

12 nominees for bishop

Twelve pastors have been nominated to serve as the next bishop of the North American Lutheran Church.

The names of the nominees were announced May 10 by the 2019 NALC **Nominating** Committee.

Biographical information on the nominees is published in a report from the **Nominating** Committee. available online at *lutheranweek.com/nom* inations.

The 2019 NALC Convocation will elect the bishop when it meets Aug. 8-9 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Rev. John Bradosky, who has served the NALC as bishop since 2011, has

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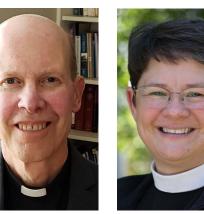
Catherine Braasch







Ronald Hoyum



Melinda Jones



Jeffray Greene



Phillip Gagnon



Kenneth Kimball



Marshall Hahn

James Lehmann



Eric Riesen



Dan Selbo



David Wendel

announced that he is not available for reelection.

The nominees for bishop are:

The Rev. Dr. Catherine Braasch, intentional interim pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jackson Center. Ohio.

The Rev. B.A. "Tim" Christ, pastor of Joy Lutheran Church in Richmond. Texas.

The Rev. Phillip Gagnon, pastor of St. Albert Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Alberta.

The Rev. Dr. Jeffray S. Greene, pastor of Word of God Lutheran Church in Peachtree City, Georgia.

The Rev. Marshall E. Hahn, pastor of Marion Lutheran Church in Elgin, Iowa, and Norway Lutheran Church in St. Olaf, Iowa.

The Rev. Ronald Hoyum, pastor of Port Madison Lutheran Church on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

The Rev. Melinda H. Jones, pastor of Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church in North Charleston, South Carolina.

The Rev. Kenneth C. Kimball, pastor of Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church in Waterville, Iowa, and Old West Paint Creek Lutheran Church in Waukon, Iowa.

The Rev. James T. Lehmann, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Thomasboro, Illinois.

The Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Ashland, Ohio.

The Rev. Dan Selbo, pastor of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, California.

The Rev. Dr. David M. Wendel of Jacksonville, Florida, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism for the NALC.

Any delegate to the 2019 NALC Convocation may nominate additional candidates for bishop. Delegates



The installation service for Bishop John Bradosky at the 2011 NALC Convocation in Hilliard, Ohio.

are encouraged to submit such nominations as soon as possible to allow the nominees time to submit the required biographical information to the Nominating Committee.

To prepare for the election process for bishop, the Executive Council provided a booklet of prayers encouraging NALC members to engage in prayer and discernment leading up to the election. The prayer booklet and information on the election process may be found online at *thenalc.org/election*.

Almighty and everlasting God,
in all ages you have raised up
faithful servants to pastor
and guide your holy people
and to make known your will among us;
increase in us the gifts of
discernment and understanding
that we might know your will
as we prepare to elect a Bishop
for your Church.

Reprinted from
Prayer in a Time of Discernment
A Resource for the Election of the
Bishop of the North American Lutheran Church

Executive Council nominees

Five pastors and three lay people have been nominated for positions on the NALC Executive Council.

The 2019 NALC Convocation, Aug. 8-9 in Indianapolis, Indiana, will elect one lay person and one pastor to four-year terms on the NALC Executive Council.

Nominees for the lay position on Executive Council are:

Rebecka V. Andrae, a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

Rosemary Johnson, a member of Hope Lutheran Church in Ladysmith, Wisconsin.

Scott Kramer, a member of St. John Lutheran Church in Boerne, Texas.

Nominees for the clergy position on **Executive Council are:**

The Rev. Bassam J. Abdallah of Prospect, Kentucky, a retired pastor and a member of House of Prayer Lutheran Church in Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

The Rev. Rebecca M. M. Heber, pastor of Oasis Church in Lake Mary, Florida.

The Rev. Dr. Keith G. Less, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Abilene, Kansas.

The Rev. K. Craig Moorman, pastor and mission developer at River's Edge Ministries, Mount Airy, Maryland, and interim pastor of First Evangelical Lutheran Church of Gray Manor in Dundalk, Maryland.

The Rev. Carl L. M. Rasmussen, pastor of First Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Illinois

The names of the nominees were announced May 10 by the NALC Nominating Committee. Biographical information on the nominees is published in a report from the Nominating Committee, available online at lutheranweek.com/nominations.

