

# CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

August-September 2013

## A new direction for the ELCA?

“Nobody saw that coming!” So I heard again and again at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Pittsburgh after Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson was denied a third term and Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was elected to replace him.

Lutheran CORE heartily congratulates Bishop Eaton, and we urge fervent prayers for her and for the ELCA in these precarious times (to borrow a phrase from our theological conference). Her task will not be easy, and we also should pray for the many ELCA staffers who suddenly find their future employment in doubt.

While nobody can read the minds of the voting members, surely she was propelled to the top of the balloting by statements such as, “In 2009 this church took a very important and momentous decision which turned out to be a very costly decision. I happen to think it was the right decision, but I think we’ve not yet had a chance to grieve the loss that we experienced before we move on to hope and renewal. So to all of our rostered people, all of you who are still members of the ELCA, I thank you for your faithfulness when so many decided that they could no longer remain a part of this body.”

She added later, “We talk about being an inclusive church and I think that’s a good and wonderful thing. Bishop Hanson has worked hard and courageously to make sure that all are welcome, but I want to make sure that what we said in 2009, that those who by their scriptural and confessional convictions believe that that decision was not the correct one, that those people also have a voice in this church. We need to make room for those who do not agree with us but who do agree upon the cross.”

And in response to the question about what her priorities would be over the next six years if elected, she said, “I think it’s going to be absolutely critical to spend as much time as we possibly can trying to rebuild the trust and relationship that we should have as members of the Body of Christ.”

In the midst of the ELCA’s 25th Anniversary hoopla, Bp. Eaton publicly named “the elephant in the room” and promised to deal with it. One friend posted on Facebook, “I’ve been waiting four years to hear somebody say that.”

I asked a mutual friend to introduce us, and I told Bp. Eaton, as I now say publicly, that I would like to meet with her once she gets settled

into her Chicago office (or sooner if she desires) and discuss ways Lutheran CORE can help her in the rebuilding of trust and unity. Lutheran CORE has connections with many who feel alienated, and we would like to help her in this work of building up the Body of Christ in North America.

We have stated from the beginning that we are not about staying or leaving, but that we exist to “mobilize confessing Lutherans for evangelical renewal,” no matter their affiliation. As an ELCA pastor for 40 years, I have never been told by any ELCA or synodical official what I may or may not preach. That may be part of our problem; I wish bishops were more concerned about what is preached and taught in our congregations and seminaries. But I have the freedom to proclaim God’s Word of Law and Gospel in the ELCA, and so do all other pastors.

My request is that we give Bp. Eaton time to get established in office, and that we follow the Eighth Commandment and put the most charitable construction on all that she says and does. This includes expecting that she will make mistakes along the way. The Golden

*(Continued on page 2)*

## ELCA's new direction?

*(Continued from page 1)*

Rule is never bad advice, even where bishops are concerned.

Those who know Bp. Eaton speak of her as truthful and honest, willing to listen but also one who states clearly where she stands on matters. One person I spoke with used the word “transparent.”

There was one particularly sour note in the assembly. Whether he intended it or not, Bp. Hanson caused great offense to the North American Lutheran Church delegation that was invited to the ELCA assembly for the first time. After calling the ecumenical guests onto the stage, he looked at them and said, “When a church first defines itself over against another, the road to reconciliation is more arduous. This church at its founding said that’s not what it means to be Lutheran. To be Lutheran is to first define ourselves on the basis of our relatedness. And when we begin defining ourselves on the basis of our relatedness, then we are called immediately to a deeper conversation, to attend to those things that keep us more fully together. And then we begin to look upon each other in our differences as being enriched by them, not threatened by them.”

In the context it is hard to hear his comments as anything but a public chiding of the NALC. And since his point seems to have been that these

unnamed other bodies will not be able to establish all the ecumenical relationships the ELCA has, it is worth noting that although the persons on stage represented a large number of mostly declining old-line denominations, the NALC has vital relationships with some of the largest and fastest-growing churches in the world. There may be more Christians in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus than in all the groups with whom the ELCA has Full Communion agreements. Add the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, and there is no question.

We are especially disappointed if Bp. Hanson's offense was deliberate, as he has usually been carefully diplomatic. If it was a misstatement committed near the end of an emotionally grueling assembly, the appropriate response would have been an immediate public apology. None has been offered as we go to press, and he was informed quickly of the NALC reaction.

Many of the dissenters in the ELCA retain friendly relationships with sisters and brothers in Christ who have left, and if Bp. Eaton is to work toward healing and reconciliation, her actions and attitudes toward those in LCMC and NALC will need to be part of the equation. We do not build up the Body of Christ if our unchurched neighbors only see Lutherans attacking one another, and those who have left are also part of the Body of Christ.

There has been a lot of sin and pain all around, and rebuilding trust will not be easy. All of us are overly sensitive on some issues, and as fallen human beings we need to tread lightly in our conversations and actions. The incident reminds us that healing will take effort, and it is easy to pour salt on open wounds.

Bp. Eaton has set challenging goals for herself, and for the sake of all the people in the ELCA and for all our unchurched neighbors in North America, we pledge to work with her in our shared task of biblical and confessional renewal. We will be as honest and forthright in both our support and opposition as she has been. We trust that the Holy Spirit will blow across the chaos of our twenty-first century churches, creating new life for all people in the Lord Jesus Christ.



*Pr. Steve Shipman, director of Lutheran CORE, can be reached at [sshipman@lutherancore.org](mailto:sshipman@lutherancore.org) or 570-916-7780.*

# “A Life Worthy of Our Calling”

## 2013 Convocation



More than 300 individuals attended the 2013 Lutheran CORE Convocation in Pittsburgh, Penn. This year's theme was “A Life Worthy of Our Calling.” Photo by Samuel Nieva.

Issues of identity, mission, and discipleships characterized Lutheran CORE's 2013 Convocation held at the Station Square Sheraton Hotel in Pittsburgh, August 6. The event marked a first in recent years for the convocation to meet at a major city hotel rather than a megachurch campus. The convocation was followed by the joint Lutheran CORE/NALC-sponsored Theological Conference (see related article on page 5).

Lutheran CORE's Moderator, Pr. Paul Urling, reflected on the history and future of the organization, noting that much had changed within the past eight to ten years, especially since the meeting at Fishers, Indiana, following the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

“The ground keeps shifting; the result of decades of erosion, unfaithfulness,” said Urling. “But have the ‘new wisdom’ and the ‘progressive thought’ made the Church and the

world, the evangelism and mission, better or stronger?” he asked.

Urling said Lutheran CORE's challenge will be to keep orthodoxy, and that time will be required for that faithfulness to result in changes. Keeping that orthodoxy will involve facing “the reality that many faithful

people are still in the ELCA and the ELCIC. Those who have left are called to faithfulness toward those who have not,” he stated. Lutheran CORE members must remain connected, he said, adding that “our hearts must beat for those who are alone, to support and

*(Continued on page 4)*



Pr. Dennis Nelson, Pr. Steve Shipman, Pr. Paul Urling, and Lynn Kickingbird sing a hymn during the opening worship for the 2013 Lutheran CORE Convocation. Photo by Samuel Nieva.

## 2013 Convocation summary

*(Continued from page 3)*

connect to them. Even if we don't 'need' Lutheran CORE, we support it for the sake of others who do." He exhorted the group to pray and work together and remain Christ-centered.

Lynn Kickingbird, chair of the Steering Committee, gave a brief history of the organization from its beginnings as a movement for reform in the ELCA to a pan-Lutheran movement for renewal dedicated to mobilizing confessing Lutherans to fulfill Christ's Great Commission by making disciples.

She reminded the convocation of the many ways that takes place, including theological conferences in the US and Canada, visitation by the director across North America to congregations and renewal groups, connecting congregations with worthy missions through MissionConnect, an ELCA-specific working group that attends synod assemblies and regional renewal groups, a congregational life working group that addresses concerns in parish life, connecting pastors and lay professionals with confessing congregations through ClergyConnect, as well as electronic media such as the newsletter, the website, Facebook and Twitter.

