



# THE EASTER PROMISE: IN AND FOR ALL TIME

## AN EASTER MESSAGE FROM BISHOP DAN SELBO

In Charles Dickens' well-known Christmas story, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge is confronted in a dream by the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. He was forced to look at his past life, his present reality, and what lay ahead for him in the future.

In a very real sense, those same three tenses are a part of us. We cannot change our past. It is there. It is over. The memories and, hopefully, the lessons we carry with us will remain. The present, of course, is that which occupies us day to day. It is the here and now of our existence. It's where we are. It's the world and the moment in which we live. And the future? We can think about it. We can plan for it. We may even have hopes and dreams for it. But it all lies in the future, and it will not be realized until it happens.

In the same way, the truth of Easter also contains those same three tenses. It is in the past, because the big event of Jesus' resurrection took place 2,000 years ago. It is written into the pages of history: A man named Jesus, three women at the tomb, on a certain day, at a certain hour, at a particular place. Even the characters involved—Caesar, Pilate, Herod, the Jewish people, Peter, James, John, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. They are all gone. It's all part of history.

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*The Resurrection of Jesus by Lucas Cranach the Younger (1515-1586). (Public domain image from Wikimedia Commons)*

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It is in the present because it involves you and me. Today. During Holy Week. On Easter Sunday, people throughout the world gather to celebrate that great event. We worship every week because of it. Jesus is alive. He is with us in this life. Whether we acknowledge Him or not does not change the fact that He is present and alive in the 21st century.

And the future—because what He did establishes and secures a future life. As the Apostle Paul puts it, “Christ the first fruits, then, when He comes, those who belong to Him” (1 Corinthians 15:23). It is in the future because the promise of His return is certain.

Let’s dig a bit deeper into those three tenses in relation to Easter and what they mean to us, because all three are extremely important.

**Easter Past:** This is the foundation of our faith. This is the basis of what we believe and why. Without it, nothing we confess is certain. We can talk all we want about a future hope for life beyond the grave. We can indulge in wishful thinking or profound philosophy. But if Easter did not happen, if Christ did not rise from the dead, if what the Bible records about that day was little more than the gospel writer’s hopeful thoughts, then we’re left with nothing more than human speculation at best.

Thankfully, the historical record is consistent and clear. In the New Testament there is overwhelming affirmation that the resurrection of Jesus took place. It was God’s action that caused it to happen. It was the turning point of human history. It is not a take-it-or-leave-it doctrine of the Christian faith. It is crucial. The witness of the early Church was based upon it: “He is Risen.” The climax of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost points to what ultimately matters: “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses to it” (Acts 2:32).

Christianity is a historic faith. Not just because it has been around for a long time, but because it is based upon historic happenings, actual events. The Bible is a book of history, a record of the acts of God worked out on earth. The Old Testament is the history of the nation of Israel, the people chosen by God through whom He promised to send a Savior. The New

Testament is the story of how it happened in Jesus, and of how God worked through Him to save the world.

It is who Christ is and what He did that matters, not what people think about Him or about who He was. And it’s certainly not built on the illusions or deceit of some people long ago who said that something happened when it really didn’t. No, our faith is a historic faith, rooted and grounded in real and concrete historic events.

The central doctrine of Christianity is the truth and the promise that we are justified before God through our faith in Jesus. Jesus took our sin to the cross. His death put to death all of our sin. And His resurrection from the dead gave to us the promise of life eternal in God’s kingdom.

What a Great Exchange it was. Jesus took our sin. He gave us His righteousness. This promise is not wishful thinking on our part, but a certain and concrete assurance based upon historic facts and events.

Many people today base their hope in a God who they believe is good and loving and, as a result, go through life thinking they have no need for Jesus and for what He did upon the cross. His resurrection might have been nice but not essential to their salvation, or so they think.

What they need to hear is what the Bible proclaims to be the truth. “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless. ... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). It’s empty of content. It’s a human wish and nothing more. Such folks have substituted their own thinking and ideas for the saving act and actions of God. And they have not thought very deeply into the human predicament we all face apart from Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus is not peripheral in our belief. It is central. It is at the heart. It is the basis and foundation of our faith. All other truths come together in the events of Easter. Who is Christ? Who are we as humans? What is sin? Why did Jesus

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have to die? Where is this all heading? It is all one package in Jesus. It all comes together and makes sense in the death and resurrection of Christ. It's a historic faith, based upon actual historic events.

**Easter Present:** Is it real? Is it now? Do the events of 2,000 years ago matter to us? Is there any relevance for our lives today? Or should we just relegate it to the archives of folklore or Greek mythology? Was it just a first-century phenomenon or does it still have meaning and impact for us?