Rebecka Andrae





Scott Kramer



Bassam Abdallah



Rebecca Heber



Keith Less





Carl Rasmussen

Additional nominations for Executive Council must be submitted to the Nominating Committee by June 24.

3 NALC News May 2019

Court of Adjudication nominees

Three pastors and a lay person have been nominated for the NALC Court of Adjudication.

The 2019 NALC Convocation, Aug. 8-9 in Indianapolis, Ind., will elect two members of the Court of Adjudication to four-year terms.

The Court of Adjudication decides appeals from disciplinary decisions and questions regarding interpretation of the NALC's governing documents.

Nominees for the Court of Adjudication are:

The Rev. Jennifer Gold of Helotes, Texas, director of Commission Expeditions and a member of St. John Lutheran Church in Boerne, Texas.

The Rev. Leslie Haines of Fort Wayne, Indiana, chaplain and executive director of Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministry and a member of St. John's Lutheran Church of Lake Township near Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The Rev. Marty Ramey of Dallas, North Carolina, an interim pastor and a member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Gastonia, North Carolina.

Allyn Ray Rub of Llano, Texas, a retired police officer and a member of St. James Lutheran Church in Llano, Texas.

The names of the nominees were announced May 10 by the NALC Nominating Committee. Biographical information on the nominees is published in a report from the Nominating Committee, available online at https://linear.numer.com/nominations.

Jannifar Cald





Leslie Haines



Marty Ramey



Allyn Rub

Additional nominations for Court of Adjudication must be submitted to the Nominating Committee by June 24.

Tool trailer for Disaster Response

Reformation Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and neighboring congregations in the Atlantic Mission Region are preparing a tool trailer for NALC Disaster Response.

They are purchasing a cargo trailer, customizing the inside for tool transportation and storage and equipping it with the power and hand tools needed for disaster response work.

The outfitted trailer will be given to NALC Disaster Response for use in responding to disasters.

For more information about NALC Disaster Response go to <u>thenalc.org/nalc-disaster-response</u>. Donations to NALC Disaster Response may be given online or sent to: North American Lutheran Church; 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220; New Brighton, MN 55112-2202.

Lutheran Week is Aug. 5-9

Lutheran Week 2019 will be held Aug. 5-9 at The Westin Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Indiana. 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 the leaders of two of the largest Lutheran church bodies in the



world. The Rev. Yonas Yigezu, president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and a representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania will be featured speakers during the Mission Festival and Convocation. They will also take part in the installation of the new bishop.

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 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Tuesday, Aug. 6, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Registration fee of \$80 includes lunch on Monday.

For more information on Lutheran Week or to register for any or all of the events of Lutheran Week go to <u>lutheranweek.com</u>.

Hotel rooms are available at a discounted rate of \$149 a night. The discounted rate is available Aug. 1-13 depending on availability. A link to the hotel is provided on the Lutheran Week website.

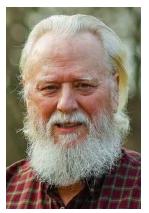
Braaten-Benne Lectures to focus on work of Holy Spirit

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, Indiana.

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 *lutheranweek.com*.



Robert Benne

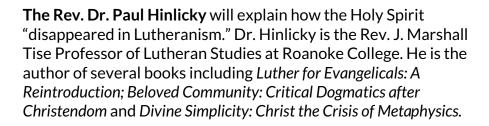


Paul Hinlicky



Craig Keener

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, Virginia, 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 co-named in his honor.



The Rev. 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, Kentucky. He is the author of 25 books including IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament; Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking and Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost.

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



Matthew Levering



Derek Nelson

Mundelein, Illinois. 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?

The Rev. 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, Indiana. 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.

Pentecost and early Church point to life of discipleship

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

As we continue our celebration of Easter, we are preparing for Pentecost. The same power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is manifest in both these central events in our life in the Body of Christ.

While the event of Pentecost is truly amazing, what followed was just as miraculous. What followed was the development of a community that nurtured these new disciples to live as faithful followers of Christ.

Pentecost gave birth to the Church and the first followers of Jesus shaped it according to the life they experienced with Jesus. The formation of people in this community of disciples not only sustained the Church but equipped the Body of Christ for the spread of the Gospel and the fulfillment of Christ's mission, to make disciples of all nations.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NIV)

This text reminds me that how we minister to one another within our congregation has a direct effect on how we do ministry in the larger community. How we treat one another in the Church directly affects how we treat others beyond the Church. Our witness within the Church is our witness to the world about the difference Jesus is making in our lives. So how are we doing?