Kickingbird stated that finances have declined as members have joined other denominations. Currently about one-third of the membership supports the organization, and efforts are underway to be good stewards of the group's assets.

"Whatever the future brings," said Kickingbird, "Lutheran CORE seeks to be faithful to our 'core'—witness to Jesus through the Scriptures, as articulated in the Creeds and taught

through the lens of the Confessions, for the sake of bringing the saving Gospel to the world."

Pr. Steve Shipman, director of Lutheran CORE, gave greetings to the audience watching the live internet streaming, and reminded the convocation that Lutheran CORE exists to connect confessing Lutherans across denominational boundaries. "Even if you don't need Lutheran CORE, other people need you, and need you to be involved with us. We want to get the Word out! God's Word and mission are in the forefront, not politics," he said.

Pr. Shipman referred convocation attendees to his written report, which outlined the latest developments in Lutheran CORE's work. He noted that the majority of funds designated for ethnic ministries have been distributed to Chinese, Latino, Oromo, Amharic, Sudanese, and African-American ministries. Two of the newer denominations have joined Lutheran CORE: Augsburg Lutheran Churches and the North American Lutheran Church.

Shipman reported that, "Lutheran CORE is not in the business of telling people to leave the ELCA. Rather, we are committed to 'mobilizing confessing Lutherans for evangelical renewal.'" To fulfill that mission, he has met with several bishops, put up display tables at three synod assemblies and arranged for a meeting room and display table at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Improvements have been made in MissionConnect to connect congregations to worthy ministries, including the implementation of a vetting process by which ministries apply for inclusion on the website listing.

He also reported that he seeks to let people know of the many resources available through Sola Publications, our *CORE Connections* newsletter, Youth Encounter, the Institute of Lutheran Theology, and the St. Paul Lutheran Seminary. He made reference to the difficulty dissenting congregations faced with the election of the first openly gay ELCA bishop in southern California given that congregations were told they would not be forced to call a gay pastor if their conscience did not permit it.



*During his report to the Convocation, interim treasurer Mike Bennett noted that giving is down but that appropriate decreases in spending have been made. Photo by Carter Askren.*

Interim treasurer Mike Bennett reported on the current finances. Giving is down, and appropriate decreases in spending have been made. He emphasized that the budget is a spending plan, not an authorization for spending. He noted that the surplus from the past was intended for Lutheran CORE's work. "We weren't obligated to spend it in the past; we aren't obligated to refrain from spending it as we need to," he said. Projected deficit for the coming year is estimated at \$20,000, with the largest items in the

*(Continued on page 16)*

# “On Being the Church in These Precarious Times”

## 2013 Theological Conference

### The Church of the Triune God



“What kind of church are we talking about...and what is so precarious about the times in which we live?” asked the Rev. Dr. Carl

Braaten as he introduced the fourth annual theological conference sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the North American Lutheran Church held at the Sheraton Station Square Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pa., August 6-7, 2013. Braaten stated that, although we are not facing persecution from imperial Rome, post-Reformation religious wars, or Nazi or Communist tyranny, “our times are precarious... in a more spiritual sense.”

*The serpent of secularism plants the question, ‘Did God really say?’—then it follows with the false assurance—‘You don’t need to obey. You will not die!’*

Braaten said that, since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Western Christianity has struggled against “militant secularization” that

has led to the erosion of religion from society, intolerance towards Christian belief and values, the devaluing of human life, and the loss of objective truth and the biblical narrative.

He observed that the Church is secularizing itself not so much from the outside but from the inside when it shapes itself after popular culture instead of the Bible’s narrative. “The serpent of secularism plants the question, ‘Did God really say?’—then it follows with the false assurance—‘You don’t need to obey. You will not die!’” Braaten said.

“If the Church cannot provide a message, a truth, a story, a hope that is totally other, not of this world, then why bother? Instead of acting like strangers and pilgrims whose citizenship is in heaven, we have become mere earthlings at home in our narcissistic, hedonistic, and materialistic society. Worship in the secularized church tends to become a quasi-entertaining spectacle that must ‘meet my needs’ to provide me an emotional outlet, with laughter replacing reverence and silly stories a substitute for awe in the presence of the Holy One,” he said.

*“Any Church that neglects the Great Commission has entered into a state of self-contradiction... The Church’s call to mission is a matter of life and death,” Braaten said.*

The erosion of bedrock doctrines like the Trinity typifies this secularization. “Apart from a proper understanding of the Trinity, one cannot answer the question of Jesus’ identity and importance. I shudder when I hear preachers lament on Trinity Sunday that this is the occasion of the church year they dread most,” he said. “The Trinitarian paradigm frames the Church’s understanding and proclamation of the Gospel... [it] tells every generation of Christians which gospel they are to believe, teach, and confess.”

Furthermore, the Trinity doctrine serves as a model for church unity and mission. The Church serves the Triune God in sharing the Good News of Christ with the world. “Any Church that neglects the Great Commission has entered into a state of self-contradiction... The Church’s call to mission is a matter of life and death,” Braaten said.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Theological conference summary

(Continued from page 5)

### Holy Spirit, Creator of the Church

The Rev. Dr. Stephan Turnbull of First Lutheran Church, White Bear Lake, Minn., acknowledged the broken nature of Lutheran Christianity and efforts of churches to discern God's work in our present denominational divisions.



“What is God calling into being in and among us that previously was not?” he asked. Dr. Turnbull offered a theological “three-legged stool” that consists of spiritual victory, eschatological hope, and the centrality of Christ to help Christians to reflect biblically on that question.

“As the Holy Spirit creates the Church, the Church becomes part of the spiritual victory of God,” he told the convocation. Speaking on Ephesians 3:2-10, Turnbull said that “the mystery of Christ”—that the Gentiles are included in God's covenant with Israel—is mediated through the Church by the Holy Spirit.

*“Christ is the cornerstone of this whole building, without which everything in this building falls down... Christ is the center of who we are as the Church and how we live, or we are not the Church.” –Turnbull*

One way this victory is evidenced is by the Holy Spirit continually “conscripting men and women to Gospel mission. It is a joyful thing,” he said. He likened this joy of spiritual victory to the joy experienced by Tom Hank's character in the movie *Castaway*, who, after discovering how to build a fire, burst into a raucous exaltation of triumph complete with song, dance and gleeful gibberish.

“The overcoming of the overwhelming human reality of dividedness... is part and parcel of the victory of God over the power of sin,” Turnbull said.

The second leg of the theological stool, eschatological hope, acknowledges that this spiritual victory is both a present reality and a promise to be completed in the future. Turnbull lifted up Paul's image of the Holy Spirit as a deposit (Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:22 and 5:5), and gave the example of earnest money paid on a home purchase as an

illustration of the now-but-not-yet nature of God's saving work.

“The spiritual victory that God wins for the church, he wins through the cross of Christ. The eschatological fulfillment that God accomplishes in the church he accomplishes in the coming of Jesus and will bring to its fulfillment in the Second Coming of Jesus. Christ is the cornerstone of this whole building without which everything in this building falls down... Christ is the center of who we are as the Church and how we live, or we are not the Church,” he said.

The Church's joyous mission, through the Holy Spirit, is to bring people into the true family of God. “It is unbridled, unmitigated, rapturous joy to actually share the Good News of Jesus with other people, to see people discover the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ and to walk with them into newfound freedom,” Turnbull said.

(Continued on page 19)

*“As the Holy Spirit creates the Church, the Church becomes part of the spiritual victory of God,” Turnbull told the convocation.*

# “Giving Goes Both Ways” – MissionConnect report

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

The MissionConnect team is very grateful for the opportunity we were given to tell about our work at the recent Lutheran CORE Convocation. We entitled both our presentation and our workshop “Giving Goes Both Ways,” because that is the experience that has been so consistently shared both by ethnic and other mission congregations that have found mission partners as well as by more established churches that have created these mission relationships. In terms of financial and other kinds of resources,

more established congregations have much to give. In terms of a stirring, inspiring, and contagious example of commitment to Christ, belief in the authority of the Bible, courageous faith, and evangelistic fervor, ethnic and other mission churches also have so much to give.