For many people it doesn't. It has never sunk in. The scope of what took place has never made it into their hearts and their minds. They've heard about it in church. They've read about it on the internet. But any transference into real life, for many, is only coincidental. To worship this Lord regularly, to make any kind of life commitment, to give oneself to Him, and to live for the sake of His will, it makes no sense. For many, it's best kept in the past, in the history books, perhaps taught in Sunday school to kids but meaningless for real life.

In contrast to what many people think, the Bible makes clear what is real. Paul speaks to the Philippians about "knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). He expresses the hope that "those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again" ( 2 Corinthians 5:15). In writing to the church in Rome, he says that "as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of God the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

Easter has a real connection with you and me in the present. The good news frees us. We're liberated. The chains of our sin that bind us have been released. Nothing now enslaves us other than the gracious and beneficent rule of God. That is freedom in its truest and deepest sense. All other words associated with the Easter proclamation— joy, peace, hope, love, power—they all are connected and given to us, in the present, in Christ.

Easter offers us what the rest of the world cannot. Why would one choose to go through life without it? Signs of death are all around us—in society, in our



***Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene in the Garden by Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1489-1534). (Public domain image from Wikimedia Commons)***

nations, in the world. Often framed in glittering lights and with the outward appearance of success. Nonetheless, they can offer and give no lasting hope.

Only the promise of Easter offers us life in the present. Everything and everyone else come up short. In dying, we live. In giving ourselves away, we gain. In committing our lives to God, in and through Christ, He gives us in return what nothing and no one else can.

**Easter Future:** The bottom line to Easter, or maybe even the headline, is the promise of a life eternal with God. Many passages point to the promise of the Resurrection. Here are just a few:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told

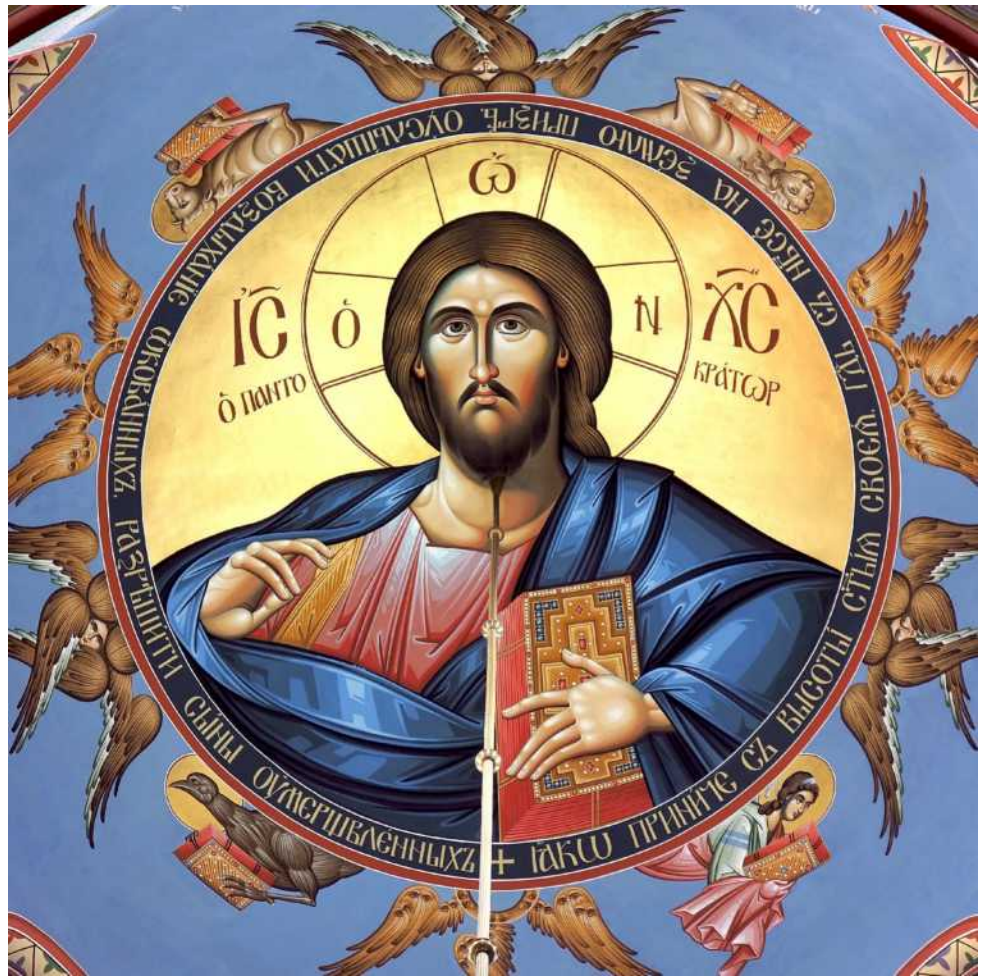
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you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:1-3).