From the Bishop

Rev. John Bradosky Bishop

It is often difficult to keep our focus on Christ's mission and invest in the quality of community that sustains it. Many people crave an experience. They want spiritual excitement and spectacular entertainment. Leaders fear that if we don't wow them, they will get bored. So we gather the community together to create one mountain top experience after another with no valleys in between. A friend of mine once said, "It reminds me of a baby's digestive system, an insatiable appetite at one end and a total lack of responsibility at the other end."

We want the excitement without the relationship with Christ and His Body, the Church. Some will stay for the experience but leave before it requires the conviction, commitment and mutual accountability of genuine relationships. Many are searching not for Jesus but for the path of least resistance — the easy way. For that reason, audiences can increase while the number of disciples decreases.

Consumerism still abounds — demanding a smorgasbord of perspectives and ministries to meet every felt need. We heed the inner call to follow ourselves rather than the call of Jesus who says, "Come and follow me!" A ministry of meeting consumer driven needs can easily replace the central mission of disciple-making.

However, that is not the nature of the Church described in the book of Acts. The disciples knew that following Jesus was never the easy path, but the

only life-giving path. These disciples had been through struggles as they followed Jesus. They were the first community of believers. They knew what was necessary to live in community with Jesus.

Following Pentecost, Jesus turned over the leadership for His entire Church to those He had trained as His disciples. Look with me for a moment at those essential ingredients.

By the way, I believe that what led up to Pentecost is almost as important as what followed. They had an intensive focus on prayer that produced a passionate spirituality. I believe the same holds true for us today.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples huddled together in fear and they prayed. They were a Church under fire. Their prayer life prepared them to be ignited with the fire of Pentecost, and they became a Church on fire!

I contend that it was their prayer life that made them combustible material. That small prayer group of 11 grew to a group of 120. During that time of prayer, they were drawn closer to Christ and to one another. The Holy Spirit was already at work.

Now consider the text:

- 1. As the disciples devoted themselves to the teaching of Jesus, those in the Church devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. How many today read and study Scripture daily?
- 2. As the disciples shared fellowship with Jesus and one another, they led the Church to do the same. Their fellowship was focused on sharing meals together and praying together. Many in the Church have little connection with others, even though they spend countless hours trying to create community. Many leaders have abandoned the pursuit of fellowship, believing that they can't compete with the plethora of opportunities for fellowship in the world. Christian fellowship should be more than just having fun!
- 3. They expected Jesus to act and He did. As they experienced the miraculous when they were with



An illustration of Pentecost from the Hortus deliciarum of Herrad of Landsberg (12th century)

Jesus, when they went out to do ministry in His name, so in the Church that same miraculous power was manifest. If someone experienced Jesus' call to follow Him in one of your worship services how would you know? Do we care? Do we really expect Jesus to show up? How can we talk about "real presence" in the Eucharist and not expect Jesus to manifest His presence? If we don't believe He is truly present, why should anyone else?

- 4. The Christian community cared for one another. They loved one another the way Jesus loved His first followers and gave His life for them. Giving up possessions was a way to care for the needs of fellow disciples. They cared so much that they shared everything every care, every concern, every joy, every sorrow everything. Have we become so independent that we have no clue what is happening in the lives of those around us? How can we become more caring?
- 5. They gathered together regularly. They worshiped together daily. They had a mutual sense of obligation to be together to support one another and to share their faith in Jesus. The average active Christian in North America only attends worship about two times per month. The result is that spiritual gifts are not being put to use to build up the entire body. Unfortunately, some come to worship in order to see what we can get out of the worship experience instead of what we can give to others from our store of spiritual gifts.
- 6. Their love and commitment spread from the worship center into their homes. They manifested the love they experienced in Christ through the love they had for one another. Their community was

marked with joy and sincerity in their hearts. What are the marks of Christian faith being lived out in our homes? How are parents discipling their children and witnessing to others in their neighborhoods?

7. The world was watching how they lived and treated one another, and Christian community became a witness that captivated many others. The way they lived in community with each other drew people to Christ. What is our witness to others in our congregations? Do others look in on us and see only bitterness and anger, resentment and resistance to reconciliation with Christ and one another? If we are not growing, perhaps we should spend less time blaming the world and consider how we are living with one another.