The team wishes to thank everyone who participated in the report and in the workshops. Pastor Doug Gast of Bethel Lutheran Church in Noblesville, Indiana, told of his trip to Ethiopia and of God’s calling him to establish a partnership with a congregation in the town of Senbete. Pastor Samuel Nieva

spoke of the work of Pueblo de Dios Lutheran Church in Compton, California. This congregation is doing ministry and outreach in a very low income community. Pueblo de Dios is part of the ELCA’s Southwest California Synod, but its members are very upset over the synod’s recent election of an openly gay bishop. However, because they meet in a building that is owned by the synod, and most of the pastor’s salary is paid either by the synod or by ELCA Churchwide, their options are limited.

*(Continued on page 8)*



“Giving Goes Both Ways,” a presentation and workshop by the MissionConnect team, highlighted ethnic and other mission congregations—and the more established churches that support them—by creating and developing mission partnerships. Pastors Randy Ouimette, Eddy Perez, Patricia Muran, Samuel Nieva, Douglas Gast, and Dennis Nelson (from left) detailed their experiences and explained how creating and building mission partnerships benefits both sides of the relationship. Photo by Carter Askren.

## “Giving Goes Both Ways”

*(Continued from page 7)*

We also heard from Pastor Patricia Muran of Iglesia Luterana Santa Cruz in Santa Maria, California. Pastor Muran told the story of how, just out of seminary, she started a new church that would reach Spanish-speaking people. She wondered whom God would send. God surprised her by sending a group of first-generation immigrants from Mexico, who speak Spanish and a language that she had never heard before: Mixteco.

Patricia is pastor of an ELCA mission start that meets in the facility of an NALC congregation and is supported by both ELCA and NALC churches. She was introduced by Pastor Randy Ouimette, an NALC/LCMC pastor from Arroyo Grande, California, who told the story of how a group of ELCA pastors and churches had the vision to work together to start a new Spanish language mission. Some of these pastors and churches are now NALC, while others have remained within the ELCA, but they still work together to support this mission.

Pastor Eddy Perez of Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Florida, and dean of the NALC’s Caribbean and Hispanic Mission District, told of how ethnic churches and other church plants are blessed by the financial support they receive from more established, resource-blessed congregations, but also how the lives and ministries of resource-blessed congregations are enriched by establishing partnerships with ethnic churches and other church plants. Hence the name of our workshop, “Giving Goes Both Ways.”

The stories of these congregations, as well as other congregations that are seeking mission partners and/or have entered into mission partnerships, can be found on Lutheran CORE’s website by first clicking on the link, “MissionConnect” and then on the link, “Stories of MissionConnect.” You will also find contact information for each of these congregations.

The MissionConnect team wishes to thank everyone who attended one of our workshops. We hope that you were inspired to go back to your congregation and urge them to respond to the challenge to establish a direct, personal mission connection with at least one local or domestic mission and at least one global mission. As a visual reminder, we displayed three world maps made up of puzzle pieces. We encouraged people to take at least one piece from at least one of the puzzles

and then pray for the people who live in that part of the world—both for the Christians as well as for those who do not yet know Jesus.

The MissionConnect team consists of the Rev. Carter Askren, Mr. Rod Hackman, the Rev. Dennis Nelson, and Ms. Rachel Sosebee. Carter is editor of the *CORE Connection* newsletter and webmaster for Lutheran CORE’s website. Rod and Dennis serve on the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. We want to thank Rachel for her invaluable contributions to our efforts. At the time, she was serving as administrative assistant to Dr. Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions of the NALC.

To make a connection through MissionConnect, [click here](#) for a MissionConnect Response Form.



*One of three MissionConnect world puzzles displayed at the workshops. Participants were encouraged to take at least one piece from a puzzle and then pray for the people living in that part of the world—both Christians and those who do not yet know Jesus. Photo by Carter Askren.*

# MissionConnect: A New Thing Christian Church – Lithonia, Georgia

*The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee seeks to remind congregations of the challenge that Lutheran CORE makes to member congregations to support one local and one international mission partner. This article continues the narrative of congregations that are making this kind of direct mission connection.*

By Pastor Dennis Nelson

A New Thing Christian Church of Lithonia, Georgia, is an NALC mission congregation in the Stone Mountain area of metropolitan Atlanta. Their vision is very simple—to go and fulfill the mandate to make disciples in the name of the Triune God.

According to Pastor Trina Petersen, “We want to be as biblical as possible.”

The priorities of the congregation are expressed in the acrostic SHAPE—Serve others, Honor Scripture, Apply what has been studied, Pray the will of God, and Embrace worship as a lifestyle. Pastor Petersen has spent a great deal of time cultivating the sense that the church is not the building, but the people of God, who are living a life that reflects who they are and whose they are.

Every few weeks the congregation holds what they call a “Taking it to the streets” Sunday. The day begins with everyone gathering together for prayer and communion, and then for the next forty-five minutes to an hour, the people go out to such places as restaurants, bus stops, and gas stations to share the Gospel, to find out the needs of people, and to learn how the congregation can be of service to the community. Then everyone comes back to share their experiences and to report on what they have learned. According to Pastor Petersen, “Jesus did not just sit in the Temple. Most of his ministry was out in the community. Jesus went to where the people were. We want to follow his model.”



*Every few weeks, Pastor Trina Petersen and members of A New Thing Christian Church gather for prayer and communion before “Taking it to the streets”—going out into the community to share the Gospel.*

Those who are not comfortable with going out remain and pray for the others.

A New Thing Christian Church works with three other congregations to serve the indigent and the working poor in the Stone Mountain area. They provide food, clothing, and legal assistance, and hope to soon be able to offer computer access for people who live in extended stay hotels or in

low income housing, or are homeless and sleep on the streets. They also have a strong worship and arts ministry. They go out and share the Gospel through dance, the spoken word, and drama. They go to coffee houses and other places where unchurched people gather and speak in a language that unchurched people can understand.

This past summer the church partnered with a local community center. The men of the congregation spent time with children who were attending a summer camp. They serve a hot meal to about eighty people each week. They not only provide the food, they also sit down and talk with the people while they are eating. In addition, they give these people a sack lunch, so they are actually serving 160 meals a week. Pastor Petersen shared, “Some of them sit down and eat their sack lunch outside the building right after they have eaten the hot meal. They must be really hungry.”

A New Thing Christian Church traces itself back to January 2011 and a handful of people, who were committed to

*(Continued on page 10)*

## A New Thing Christian Church

*(Continued from page 9)*



*Members of A New Thing Christian Church, in partnership with a local community center, serve a hot meal to about eighty people each week. They not only provide the food, they also sit down and talk with the people while they are eating. In addition, they give the diners a sack lunch, so they are actually serving about 160 meals weekly.*

living biblically-based lives. At the same time Trina Petersen was finishing seminary and was waiting for her first call. She felt that God was leading her to the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). A few of these people knew her, so they kept in contact with her. They told her, “When you begin your church, we will become members.”

On the first Sunday she met with them, the only ones she knew were coming were her own immediate family. However, a total of twenty-nine people attended. They first started meeting in her sister’s basement, but soon outgrew that location. So Trina Petersen offered to move out of her own home and make it available to the congregation. The bedrooms are used for office and classroom space, the living room and dining room function as the fellowship hall, and the family room,

kitchen, and sun room serve as the sanctuary. Upon giving up her own home, Pastor Petersen moved into her sister’s basement. She said, “Many people would see that as a sacrifice. I see it as a joy. We outgrew the space we were meeting in and had to move to something larger.”