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).

“For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53).

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).



**Christ Pantocrator from the Church of St. Alexander Nevsky in Belgrade, Serbia. (Photo by Petar Milošević from Wikimedia Commons)**

It has been said that the closer a person comes to the end of their life, the more certain the end of life becomes. Why is that? Because the reality is that all of us will die. Every person who has ever lived will one day come to the end of their life.

If that is true, which it is, then what is the answer? And where in this world is hope to be found?

Easter is the proclamation that the answer we need and the hope with which we can live has already been given to us in Jesus. The past, present, and future are all wrapped up for us in the person and work of Christ.

We do not worship a God who created a beautiful world, gave us life in it, allowed us a taste of such joyous things as love and friendship and peace, only to take it away after a few short years.

No, we worship a God who has given and secured for us all three tenses—the past, the present, and

the future. It was His plan. He conceived it. He carried it out. And He will see it to its completion.

God did not create us for a time, but for eternity. That was His original purpose, and His purpose will not be thwarted. Every other rule and authority and power will be destroyed. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Perhaps the best summary statement we can find is one given to us in Scripture. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Easter Past—it did happen. Easter Present—it does happen. And Easter Future—it will happen.

Take it to heart. Hear the promise anew. Remember that it has all been done—past, present, and future—for you. Thanks be to God!

# NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR 2024 MISSION CONVOCATION

The NALC Nominating Committee is receiving the names of candidates to serve in positions to be elected at the 2024 NALC Mission Convocation, which will be held online on Friday, Aug. 9.

The 2024 Mission Convocation will elect one lay person and one ordained minister to the NALC Executive Council and one member of the Court of Adjudication. Both ordained ministers and lay members may be elected to the Court of Adjudication.

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

The Court of Adjudication hears appeals from disciplinary decisions; resolves questions of the interpretation of NALC governing documents; and decides claims that a person or entity has violated these governing documents.

The elections will be for three-year terms. The normal four-year terms were shortened as a part of the NALC's process of moving to holding convocations every other year. The 2020 Mission Convocation voted to amend the NALC Constitution to hold convocations every other year and to elect two lay members and two pastors to Executive Council at each convocation, but the NALC is still in the transition period toward electing two lay members and two pastors at each biennial convocation.

The convocation will also elect two members of the Board of Regents of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) to five-year terms. Both ordained ministers and lay members may be elected to the Board of Regents.

The Board of Regents provides oversight, supervision and direction for the NALS Network. The NALS Network includes the Seminary Center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania; and

partner seminaries Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina; Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama; Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta; and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and Houston, Texas.

Information on the nominating process, including the nomination form and descriptions of the positions, is available online at [thenalc.org/nominations](https://thenalc.org/nominations). All nominations must be submitted electronically.

The Nominating Committee is asking that nominations be submitted by May 3 to allow the committee time to compile biographical information and meet the constitutional deadline to distribute it to NALC members 90 days prior to the convocation.

Questions may be addressed to the Nominating Committee at [nominations@thenalc.org](mailto:nominations@thenalc.org).

## NALC HITS 500 CONGREGATION MILESTONE

The North American Lutheran Church reached the milestone of 500 congregations in March.

The NALC had only 17 charter congregations when it was constituted in August of 2010. The church has experienced steady growth since then.

Congregations from other church bodies regularly contact the NALC office about the possibility of joining the NALC.

# SLOVAK EVANGELISTIC CENTER

By *Slavomir Slavik*  
NALC Global Worker

When I was a teenager, I didn't like to go to church. All I knew was to seek fun and pleasure. But it changed. God found me. Now the most fun for me and my colleagues is to share His Gospel, mercy and love.

I lead the Slovak Evangelistic Center (EVS). We share the Gospel inside and outside of the church. We hope, pray and work for the revitalization of the church and the transformation of society.

We serve everywhere we feel it is appropriate to share the Gospel and ignite people for Christ. Here are some examples:

## Mission conference

One of our outreaches is our annual mission conference, a gathering of 500 to 700 people and leaders for three days. Generations come together for listening to God's Word, praying, worshiping, smiling, and crying. We are happy that people are coming and trusting us. God's blessing and the responses from people make us humble.