The disciples had experienced this love and community as they followed Jesus. Christianity is not just a statement of faith, a body of knowledge, an experience. It is not a matter of being a member of an organization or institution. It is more than theologies and liturgies, vestments or strategies, structures and constitutions. It is about one thing, rather one person — Jesus Christ. It is about following Christ, believing in Christ, serving others in Christ and living in Christ.

Martin Luther's commentary on this text from Acts, as you can imagine, affirms that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. It is not by works or through the Law. Like those who first heard Peter's preaching, Luther says, "We must fall upon this Gospel and be broken to pieces and in deep consciousness lie prostrate, like a man that is powerless, unable to move hand or foot. Here all men must confess their incapacity and inability to do good. We lose faith in ourselves, confess our sins, admit that our sentence of condemnation is just and simply trust, believe and cling to this divine grace that is ours through Christ."

It is Christ who has taken that first step in our direction, accomplished it all for us and makes His abundant grace so readily available to all who believe. Once we come to Christ and the foundation of faith is laid within us, then we are to grow in the knowledge of God and His will and be filled with spiritual wisdom, pleasing God, walking worthy, bearing fruit in every good work.

Luther continues by reminding us that what follows Peter's preaching is the proof that we have faith in Jesus in the treatment of our neighbor. Christ's love comes through us. We find pleasure and joy in serving our neighbor. Those who follow Jesus see the world from a different perspective, not obsessed with what the world values. Luther says, "With Christ the root and sap are good for He has grafted us onto a rich and fruitful vine, therefore, such fruits must come forth."

The disciples remained with those who had come to believe in Jesus. The design of this community, the New Testament Church, bears the same marks that the disciples experienced with Jesus. They want the new believers to be as intimate with Jesus as they were. They want them to experience His powerful presence. They want them to know and love Jesus as they did, to understand who He is and the nature of His kingdom. They want them to understand that they, too, are on a journey of following Jesus.

The invitation is simple, "Come and follow me!" He is the Gospel. He is the singular object of our faith. He is eternal life and there is no life apart from Him. He is all there is. In Him the whole world holds together. This is the content of faith and the only source of salvation. He is who He claims to be — "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

It is by following Jesus as His disciples that we grow in our faith, are involved in ministry that offers care and consolation to our neighbor. It is following Jesus that transforms our lives. It is following Jesus that becomes our witness. It is in following Jesus that we lead others to hear both Law and Gospel and believe in Him and through that faith to respond obediently as His disciples. This is the heart of what it means to be Mission Driven and to engage in life-to-life discipleship. The faithful transmission of this message through Word and Sacrament ministry is the legacy and heritage that has been passed on to us — not to simply embrace, but to share broadly. It is the life we are called to live.

It is my joy to be with you following our risen Lord, Jesus Christ!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

May is North American Lutheran Seminary month

A time for special gifts to support our seminary

By the Rev. Dr. Amy C. SchifrinNorth American Lutheran Seminary
President

Students work hard all year long. They study. They write papers. They learn ancient languages. They give presentations. They question. They learn new material. They engage old material in a new way. They think. They reflect. They memorize. They may get nervous before they preach their first sermon before their peers. They hold part-time jobs. They take turns working in the community's kitchen. They are far from their families and share holiday meals together.



Our seminarians have daily rhythms of work and prayer, study and conversation, quiet reflection and joyous celebration. And among all of these things, graduation is the time when those around them — from parents and spouses to friends and faculty — can look at them and see who they have become and how they've grown in faith.

We have six NALS graduates this May, and I am among those who celebrate their accomplishments, give thanks for how God is shaping their faith and witness, and who will miss them dearly.

As you contemplate your annual giving to the NALS, I want you to hear what some of them have to say about their years of seminary formation.

In my time of study at the NALS, I have been continually overwhelmed by the goodness and love of God in Christ Jesus through the faithful teaching of my professors, the mutual care and camaraderie among my classmates, and our rhythm of worship and prayer together.

- Brittany Jones, M. Div., 2019

I became more Lutheran through my time studying at NALS. I was impressed and inspired by the Lutheran liturgy, which drew me closer to the God we worship. I was dramatically transformed and reshaped by the teaching of instructors here. I found the NALS to be a very supportive community with some really interesting people, and my life was enriched by classmates coming from various backgrounds.

Ke (Ray) Zhu, M. Div., 2019

While at the NALS residentially, I have a new found love for Lutheran worship studies. I have experienced worship every morning and evening with Matins and Vespers services in the campus chapel with my fellow seminarians. Forming us in the tradition of the Church, singing the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis, and many others help shape us for our future as pastors and theologians. I also really enjoyed spending time with seminarians at their homes with their spouses and children. Making dinners for one another and playing games with one another was wonderful.