A New Thing Christian Church became an official congregation of the NALC on May 5, 2011, and then called Trina Petersen to be their pastor. She was ordained on May 29, 2011. She is very grateful for the gifts they have received from several other NALC congregations, including microphones, a baptismal font, and altar furniture, as well as for financial support from Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

Currently, they are raising funds for new sanctuary chairs. Pastor Petersen said, “We have a lot of mismatched folding chairs, and we have yet to have a sign.” They are very intentional in not including the need for chairs in the church budget. They want the majority of the budget to be outreach and community oriented, not for inward use.

The name of the church is based upon Isaiah 43:18-19, where God says, “Forget the former things, the things of old; behold, I am doing a new thing.” They are a Lutheran church, but they feel that lifting up Christ is more important. Pastor Petersen explained, “We are Christo-centric, so Christ needs to be in our name.”

Pastor Petersen also shared, “It can be a dangerous thing when congregants actually listen to the Word of God and apply it to their

*(Continued on page 12)*



*Children from a local community center’s summer camp participate in a three-legged race with members of A New Thing Christian church. Photo courtesy of Brandon Gregory Photography. Used by permission.*



Call Inc. is a Christian non-profit teaching mission and ministry (not a business) dedicated to mobilizing ordinary people called by Jesus to “incorporate” His call into all of life ... family, work, community, world and the gathering of believers.

Yes, Jesus is calling you—not just pastors, church professionals and foreign missionaries! Miraculously throughout history, Jesus has called ordinary people to transform and heal a broken world. It’s the Lord’s ingenious plan! Martin Luther taught and encouraged the same.

Discover how you can live “worthy” of Jesus and “in conformity” with His call! Recognize His personal and practical voice! Yes, Jesus is still speaking to His children, and desires to speak to you. Uncover how Jesus has already custom designed, empowered and equipped you for His call, giving you His Holy Spirit, power, spiritual gifts and other unique attributes. Identify the places that Jesus has prepared for you to live in conformity with His call. Pinpoint what distracts and detours you from living worthy of Jesus and His call! Because He rose from the dead, Jesus is still alive, calling, befriending, training and partnering with ordinary people like you to recreate, reform and renew people, places and problems with His rule, reign, redemption, and resurrection power!

Discover how you can be the “church” in action. “Church” in biblical Greek literally means, “called out ones.” Ordinary people “called out” by Jesus and pressing on in His call are crucial to truly grasping the potential and power of “church.” Mobilize ordinary people “called out” by Jesus to have a transformative impact and influence in the world!

A multitude of ordinary people hearing Jesus’ call... that’s our hope and prayer! Towards these ends and as a result of years of experience, Call Inc. has developed teaching seminars and resources such as our *Ordinary People “Call” Seminars* and our brand new *Custom Designed Reflection Guide*, an interactive prayer journal combining guided listening prayer exercises and scriptural teaching for individual discernment, Bible study and group conversation. We hope ordinary people will hear Jesus calling them to a life of discipleship.

#### **Our Objectives & Values:**

- + We teach ordinary people called by Jesus how to seek, discover and “incorporate” His call into all of life. Our hope is that all Christians of any age will live worthy of Jesus and His call.

- + We train leaders to mobilize ordinary people called by Jesus.

- + We encourage leaders to discern the call within their call to increase their effectiveness as kingdom leaders and mobilizers of ordinary people.

- + We renew “Christian churches”... ordinary people “anointed” and empowered with the Holy Spirit in order to be “called out” by Jesus to transform the world.

- + We encourage “living worthy of Jesus and His call” as an essential dimension of a multifaceted approach for developing fruitful disciples of Jesus.

- + We teach events, provide resources (including free downloads), discernment conversations, discipleship development, leadership development, and encourage individuals, groups and churches towards these objectives.

*(Continued on page 12)*

## Call inc.

*(Continued from page 11)*

### What We Do:

+ **Ordinary People Call Seminars** combine scriptural teaching, prayerful reflection exercises, listening prayer and conversation, assisting people to seek, discover and “incorporate” God’s call into their unique mission field of life: family, work, community, world, and the church gathering. Most basic is the call to know, follow and uniquely serve Jesus... 24/7.

+ **Teaching Events** (seminars, retreats, workshops) on related topics: spiritual gifts, life stewardship, discipleship, listening prayer, spiritual disciplines (as a means of grace), call mobilization training, fear, and “church” (the called out

ones). These scriptural events are taught by highly experienced and knowledgeable teachers.

+ **Resources** (publications and downloadable resources for all ages): God’s call, spiritual gifts, life stewardship, discipleship, and “church” (the called out ones) with plans for video teaching!

+ **Free Downloadable Resources** for individual use including spiritual gifts identification inventory and an easy-to-use talent and skills profile (an effective replacement for time and talent sheets).

+ **Discipleship Development Strategy & Discernment Conversations** for individuals, leaders, churches and other organizations.



### Contact Person:

Pastor Wendy Berthelsen, President and Cofounder; NALC/LCMC Pastor; member of Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

[pastor.wendy@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pastor.wendy@sbcglobal.net)  
214-477-0429

**Website:** [www.callinc.org](http://www.callinc.org)



## A New Thing Christian Church

*(Continued from page 10)*

lives. They become disciples who want to make a difference.” There have been times when the congregation has wanted to do a task or undertake a new ministry, which she has felt was too ambitious for a group of their size. “But, Pastor,” they would respond, “didn’t you say that if we could do it on our own, then we would not need God?”

The people of **A New Thing**—ANT—call themselves the Mighty Ants. They say, “Like an ant, we can carry ten times our weight.” To which

Pastor Petersen responds, “Sometimes I just have to step back and let them do it. When folks take the Word of God and start living it out, that is what I call dangerous discipleship.”

Already numbering about fifty adults and twenty children in worship each week, they are making plans to expand to two services in the fall. But their biggest goal for the future is to acquire space in the area where they do their outreach ministry. Right now they have to carry in everything—food, clothing, and computers—and set it all up each time. They would like to acquire a more permanent site. The

ideal would be to find one location where they would be able to do everything—worship, education, fellowship, and outreach.

A New Thing Christian Church is worthy of our prayers and financial support. You can learn more about them on their [website](#). You may also [email Pastor Trina Petersen](#) or call her at 404-408-3481.

Pastor Petersen said, “We consider it a privilege that God has chosen us and trusts us as instruments through whom he is doing a new thing.”

# Does God have a “plan” for your congregation?

Carolyn Arends, columnist for *Christianity Today*, is also a professional musician. She once toured with the late Rich Mullins, who was also a Christian musician and songwriter. Carolyn mentioned in a recent column that Rich would sometimes be asked how a Christian could discern God’s will for his or her life. This was his response: “I don’t think finding God’s plan for you has to be complicated. God’s will is that you love him with all your heart and soul and mind, and also that you love your neighbor as yourself. Get busy with that, and then, if God wants you to do something unusual, he’ll take care of it. Say, for example, he wants you to go to Egypt. If that’s the case, he’ll provide eleven jealous brothers, and they’ll sell you into slavery.”

Good answer. But that raises the question as to whether God has a “plan,” not just for individuals, but for congregations. If so, then a further question is raised: what might be God’s plan for those Lutheran, Episcopal/Anglican and Presbyterian congregations that have been impacted by the controversy over sexuality and biblical authority?

This would include congregations that have gone through disaffiliation and joined a new church body (like the NALC and LCMC), those that have had votes to disaffiliate that “failed” (i.e., came up short), and those churches that, from the beginning, chose not to disaffiliate and instead continue to advocate for the centrality of Scripture in their original denominations. (Many of these

---



---

## Pursuing Great Commission Evangelism in Your Congregation

---



---

churches belong to Lutheran CORE.) And we must not forget those faith communities that have separated from their local congregations over this controversy and have organized as new mission starts.