**Slovak Evangelistic Center Mission Conference**

Here are some responses we've received:

*Marta: Last year I concluded: this was the best conference I ever attended ... but I need to say that this year ... it was even better ... perfect, full of wisdom, great speeches ... thank you very much ... Thank you for everything ... God bless you!*

*Erik: God bless you in this service to our nation. Great!*

*Adriana: Thank you. I want to renew my relationship to God.*

## Evangelism in cities

We travel and share the Gospel in various cities in Slovakia. In cooperation with local congregations we call people to renew and to re-think their lives. We do our best to build a bridge between people and local congregations. We are thankful that it is sowing new seeds of the Gospel in lives of people.

Responses from people encourage us to go on in future:

*Your evangelistic evenings have a huge impact on my heart. Thank you!*



**Evangelistic event**

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Always great sermons! Right into today's world.

Thank you very much. Eye-opening evenings. I am working on inviting my brother.

### Web ministry

Some years ago we realized how many people search for spiritual answers on the internet. Lectures were the most viewed content on our website, so we decided to make a special website for spiritual growth and outreach. You can view our website at [chcemviac.com](http://chcemviac.com).

We add new content five times a week: articles, lectures, preaching, video, and audio. We have now published 1,245 articles, 791 audio lectures, and 404 videos. Last year there were more than 190,000 visits to our website. The most-visited article has 310,498 views. We are also active on Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube, and every morning we send morning devotions to 2,223 people.

### Podcasts

Not long ago, we started our regular podcasts, building a new platform for sharing the Gospel and



**Slovic Evangelistic Center Podcast**



**Slovak Evangelistic Center training event**

addressing topics like marriage, relationships, sexuality, identity, pop-culture, technologies, media, and artificial intelligence. We have already released 73 episodes. We are happy to have received positive responses from people to our new experiment. We keep learning how to share faith in new ways, in conversations and in dialogues.

Here are some responses we have received:

*Brano: We use your podcast for our small group. We listen at home. Then we discuss it. Thank you.*

*Matej: Great podcasts. I am not listening to Christian podcasts, but I listen to you. In 25 minutes you will give me so much that I have plenty things to think about.*

### EVS Academy

In cooperation with church, districts, congregations, diacony centers, and schools, we educate and train pastors, elders, teachers and lay people on several topics, including how to lead and build a team; value-

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added leadership; resilient life; organizational development; transition management in the church; communication and preaching, etc. Our hope is to help the Church to grow, call back those who have been lost and reach out to new people.

Some responses from training:

*We liked your training so much that we didn't want to go home. We take with us a lot of inspiration.*

*I have been in leadership in the church for 27 years. I have experienced a lot of education and seminars in the church but never as high quality as at your seminar.*

### **Prison ministry**

We regularly visit 10 prisons in Slovakia. Last year we had 162 personal meetings with 598 prisoners. We also keep contact with those who have come out of the prisons and have been touched by the Gospel.

This year we are in contact with 22 prisoners who are outside the prison and are helping them start new lives. There are a lot of problems and existential questions in letters and communication. For example:



**Children sing for worship**



### **Slovak Evangelistic Center training event**

*Please tell me. Is there any chance to save myself from evil? I do not know what to do. I hate my life. I need to know truth.*

*I am afraid I will lose my family. I have thoughts that I am not worthy of God's mercy. I can't focus reading the Bible. I have hard times.*

*I am thankful to Lord that I could meet your ministry. It helped me to find new way of life.*

### **EVS Think Tank**

We live in a society where there is a lot of hostility, animosity, and mockery against Christians and the Church in some media. Therefore, we started the EVS Think Tank for articles, respectful discussions, arguments, new thoughts, and media presence. We want to show in media and our culture, that a life which counts with God is much more wise, logical, coherent, deep and beautiful than life which doesn't count with God. We feel it is very important as a pre-evangelization of people. The prophet Daniel writes: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3 NIV).

We are thankful that the ministry of EVS is growing and we can experience the blessings of our Lord. He created all beautiful people around us and He sends us to bring the Gospel to all of them. Thank you for your prayers and support.

**Slavomir Slavik is an NALC global worker in Slovakia.**



# WHEN DOES LIFE BEGIN?

*This article is a part of a series of articles from NALC Life Ministries for the NALC News and Lutheran CORE Voice.*

*By M. Roy Schwarz, M.D.*

The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition, defines “life” as “the property or quality that distinguishes living organisms from the dead or inanimate matter manifested in functions such as metabolism, growth, reproduction, and response to stimuli.” These four criteria can be used to judge whether some object is alive or dead.