– Ryan Henkel, M.Div., 2019 Continued on Page 11



Ke (Ray) Zhu preaches in his home congregation, the Chinese Lutheran Church of Honolulu, Hawaii.

It has been such a gift to be a student in the NALS at Trinity! I have been deeply formed by my classes, professors, fellow students, and participation in the liturgy, and cannot imagine a more beautiful, wonderful seminary experience. The presence and love of Jesus Christ is in this place!

> Janessa Fisk, M.A.R. in Church History and Systematic Theology, 2019

These words only begin to tell the story. I can't wait for you to hear them preach God's Word. I can't wait for you to meet them all. They will serve you well as parish pastors, in nursing homes and chaplaincy settings, as missionaries and church planters, and as teachers of the church. Each one is gifted by God for a life of faithful service, a life that gives glory to God in word and deed.

Your financial gifts and your prayers have made their seminary education possible, and for this I say, Thanks be to God! And I pray that as we highlight the North American Lutheran Seminary in our May campaign, you will continue to give generously, so that we will be able to continue to prepare this generation, and the ones that follow, for faithful service in Christ's Church.

You may learn more about the North American Lutheran Seminary or make a gift online at thenals.org.

Gifts to support the seminary may be mailed to:

North American Lutheran Church PO Box 860565 Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565

Checks should be payable to North American Lutheran Church or NALC. Use the memo line to indicate North American Lutheran Seminary or NALS.



Congregational annual reports

Congregations are reminded to complete their annual report to the NALC. These reports help us to gain an accurate understanding of our congregations and of the NALC as a whole.

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

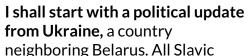
Many congregations have not yet completed their reports. They are encouraged to do so as soon as possible. The report may be accessed online at thenalc.org/congregational-report.

Belarus Ministry Update from Pastor Valery Hryhoryk

By Pastor Valery Hryhoryk

Dear brothers and sisters:

Greetings in the name of Christ! This ministry update comes to you from Pastor Valery Hryhoryk, your global worker in Belarus. This is my spring 2019 ministry update. You may remember I am issuing a ministry update quarterly. This helps our friends and ministry supporters to pray, be aware of the needs and to give thanks together with us for God's blessings.



countries are connected in this part of the world economically and politically, and influence one another in many ways. The Ukrainian people just elected a new president, Vladimir Zelensky. He is no politician. He is a comedian! This situation reminds me of Arnold Schwarzenegger in California. Vladimir Zelensky has united 73 percent of the voices in Ukraine. People are tired of the old system and corruption that Pyotr Poroshenko (the former





president of Ukraine) had to offer. So, Ukraine is going to have a new president soon, and hopefully it will experience some democratic development. Time will tell.

The president of Belarus, however, is the oldest president in all of the Commonwealth of Independent States and is well known for his hard authoritarian rule. He has been in power for 25 years now. So, Belarus continues to be a nondemocratic state with the last dictator in Europe.

Please pray for a good neighboring relationship between Ukraine and Belarus! There is a war going on in Ukraine, and Belarus plays an important role in the peacemaking process. Please pray for justice and freedom of worship in Belarus.

A theological seminar took place in Vitebsk in March. Having theological seminars twice a year (spring and fall) has become a good tradition. It is not always easy for our teacher, Valery Volodin from St.

Petersburg, Russia, to travel to Belarus. However, the Lord is good to us as we understand the importance of theological education, fellowship and time spent together — as we always have people gathered from different Lutheran congregations in Belarus. We even had representatives from the Reformed Church of Belarus this time. Please give thanks to God for the seminars and ask the Lord to help us to continue this into the future!

We are grateful for the opportunity to support the rehabilitation center for handicapped children in Vitebsk.

We had a second visit to the center and had a meeting with the director, Elena, and some parents of the handicapped children. We were able to discuss and make plans for how to help the center and the children. The first steps have been taken. Praise the Lord! We are working on filming a short video that speaks about everyday life in this place. We brought the children presents and they were very happy!

For the children with mental illness, it is very important to experience love and care. In many cases, they interact with this world through physical experiences and sound. We were discussing the possibility of having acoustic concerts in the center. Please thank the Lord for the possibility to minister to the staff of the center, the handicapped children and their parents, showing God's love and care.