All of us, to one degree or another, have experienced painful and exhausting conflict. This brings me to one more possible insight—from Joseph—regarding God’s possible “plan” for our congregations, found in Genesis 50:20. This was when Joseph spoke to his brothers and said, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done...” *Is there any “good” that has come from all this?*

In the congregation I serve—Our Savior’s—I still find myself reflecting on what we went through beginning in late 2009. It was a process that ultimately ended with two overwhelming votes to disaffiliate from the ELCA in 2011. Despite these votes, this still ranks as the most significant congregational conflict I’ve experienced in thirty-seven years of

parish ministry. (The problem with any formal vote is you always end up with winners and losers.)

Eventually, about 15% of our active members ended up leaving. For a pastor who, over the years, has grieved when even one member became angry and left the congregation, this has been extremely difficult. And needless to say, many of our members have experienced a similar type of “grief,” especially when close friends have been among those who chose to leave our congregation.

However, acknowledging what we’ve endured, is there anything we have gained as a congregation? One benefit has been an overwhelming consensus among our members regarding the centrality of Scripture in our faith and life. We now share a conviction that the authority of God’s Word trumps the prevailing, ever-changing views of our secular culture. A second blessing resulting from the 2009 to 2011 period is that I, and our members, are no longer looking over our shoulders, anxiously awaiting the next change in denominational policy.

With both the NALC and LCMC, there is recognition of not only the centrality of God’s Word in denominational life, but also an understanding that the heart and soul of any denomination is the local church. Consequently, both the NALC and LCMC require the approval of any major policy changes by at least two-thirds of their congregations. And while there might be future instances

*(Continued on page 14)*

## God's plan for your congregation

*(Continued from page 13)*

in which our national church leaders grow frustrated with this particular constitutional provision, the great majority of my members are grateful for this requirement.

More often than not the Great Commission is most effectively lived out and fulfilled by the local church. Missional congregations are not only essential to the health of national church bodies, they ultimately accomplish far more in evangelism than denominational agencies. However, congregational conflict can cripple these local mission efforts. Congregational unity is, more often

*Move beyond a survivor mentality to a new, more vibrant mission focus. Remember: A healthy, well-led and motivated local church is uniquely equipped to help build God's kingdom on earth. There is no time like the present!*

than not, essential to effective outreach. The good news is that many of our congregations are now more unified than they have been in years. There are post-conflict opportunities for us now, as united faith communities, to fulfill God's "plan" for our congregations. Ultimately, we don't seek unity simply to avoid conflict. We seek unity for the sake of our mission: That all might come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Try not to dwell on all you and your members have endured these last few years. Move beyond a survivor mentality to a new, more vibrant mission focus. Remember: A healthy, well-led and motivated local church is uniquely equipped to help build God's kingdom on earth. There is no time like the present!

*Pr. Don Brandt welcomes comments and questions. Contact him at [donb@oursaviorssalem.org](mailto:donb@oursaviorssalem.org)*

**Now Available**

## Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God

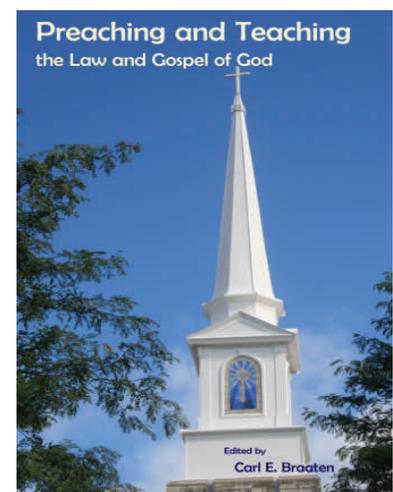
This book collects the papers presented at the 2012 Theological Conference co-sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota.

Dr. Carl E. Braaten, who served as the book's editor, calls the proper distinction between law and gospel in Scripture "the hallmark of classical Lutheranism." The overall theme of the conference illustrated how pastors need to understand the law/gospel principle and to reflect it in preaching and worship in their churches.

The presentations examine the law/gospel distinction from many angles including:

- Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic perspectives
- Luther's understanding of St. Paul and that of current New Testament scholarship
- Historical Lutheran disagreement about the Third Use of the Law
- Implications for preaching and worship

The book is 174 pages and is available from the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau for \$14 plus postage. To order or for more information, go to [www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org) or call 607-746-7511.



# Social media and the Gospel

*Pr. Eric Swensson, our social media consultant, offers some insights on leveraging social media for the Gospel.*

## Keeping up with the kids

Forget about it! We elders cannot keep up with our teens and preteens. They know it. We know it. However, not only do we not want to be left in the dust, we actually do need to be able to reach them. So we try. We even try learning their language and various means of communication like social media.

You know about this, right? Email does not work. It is so yesterday. Facebook? Ditto. (Caveat—Facebook still works with many teens. They use it but do not think it is cool, not like it was a few years ago). Twitter is still cool. What's real cool? Instagram. If you are to begin one new thing, Instagram is probably it. Go for it.

It will be something else after that. It's the nature of the beast. As soon as the old folks figure it out, it will be time for something else. But we love our youth, so we will learn and adapt as much as we

can. And we will not abandon them to their own devices!

So, whatever comes along, whatever medium, as long as we are authentic in our voice (never try to be cool like you think they think is cool—you know that, too) we can experiment and learn to use anything. Basically, whatever social media or app or whatever, get your username and password and go. It's a Brave New World, and we do not want our kids completely on their own out there. The stakes are too high.



## Connect on Facebook with your peers' congregations

I was talking to a Facebook friend on the phone and his work on his blog came up. After we hung up I went to look at the post on Facebook. The easiest way to find the latest post was to put his name or the name of his congregation in the Facebook search field.

I chose to use his congregation's name. When the page came up I realized I had not followed them. When I hit "Like" I noticed that it was giving me the option to invite friends, so I invited a couple



*Rev. Eric Jonas Swensson works with the Institute of Lutheran Theology in marketing, development and international theological education. The owner of Sound Shore Media, a social media marketing business, he has been using the web to connect with people evangelistically for fifteen years. A historian and a writer, Pr. Swensson can be reached at [ejsvensson@gmail.com](mailto:ejsvensson@gmail.com) or 914-235-0361.*

of dozen of my friends to like the congregation's page.

When people invite you to pages, do you find that to be an annoyance, or do you check it out? I now click on every church page that is suggested or that I run across. It helps them, and who knows when I am going to pick up a really good tip on outreach or read a very good devotion?

Visit your friends' pages and invite your friends to that page when you are there. It's a good thing to do!

## 2013 Convocation summary

*(Continued from page 4)*

budget being the director's salary and travel expenses, the convocation, and the theological conference. Bennett called for volunteers to serve on the audit and finance committees for which he has helped developed governance documents to aid in accountability and organizational transparency. A question from the floor asked if membership dues might be considered, and Mr. Bennett responded that it is being given consideration, though no decisions have been made.



*Pastor Cori Johnson, a member of Lutheran CORE's ELCA-specific task force, was a dissenter to the ELCA's Human Sexuality Task Force recommendations. Photo by Carter Askren.*

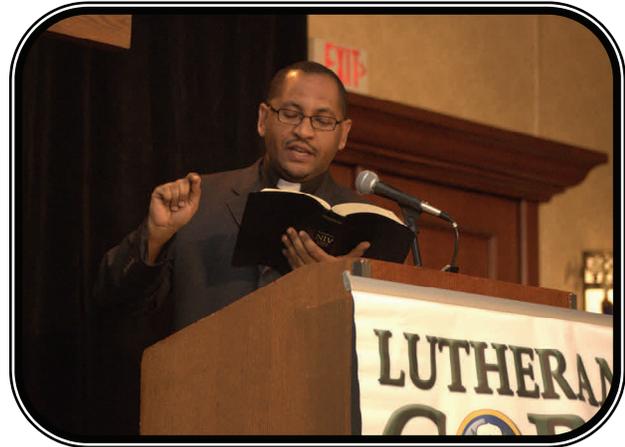
Also related to identity, the ELCA-specific task force presentation was given by Pr. Cori Johnson, who was a dissenter to the ELCA's Human Sexuality Task Force recommendations. She reiterated that Lutheran CORE serves to support confessing, orthodox Lutherans across denominations but also makes a significant presence within the ELCA through its table presentations at ELCA synod assemblies. This year the task force called on the ELCA leadership to include within its twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations a time of

reflection and self-examination. The committee's strategies to engage with the ELCA include reminding the ELCA leadership of its prior commitments to respect disagreement on sexuality, monitoring disrespect of the bound conscience within the ELCA, obtaining recognition as an Inter-Lutheran Organization, sending a representative to the ELCA church council meetings, and continuing its presence at synod assemblies and conferences. Pr. Johnson introduced Prs. Mark Braaten and Paul Borg to discuss regional discipleship events, and networks are forming in Latvia, Africa, and Germany.

