon, Michigan
- Zion Lutheran Church, Lafayette, Ohio
- Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
- Friedens Lutheran Church, Stony Run, Pennsylvania
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Burstall, Saskatchewan
- Sinai Lutheran Church, Sinai, South Dakota
- Lake Campbell Lutheran Church, Volga, South Dakota
- First Lutheran Church, Burnet, Texas

+ The following clergy were received into the NALC:

- The Rev. Larry Bannick
- The Rev. Timothy Johnson
- The Rev. Richard Little
- The Rev. Esteban Salazar
- The Rev. David Schweppe
- The Rev. Roland Weisbrot
- The Rev Michael Wilkstrom
- The Rev. Terry Wimmer

+ Commissioned lay minister Nancy Guthrie was received into the NALC.