I was privileged to attend a pastors' conference in Odessa, Ukraine.





The Rev. John Bradosky, bishop of the North American Lutheran Church, and his assistant for missions, the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, came to Ukraine to share their knowledge on discipleship. Disciple-making is a great theme that many churches miss. However, this is the only way the Church of Christ can grow and develop. The conference was a blessing.

Bishop Bradosky met representatives and bishops of all the Ukrainian Lutheran churches and gave a talk on the future of the Church. This was the first time that all Lutheran church bodies in Ukraine met together. A historic event indeed!

Disciple-making is also our priority here in Belarus. However, we have our own peculiarities, as we do not have church buildings — the church meets in homes. "Handshake relationships" remain the key in such conditions.

One of the ways to achieve this is to hold youth meetings, which we continue to host in my garage. Young people come to have fellowship together, discuss various topics, watch movies and have spiritual talks. Please ask God for the opportunity to continue these meetings!

In Odessa, a meeting was held with Bishop Bradosky and Pastor Buba, where I was able to present our plan for future development of the ministry in Belarus.

Having discipleship in mind, the idea is to build a permanent center for the children and youth ministry in Dolsha, which is 25 kilometers (15 miles) away from Vitebsk, so that we can have opportunities to have Bible camps and different educational events all year round.

The plan was approved and now I have to begin the paperwork process and fundraising. The next stage is to bring the papers to the United States during my visit to the NALC Convocation in August. Please pray for this project as it is vital for the future of the Lutheran Church in Belarus. Pray that the Lord could send all the necessary funds. We are praying for about \$70,000 to \$100,000 (U.S.) for this project.

Youth and children ministries remain our priority. We visited the unregistered congregation in Balbasovo, Orsha district, 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Vitebsk. This time we came with presents and the children were very happy. It is always great to give the presents! Sofia is our team leader there. She is a dance teacher and loves God very much. We were able to discuss the upcoming summer Bible camp in July. Please pray for Sophia and her ministry. Please ask God to give her the necessary strength to serve to the glory of God!

Please pray for the upcoming summer Bible camp

for protection, as it may be interrupted at any time.
 It could be viewed as illegal. Belarus has strict religious laws and everything to do with large gatherings is followed very closely by the





government. We praise God for the opportunity to obtain big tents, that will serve as protection from bad weather conditions. Please give thanks to God as the number of attendees of the Bible camp is increasing every year!

Book ministry: Good Book Publishers' books were delivered to Ukraine. Pastors from the Independent Lutheran Church in Ukraine received our books and were very thankful for them as there is very little Lutheran literature available in Ukraine. However, the border between Ukraine and Belarus remains a major problem. Please thank God for the literature ministry that is conducted from Belarus to other countries in the world. Currently, we are looking at the possibility of working with Christians in Ethiopia to print materials in their two main languages.

Our new books were also delivered to Grodno, the only functioning Lutheran church building in Belarus. Pastor Vladimir Tatarnikov was very pleased with the books.

Cooperation with the the Center for Mission and Evangelism of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.

This year we have started a cooperative effort with the evangelistic center in Poland. We have received 100 shoe boxes for Christmas with presents for needy children in the Vitebsk district of Belarus. It is such a great opportunity to witness about the love of God! Please give thanks and pray for this cooperation to continue to the glory of God!

Christian music ministry

We have a new bass guitar player in our music group. His name is Vitaly, and he is not a

Christian yet. He is a very kind man with a great sense of humor. Please pray for Vitaly to get to know the true and personal God! We participated in two concerts in Vitebsk recently and our Christian song "100 Stones," which was based on John Banyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," was chosen to take part in a song competition on the Belarus national radio station, "Stolitsa"





("Capital"). This radio station is number one in Belarus! I am pleased to say, that this is a great achievement for our music ministry. The song, recorded in my home studio, has perfectly fit into a radio ready format. It took me six years to study the sound engineering craft. All this was done to make music ministry possible!

Ecumenical contacts: I took part in the ecumenical event organized by the local Catholic church. We had a common prayer for the unity of all Christians. The Rev. Oleg Butkevich is the newly-appointed Catholic bishop for the Vitebsk district. Please pray for such events and dialog to continue.

Dear brothers and sisters, Please accept our gratitude for your faithful and ongoing support of the Lord's work in this part of the world. Please know that the Lord is glorified here and it is a great privilege of ours to be a blessing to our brothers and sisters outside Belarus! Praise be to God! May the Lord keep you and bless you as you bless others! Amen!