A new video about Lutheran CORE, produced by Advent Media, was presented to the convocation. The video is available on [YouTube.com](http://YouTube.com) as well as on the Lutheran CORE website. Some DVDs are available. (Contact the Lutheran CORE office for information on DVD availability.)

The Canadian contingent announced the 2014 Canadian Rockies Conference will be held in Canmore, Alberta, May 5-8. The featured speaker is Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, with Dr. Robert Bugbee of the Lutheran Church in Canada as respondent. The theme will be "The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation as an Antidote to Today's Lethal Me-Culture." Cost will be \$300 plus room rate of \$95 per night at the Canmore Radisson. The rate will apply for several days before and after the conference.

Dr. Gemechis Buba made the first keynote presentation, "The Political Church versus the Missional Church"



*The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba's keynote presentation on "The Political Church versus the Missional Church" described the first political controversy within the Church: providing food for the widows within the community. Photo by Carter Askren.*

on Acts 6, in which he described the first political controversy within the Church: providing food for the widows within the community. Dr. Buba stated that Lutheran CORE stands as a model of encouragement and example to renewal groups, especially in Europe and Africa. Lutheran CORE is such an example precisely because it is a missional ministry and not one mired in worldly politics.

Dr. Buba stated that despite persecution in many countries and the rise of militant Islam, Christianity continues to be the fastest growing religion in the world, with 2.7 billion people. "It is amazing how the Gospel, no matter how it is persecuted, continues to bring people into the Kingdom of God," he said. The early church was also growing by leaps and bounds, and as it grew, division arose between the Greek and Hebraic Jews.

"There is no problem having the same church with different backgrounds, no problem for the Church to be diverse. It's a good thing,"

*(Continued on page 17)*

## 2013 Convocation summary

*(Continued from page 16)*

said Buba. The problem, though, came in how the two groups treated one another. The complaint by the Greek Jews against the Hebraic Jews became the main issue rather than gospel preaching. “Food distribution is a justice agenda,” Buba said. “The Greeks wanted to make this a central agenda of the Church, rather than the Gospel.” Dr. Buba said that putting nationalism, group identity, and social issues before Gospel, mission and evangelism is the problem.

“The peace and unity of the Church was being disturbed, and apostles were being distracted from mission—and, ironically, in the midst of the fights, the poor widows were actually being neglected. When we fight over church resources, at the end, there are no resources left to fight over,” Buba stated. To care for the widows, the apostles chose and ordained seven men to serve the tables.

Lutheran CORE reflects the apostolic witness by bringing people together and “declaring the central



*During his keynote presentation, the Rev. Steven K. Gjerde, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin, made an analogy of the divisions caused by the formation of the ELCA in 1987 and the divisions post 2009. Photo by Samuel Nieva.*



*A panel made up of representatives from the ELCA, LCMC and NALC responded to the points made by Pr. Steven Gjerde during his keynote presentation. From the left: Pr. Paul Ulring, Moderator of Lutheran CORE; Pr. Gjerde; Pr. Scott Grorud of Augustana District LCMC; Pr. Mark Chavez, General Secretary of the NALC; Pr. Beth Schlegel of St. Peter's ELCA in York, Penn. Photo by Samuel Nieva.*

thing as central...gather[ing] around the living, breathing, inspired, authoritative Word of God.” Buba said that the apostles had identified “two wings of the bird”—preaching and serving—but those “called to these ministries must focus on the Word... this is the *only* thing that will bring the Church together today—not agreements, talks, proposals, agendas, initiatives, but the Word enthroned as the main thing... The Gospel drives out issues and agendas, makes people Gospel-centered and mission-minded, and the Church will grow.”

The second keynote presentation was given by the Rev. Steven K. Gjerde, pastor of Zion Lutheran in Wausau, Wisconsin. Pr. Gjerde made an analogy of the divisions caused by the formation of the ELCA in 1987 and the divisions post 2009. He raised three questions for consideration: altar and pulpit fellowship with those with whom we disagree, seminary education for future church leaders, and the reclamation of friendship as a means to uphold the scriptural view of marriage.

Regarding the first question, Pr. Gjerde pointed out that, unlike the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, neither the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) nor Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) broke fellowship with the ELCA. Pr. Gjerde questioned the consistency of dual rostering by arguing that the “de-sin[ning]” by any group of an act for which Christ died dishonors our Lord and changes the nature of the Church’s understanding of for what Christ died. Does such disagreement not impair our fellowship with one another?

Pr. Gjerde had pointed observations for the NALC, LCMC and the ELCA to consider. He pointed out that when Jesus told the disciples to “Come, follow me,” that included leaving their profession and a change in venue. Current models of distance learning online do not conform to the biblical witness, he argued. Further, he noted that the history of Lutheran thought develops in the seminaries. How can non-Lutheran seminaries provide

*(Continued on page 18)*

## 2013 Convocation summary

*(Continued from page 17)*

Lutheran formation, even with just one year of Lutheran studies? And why not allow education from ecumenical partners in Latvia, South Africa and other countries where faithful orthodoxy is taught?

Finally, Pr. Gjerde suggested “friendship” as a conference topic for a future convocation. Our sexualized culture has lost the meaning of the word “friend,” and that such friendship can involve some sort of touch. After all, the beloved disciple laid his head on Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper.

A panel responded to Pr. Gjerde and consisted of Pr. Scott Grorud of the Augustana District LCMC; Pr. Mark Chavez, General Secretary of the NALC; and Pr. Beth Schlegel of St. Peter’s ELCA in York, Pennsylvania. Pr. Schlegel is a member of the Society of the Holy Trinity.

Pr. Grorud said that he applauded the call for theological integrity concerning altar fellowship, but found it odd for Lutheran CORE—a union of confessing Lutherans—to be considering further division. Current policies of altar fellowship have as much to do with humility as doctrine. Regarding seminaries, in today’s day and age, bricks and mortar have to give way to digital media and can provide the Lutheran formation we need. Friendship needs to be addressed, he said, but “emotionally challenged Lutheran men ain’t gonna *ever* recline on the breast of a male friend.” Pr. Grorud stated that the real issue for Lutherans is the divide over ecclesiology (church structure) and the doctrine of ministry.

Pr. Mark Chavez noted that while there were similarities between divisions

forming in 1987 and those of 2009, especially regarding theological integrity, “The biggest difference is that many leaving the ELCA have not joined either LCMC or the NALC. More than sixty percent of those leaving are unaccounted for,” he said. “Most of those who opted out of merger in 1987 were mostly from one body—the ALC. The more recent division has been a large departure of former LCA as well as former ALC congregations,” he added.

Pr. Chavez also said that NALC and LCMC churches differ from the Mekane Yesus in that the American churches do not have “the full weight of the ELCA or the Church of Sweden coercing us financially... [the Mekane Yesus] needed to draw very sharp, clear lines.”

Pr. Chavez acknowledged concern about altar fellowship, but even more important he felt was pulpit fellowship—what is being proclaimed as Gospel. He sees fellowship as selective, offered on a case-by-case basis.

The NALC seminary proposal includes both online and residential course requirements that will be thoroughly Lutheran.

Regarding the kind of friendship Pr. Gjerde called for, Pr. Chavez responded that any definition of friendship arises out of family and marriage, which is part of the problem. “It is from parents and family that we learn proper boundaries, and that has been systematically undercut because we can define marriage, family and sexual relationship so fluidly in our society,” he said.

Pr. Beth Schlegel remarked that the question of barring of altar and pulpit fellowship is a painful one because it has to do with excommunication. John 17 speaks of Jesus’ prayer for unity in the Body of Christ, and therefore we should

be cautious about any tendency towards schism. “The cure for unworthy communion may not be excommunication of an entire church body, but exhortation of each believer. We need to suffer our weaker members, not sever them,” she said. She acknowledged the benefits of reciprocity in leadership education with global Lutherans, which would prove enriching. She attested to the need for friendship—“It is better to have the benefit of friends, than to have friends with benefits!” she quipped.

Pr. Gjerde was given an opportunity to respond to the panel. Among his remarks he stressed that the idea of reexamining our communion agreements had less to do with keeping out the unworthy so much as maintaining our own theological integrity. Quoting his young daughter, he stated, “If you eat their bread, you eat their words.” Thus, communing with a church that preaches unfaithfully is to give assent to their false doctrine.

MissionConnect team leaders Pr. Dennis Nelson and Rod Hackman gave a plenary address that included an introduction to their workshop entitled, “Giving Goes Both Ways.” Reminding the convocation attendees of Lutheran CORE’s commitment to connect every congregation with one international and one local mission, Pr. Nelson noted that the missions with which we connect have as much—if not more—to give us in their fervor and witness to the living God’s work in the world.

Pr. Samuel and Mrs. Ana Nieva of Pueblo de Dios ELCA in Compton, California, were introduced as an example of the many worthy missions

*(Continued on page 22)*

## Theological conference summary

*Continued from page 6)*

### The Church is Part of the Gospel



Dr. David Yeago, professor of systematic theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's

Charlotte campus, described a society in which “churches have abandoned their basic principles to the surrounding middle class culture; fundamental institutions are being redefined; the government has begun a program of social reconstruction and expects the churches to follow. Churches are pressured by the state to do things opposed to their morality.” He was describing not the twenty-first century United States but rather Germany in 1933.

Though the politics are different from present-day America, Yeago stated that now, as then, the Church is confronted with “fundamental questions of their relationship with the world.” May 2014 will mark the eightieth anniversary of the composition known as the Barmen

Declaration, a statement of resistance to the German state and the surrounding culture of Nazification.

The declaration, which Yeago describes as “one of the great documents of church history,” can help today’s churches maintain theological integrity. “False authorities need not be as wicked as Nazism” to clamor for our allegiance, he said.

By contrast, the declaration identifies Jesus Christ as “the one Word of God” who is Lord over every aspect of the Church’s life and the Church’s sole authority. “There is no part of our lives that Jesus does not claim lordship. There is no realm of life where we can just follow the crowd or follow the leader. The events and powers of this life cannot simply be trusted... in all these realms we need to be justified and sanctified by Christ as those he claims for his service... It is good news that we get to be servants of Jesus... rather than the devil,” said Yeago.

Yeago stated that “the Lord’s commission gives the Church its proper freedom. It is a free community. That can be a freedom to suffer. The Germans wanted to subject the Church to the state... [The message for today] from the

Barmen message—dare to be foolish. Dare to be weak. Therein is found all the dignity and authority of the Church.”

### Breaking the Promise of Lutheran Unity: Apostasy, Heresy and Schism

The Rev. Dr. Nathan Howard Yoder, pastor of St. Martin’s Lutheran Church in Maiden, North Carolina,



examined the Church’s ongoing obligation to re-order itself for the sake of the Gospel in response to false teaching. Yoder framed this responsibility in the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan. He followed St. Augustine’s identification of the Lord Jesus as the Samaritan, the money entrusted to the innkeeper as the Means of Grace, and the inn as the Church. Yoder suggested that the character of the Samaritan’s mule is also representative of the Church, bearing redeemed sinners along the Way that is Christ. Where the Gospel is not preached, the innkeepers have abandoned their posts (*apo-stasis*, apostasy) and the mule has veered off its appointed course and into the wild. The “Lord’s money” of the forgiveness of sins is wasted, replaced by snake-oil remedies of self-affirmation.

*(Continued on page 20)*

*“False authorities need not be as wicked as Nazism” [to clamor for our allegiance.] “It is good news that we get to be servants of Jesus... rather than the devil,” said Yeago.*

## Theological conference summary

(Continued from page 19)

*“Where doctrinal indifference was damaging to Lutheran identity before, it is downright destructive now.” —Yoder*

At times a change in management at the inn—or a new harness for the mule—is necessary to ensure that “the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel” (Article 7 of the *Augsburg Confession*).

This reform may require separation from existing church structure. Alongside such separation, however, is the temptation to embrace “a spirit of schism” and justify oneself by withdrawing from sinners. Being moved to leave a church body out of hatred instead of out of love for the neighbor and his hearing of the Gospel is incompatible with our Lord’s Great Commission, Yoder said.

Dr. Yoder used three historic examples of Lutheranism to illustrate this relationship between doctrinal abuse and the establishment of new church leadership: Muhlenberg and the Pennsylvania Ministerium (1748), David Henkel and the Tennessee Synod

(1820), and Samuel Schmucker’s “American Lutheranism” movement.

“Where doctrinal indifference was damaging to Lutheran identity before, it is downright destructive now,” he added, citing the redefinition of marriage and the renaming of the Triune God as examples. While visible unity in the Church is important, “true unity is not the solidarity within institutional bodies, but the one life in Christ of the Communion of Saints across the ages.”

Yoder noted that the formation of new church bodies such as the North American Lutheran Church is fully consistent with the Church’s perpetual obligation to provide viable, provisional structures “for the permanent Great Commission of bearing the Gospel.”

### **Whether Church Order is a Matter of Indifference (*Adiaphoron*) in Lutheran History and Theology**

“The controversy at the heart of the Confessions could be said to be the Word vs. ministry,” said the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen. “The Catholic church in Luther’s day had placed ministry over the Word, whereas the Reformers operated from the conviction that the Word

established the Church and the Means of Grace (see Augsburg Confession article 5). The ministry is the servant of the Word,” he said.



According to Nestingen, Luther identified one sacrament—the Word—and three signs: preaching, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. “Preaching the Word is essential to the Church,” he said. “Not just any word, but a Christological word of Christ’s saving death and resurrection... Faith happens on hearing the Word... the most important organ for the Christian is his ears,” he stated.

*“The controversy at the heart of the Confessions could be said to be the Word vs. ministry,” said the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen.*

Nestingen said that Luther’s objection to the Mass was the idea it was a sacrifice, because it undermined Christ’s own sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

Because preaching is so important to the Church’s life, it requires oversight. “We can define it as we will; call them district superintendents, presidents, or bishops. If the office is inflated, it becomes problematic. If it is

(Continued on page 21)

*“True unity is not the solidarity within institutional bodies, but the one life in Christ of the Communion of Saints across the ages,” said Yoder.*

## Theological conference summary

(Continued from page 20)

*“Preaching the Word is essential to the church. Not just any word, but a Christological word of Christ’s saving death and resurrection... Faith happens on hearing the Word...the most important organ for the Christian is his ears.” –Nestingen*

deflated, it becomes equally troublesome,” Nestingen stated.

The Rev. Dr. Frank Senn argued for a return to the Great Tradition and the essentials of church practice in his lecture surveying church worship from the First Century Didache to the Adiaphorist Controversy of the Sixteenth Century Reformation.



“The liturgy is not a book; it’s a resource. It is what the Church does before God,” Senn stated.