Pastor Valery Hryhoryk is an NALC Global Worker in Belarus. You may support his ministry though East European Missions Network (EEMN). Gifts may be given online at eemn.org or sent to East European Missions Network; 8210 Louisiana Blvd., NE - Suite B; Albuquerque, NM 87113.

Seeds on the Ground

Pastor Didi Panzo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

By Pastor Didi Panzo

When a farmer plants seeds in the ground, he does not know what to expect: the seeds might sprout to produce a crop, or they may die. During the visit of the Rev. Dr. Paul Gossman, World Mission Prayer League (WMPL) executive director, and Gloria Suck, our colleague missionary in Kenya, we visited Stanley Baoba and the Port of Boma.

At the port, we were well received by Christian workers and they invited us to visit one of their offices. We went to learn about what it is like to be a Christian working at the port, where no salary is paid for over 10 months. As the officer asked us to pray, Paul prayed that the place where we sat may turn into a place where people or colleagues of the company may be strengthened as they seek God's comfort in their suffering.

Now the offices are a place of prayer for many Christians who work at the port. Some even come to discover and receive Jesus as their Savior. Now, they are growing in number as the port director gave them a larger room where they may spend their prayer time, which they call "One Hour for Jesus." Also, the group wants to explore the possibility of beginning a seafarer ministry at that port. If someone has experience with seafarer ministries, please share





with us for the benefit of the group and for God's glory.

Suicide

Azimack was a young, married farmer with three children. He used to feed his family from his farming income. A few weeks back, Azimack changed his behavior and became a heavy drinker. He didn't care about his family and argued with his wife every day. Azimack told no one of what was going on in his life. On Saturday, March 23, Azimack again changed his way of living. He became happier, receptive and began talking again with his wife, kids and others. It turns out he had a plan to commit suicide. He was found dead that evening inside the bedroom of his wife's parents. Please pray for his wife and kids.

Less Production for Farmers

The city of Boma and its surrounding areas suffered a hot season of 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) during December and January. All the plants withered and died. Farmers are complaining that they are unable to harvest enough to feed their families and to generate income. We are encouraging them to rely on God, the One who can answer their "Why?" Please pray for them.

Troubling Road

During the month of March, it rained a lot in the two territories of Lukula and Tshela. That rain caused the deterioration of the road Boma-Tshela. It now takes two days to travel a distance of 120 kilometers (72 miles). This is the road I use every week to go teach at the theological school in Tshela. Two times we were stopped and could not pass because of a car that was stuck in the mud. Traveling to Tshela requires dedication and sacrifice. Pray for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) government to organize the infrastructure of the country.

Women's Convention

The women of Confessional Lutheran Churches in Congo (CELCCO) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo (EELCO) gathered for a convention organized by the women's regional office of CELCCO. The main theme of the convention was based on the book of Esther, chapter five. They encouraged all women to play the role of intercessor — asking for God's favor for the situation that the





DRC is facing. There also was a day that women spoke out against domestic violence, sexual abuse and injustice. Mrs. Elisee, who faced domestic violence for many years, recovered from trauma through our counseling program and was honored during the convention as a warrior woman. At the end of the convention, we celebrated her marriage to Mr. Jose Mayela. Let us wish them peace and blessings.

Prayer Requests

- + Pray for the port ministry.
- + Pray for Azmack's family (wife and three children).
- + Pray for the DRC government and peace in the country.
- + Pray for God's provision for mission and outreach.
- + Pray that farmers may harvest well next season.
- + Praise God for the life of Elisee and her husband Mayela.

Pastor Didi Panzo is an NALC Global Worker in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. You may support his ministry though World Mission Prayer League (WMPL). Gifts may be given online at wmpl.org or sent to World Mission Prayer League; 232 Clifton Ave.; Minneapolis, MN 55403 or World Mission Prayer League; 5408 49th Ave.; Camrose, AB T4V-0N7.

"Let No One Weep" The Resurrection is Good News!

For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. — Romans 3:20-25a (RSV)

In my first congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church in Hobbs, N.M., I was teaching adult Bible class during the seven weeks of the Easter season. We were focusing on the above passage — the Good News that we are saved by grace through faith, apart from works. I thought this would not be earth-shattering for Lutherans, but a reinforcement of something folks would've heard time and time again in catechism class, sermons and teaching.