“Is church order adiaphora?” he asked. “You lay people ought to learn what that word means so you can throw it around like pastors do,” joked Senn.

He views *adiaphora* as the least helpful idea in Lutheran theology because it reduces matters of worship and church governance to questions of personal preference, calling indifferent that which is essential.

The term *adiaphora* came to the fore in a debate between Luther’s colleague and chosen successor,

Philipp Melanchthon, and another leading theologian, Matthias Flacius. In 1548 (two years after Luther’s death) Emperor Charles V had defeated the Lutheran armies and reintroduced Catholic worship practices in the Lutheran territories through a document called the Augsburg Interim.

Melanchthon objected that justification by faith was not properly guarded in this document, so he proposed an alternative called the Leipzig Interim. But he accepted most of the Catholic practices, calling them “adiaphora,” since he did not consider them essential to proclaiming the Gospel.

Flacius, on the other hand, argued that, while taken on their own, such practices may be neither commanded nor forbidden, once they are imposed by mandate on Christians they have been made essential by that act of imposition and therefore must be rejected.

By labeling every worship and church structure practice as *adiaphora* we have short-circuited any discussion about why these developed through time and how they in fact are important in making

sure that we are proclaiming the true Gospel and not substituting cultural models for it, Senn said.

Today, pragmatism overrides theology, and matters of church worship and order become “whatever we have been doing or whatever is coming down the pike,” which leads to the Church adopting cultural models of the business world for the ordering of the Church.

*“The liturgy is not a book; it’s a resource. It is what the Church does before God,” Senn stated.*

There needs to be a return to the Great Tradition, and leadership in the office of bishop, the word for which in Latin means, “bridge builder,” Senn said. The office of bishop helps preserve the Great Tradition by bridging the past to the present in preaching, teaching, and oversight, thereby distinguishing between real *adiaphora* and true essentials.

### Doing Theology in the Service of the Church



Ecumenical theologian the Rev. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson reflected on how experience, reading and visitation

(Continued on page 22)

## Theological conference summary

*(Continued from page 21)*

can help Christians become better theologians able to serve the Church.

Dr. Hinlicky Wilson stated, “Theology is not a substitute for experience but a guide. You are entitled to the questions that your own life has forced upon you. If theology has failed to answer, then the good theologian will search the Scriptures for an answer.”

Experience, however, can best be interpreted through “deep reading” of the Bible and other books, she said, because they free us from our own self-deception and offer undiscovered answers. Deep reading includes bible memorization and reading books, even when they disagree with your own

presuppositions. Unfortunately, such reading is under-appreciated in congregations, who sometimes begrudge their pastors time to study.

There is no need for fear in the face of such reading, for we are to fear and love God above all else, as the Small Catechism teaches. So much of our culture is run by fear, she said, and such fear becomes a god when we let it replace the fear of the Lord. Theology is an activity that may involve facing our fears, but with God as the one who died for us, we need fear no one or anything.

She also stated that our experience and reading come to fruition through visitation, the means by which God communicates to the Church for the sake of the world.

---

*Theology is not a substitute for experience but a guide. You are entitled to the questions that your own life has forced upon you. If theology has failed to answer, then the good theologian will search the Scriptures for an answer.”*

---

God’s word was mediated by angels of visitation and encounters of the persons of the Bible. We too, through visitation, can be a presence to the world, “theologians of grace in the world’s dry and dusty places.”

---

## 2013 Convocation summary

*(Continued from page 18)*

congregations could support. Pr. Nieva, a photojournalist from Peru, attended a Lutheran church and, after much involvement, was invited to start a mission in Compton, where the average salary of its members is \$9,000 per year. You can read more about [Pueblo de Dios](#) on the [lutherancore.org](#) website.

Also introduced in the presentation was Pr. Doug Gast of Bethel Lutheran, Noblesville, IN, who spoke on his congregation’s partnership with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. His congregation left the ELCA following the 2009 Churchwide Assembly votes and was looking for a renewed emphasis on mission. He took

part in a Mekane Yesus theological conference and came away convinced that his congregation should connect with the Church there. To date they have given \$5,200 to one of the Church’s missions and hope to return to Ethiopia to develop their relationship further. Learn more about [Bethel’s mission partnership](#) with EECMY on the [lutherancore.org](#) website.

Other workshops included topics on *Ordinary People Transforming the World* led by Pr. Wendy Berthelsen; *Building Leaders for a Global Harvest (BLGH)* led by Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba; *Update of Lutheran Benefits Plan* presented by Verlyn Hahn of Hahn Financial Group; *Resources for Congregational Renewal and*

*Discipleship*, a panel discussion and Q & A with Steve King, General Editor of Sola Publishing, and Bill Oehlschlager, Outreach Director, Lutheran Lay Renewal; *Staying Faithful in the ELCA* led by Pr. Cori Johnson; and *Lutheran CORE Outreach to Congregations: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities* presented by Pr. Paul Ulring and Pr. Steve Shipman.

Elections for the Steering Committee reinstated incumbents Mr. Mike Bennett, Pr. Steve Dornbusch, Pr. Corinne Johnson, Mrs. Lynn Kickingbird, and Pr. Dennis Nelson on the first ballot.

# Upcoming events

November 7-9, 2013

Hilliard, Ohio

2013 Lutheran CORE/NALC Mission Festival, “Discipleship: It takes one to make one.” at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church. Speakers include NALC Bp. John Bradosky, World Mission Prayer League's Pr. Charles Lindquist, The Navigator's Bill Mowery and more! Download the [festival flyer](#) and [registration form](#). Online registration coming soon!

November 16, 2013

Pittsburgh,  
Pennsylvania

E3 — “The Gospel for Today: God’s People in Mission.” at Redeemer Lutheran Church (Oakmont). This evangelism training event will feature two keynote speakers and half-a-dozen workshop presenters representing the ELCA, NALC, LCMS, and the Anglican Church. Loose gathering time/registration is at 9:00 AM. Event runs from 9:30 AM to 4:00 PM. Details forthcoming.

May 5-8, 2014

Canmore, Alberta  
Canada

Canadian Rockies Theological Conference at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center. Featured speaker is Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, with Dr. Robert Bugbee of the Lutheran Church in Canada as respondent. This year’s theme is “The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation as an Antidote to Today’s Lethal Me-Culture.” Registration fee of \$300.00 includes breakfast and lunch on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. A special room rate (approximately \$95.00/night plus 12% tax) is available at the Radisson. Be sure to quote promo code CANROC when making your room reservation. The special room rate will apply for several days before and after the conference. (Please note: If canceling room because you cannot make the conference be sure to let Pr. Phil Gagnon know, because conference registration/cancellation is handled separately from room reservations.) For more information, contact Pr. Phil Gagnon at 780-953-3412 or email: [pastorphil@me.com](mailto:pastorphil@me.com).



*“Mobilizing Confessing Lutherans  
for Evangelical Renewal”*



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

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
TWIN CITIES MN  
PERMIT NO. 7149

**Inside the August-September 2013 issue:**

**A new direction for the ELCA?, p. 1**

**“A Life Worthy of Our Calling” – 2013 Convocation, p. 3**

**“On Being the Church in These Precarious Times” – 2013  
Theological Conference, p. 5**

**“Giving Goes Both Ways” – MissionConnect report, p. 7**

**MissionConnect: A New Thing Christian Church, p. 9**

**Call incorporated, p. 11**

**In Pursuit of the Great Commission: Does God have a “plan”  
for your congregation?, p. 13**

**2012 Theological Conference papers available from ALPB, p. 14**

**Social media and the Gospel, p. 15**

**Upcoming events, p. 23**

**CORE Connection**

News from Lutheran CORE

Published monthly by

**Lutheran CORE**

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

Phone: 888-551-7254

[www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org)

Rev. Carter Askren, editor  
[editor@lutherancore.org](mailto:editor@lutherancore.org)

Please copy and share  
this newsletter widely.