And yet, during the week, one of my members stopped by my office and said, "Pastor, I am a lifelong Lutheran. I have been in church most every Sunday of my life and whenever we have services during the week. Maybe I wasn't listening, but I've never really heard that, or understood it before."

A long conversation followed in which we discussed forgiveness and salvation as a gift that God gives, in Jesus Christ, simply received by faith, not earned or warranted because of good things we think, do or say — not because of our "works," as Paul says.

I am thankful for that early conversation which helped me to realize, in the first days of my pastoral ministry, that even lifelong Lutherans may not understand the Gospel and may need to be reminded that we are saved by grace through faith — and this is not our own doing!



Ministry Matters

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

And if Lutherans don't truly understand — then we have work to do sharing this Good News outside our congregations, as our world revolves around "rewards" and "punishments."

In the world (outside the Church), you are expected to follow the rules and receive rewards or punishments accordingly. This holds people accountable and fosters order and justice. It's only natural, then, that people expect and assume that life in God's kingdom works the same way. God has given us commandments and ordinances intended to order our lives. God wants us to live in accordance with His Law, which is, itself, a gift and a blessing.

However, contrary to the ways of the world, we do not obey God's will in order to prove ourselves worthy or just or deserving. Because we all have sinned and continue to disobey God's stated intention for us, we need a Savior — who is Christ the Lord. Now, for Jesus'sake, God declares us worthy, just and deserving, not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we receive the gift of mercy and new life so that, in Him, we have the hope and promise of eternal life after death and a new beginning every morning of our lives. So that every night, we repent of the day's disobedience and every morning, we awaken and arise forgiven, free of the burden of sin and guilt, able to begin anew as disciples and followers of Jesus.

Martin Luther explains this in the Small Catechism, where he asks, "What does Baptism mean for daily living?" The answer: "It means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance, and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever."

Through this daily baptismal forgiveness and new birth, God intends to free the disciple and follower of Jesus for a new beginning, unburdened and set free from guilt and shame. Because we have received God's love, in Jesus, as a gift, we need not carry the burden of our sin day after day, week after week, preoccupied with our sin and disobedience in such a way that we stumble and trip over it, hindered from free and faithful living. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we can face death and life without fear that our sins — our failure to obey God's Law — will be held against us. This is the Good News — and it is specifically the Good News of Easter.

In the daily devotional reading in "For All the Saints," St. John Chrysostom (A.D. 344-407) proclaimed this Good News at Easter. His message is good news for those who may have fasted throughout the season of Lent, keeping a rigorous Lenten discipline, and good news for those may have missed Lent altogether. It is

good news for those who labored faithfully "from the first hour" and good news for those who "waited even until the eleventh hour ... let him draw near, fearing nothing." Chrysostom continues:

For the Lord will accept the last even as the first. Therefore, all of you enter into the joy of your Lord. Rich and poor together, hold high festival ... Both you who have fasted, and you who did not fast, rejoice together today ... Enjoy the feast of faith; receive the riches of God's mercy ... Let no one weep for his iniquities, for forgiveness shines forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free.

And why focus on this in a Ministry Matters article? Because our ministry in the NALC has everything to do with this Good News, proclaimed not only on Easter or during the seven weeks of Easter, but every day in every way!

As we lift up discipleship and disciple-making, let us never make this a "work" or a reason for boasting. As we seek to hold fast to the Word of God, being Christ Centered and Mission Driven, let us never be arrogant or haughty, but humble and thankful,

As we minister in and through our church body and our individual congregations, let us proclaim this and only this — that Jesus, who was crucified is risen! Risen, indeed! Alleluia!



Pastor Nathan Yoder

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference

The Canadian Rockies Theological Conference was held April 30 through May 3 in Canmore, Alberta. This year's theme was "The World Following Christ: The Lutheran



Pastor Larry Vogel

Catechism as a resource for life and witness in parish, home and beyond." Featured speakers were the Rev. Larry Vogel of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, pastor of St. Martin's Lutheran Church in Maiden, North Carolina.

Ventures in Youth Ministry

By Gary and Laurie Pecuch

Join us Aug. 5-6 in Indianapolis, Indiana, 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 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Tuesday from 9 a.m. to noon. We will have presentations and discussions around the topics of developing spiritual disciplines and ministry skills in 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.



Registration fee of \$80 includes lunch on Monday. To register or for more information please visit *lutheranweek.com*.

The last monthly webinar session for this school year is on May 14.

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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