Science has taught us that the process of human development begins when the male sperm penetrates the female egg. This triggers a series of events leading to division of the fertilized egg. Hence, a single cell divides into two cells, these cells divide into four, those cells divide into eight, and those cells divide into sixteen. This all occurs before the fertilized egg attaches to the wall of the uterus. By seven days, or when implantation begins, a significant cell mass has developed. At 10 days, the cell mass shows signs of differentiation as the cells become specific in their nature. At three weeks, the cardiac or heart muscle fibers may be seen that are capable of contracting. By six weeks, brain waves appear and, by eight weeks, the human form has appeared and organs are developing. By 15 weeks, fetal movement is evident and, by 24 weeks, the fetus is a viable person. By 36 weeks, we have a full term infant.

**This process, from fertilization through delivery of the infant, is continuous without interruptions.** There are no stops and no pauses in the process. Once fertilization occurs, bio-chemical events are initiated that continue until a mature human being is formed.

So when does life begin? To answer that question, it is well to go back to the definition of life and use the four end points for judging if life exists. These include metabolism, growth, reproduction, and response to stimuli.

Immediately after penetration of the egg by the sperm, bio-chemical events start the process of development.



*Dr. M. Roy Schwarz speaking at the 2019 NALC Mission Convocation in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

Thus, the metabolism end point has been met.

When the cells begin to divide, the growth criteria has been met. Third, when the cells are reproducing in the course of their division, the criteria required for reproduction is met. The fourth end point, response to stimuli, is a little more vague. It is clear, however, that any cell when confronted with a toxic stimulus will respond by changing the movement of its membrane.

Based on this analysis, one is led to the inexorable conclusion that: **Life begins at the time the sperm penetrates the egg and life continues until death.**

*Dr. M. Roy Schwarz served as a professor and administrator for more than 20 years at the University of Washington and the University of Colorado School of Medicine. He then was senior vice president of medical education and science for the American Medical Association. He is the author of more than 150 articles, books and abstracts. He has also served as chairman of the North American Lutheran Seminary Board of Regents.*



# CHILDREN'S MESSAGES

**By Pastor Teresa Peters**

*Director of Youth and Family Ministry*

People tend to have strong opinions about children's messages—both for and against them. I would like to take a moment to share why I am in favor of children's messages.

The first thing I believe we would all agree upon is that children should be in worship services. So, when we incorporate a message specially designed for them as a part of the service it sends children a message that they are an integral part of the congregation.

The children's message contributes to faith formation. While the whole service is for everyone, a children's message is meant to meet children where they are at. When done well, it is designed to meet both their cognitive and spiritual developmental stage. While most sermons rely primarily on auditory learning, the children's message often appeals to other senses as well. They sometimes use visual, textual, or auditory props, that engage multiple senses and can be beneficial for all ages.

In truth, the children's message is for the grown-ups too. Several adults have told me that the children's message deeply engages them and prepares them for the sermon.

I have heard different complaints about children's messages over the years.

+ *The kids don't want to come to the front of the church.* Why do they have to? The person delivering the children's message can do it from the front or step down into the pews and deliver the message to everyone.

+ *They take too much time.* They don't have to. They can be short and to the point. If they are done for the whole congregation, that saves the time of the kids going up and down. If they are delivered by

the pastor, they can go right at the start of the main sermon.

*They are often object lessons that go over the kids' heads, they are corny, and they often teach non-Lutheran doctrine.* Write your own or use a good resource. One good resource can be found on the "Sower" subscription worship planning service from Sola Publishing. Look at the "weekly worship" links.

In this post-Christian era where many people don't feel a need for church, it is part of our responsibility to make all people, young and old, feel like they belong. Children's messages can play a part in doing this for our youngest members.

## CONGREGATIONAL ANNUAL REPORTS

Congregational leaders and pastors are reminded to complete their annual reports to the NALC by April 30. Information for completing the annual congregational reports was sent to all pastors and congregations in March.

Information gleaned from the reports is helpful in updating the NALC's databases and the information about congregations available on the NALC website. Questions also assist the NALC in finding ways to support congregations in their ministries.

In addition to basic information about the congregation, congregations are asked about their support for NALC Ministry Partners and Global Workers as well as their involvement in their local mission district.

If you did not receive an email or cannot find it, please contact the Communications Team at [communications@thenalc.org](mailto:communications@thenalc.org) to have it resent.

# NALC YOUTH GATHERING

Get excited because it's almost time for our first NALC Continental Youth Gathering (CYG). Make plans to join us July 1-4 at St. John Lutheran Church in Boerne, Texas. Youth grades 6-12 are invited. You can find all the information at [cyg.thenalc.org](http://cyg.thenalc.org).



**WE BELONG**  
"I KNOW MY OWN AND MY OWN KNOW ME"

In addition to multiple age-appropriate Bible studies led by NALC pastors, we will be engaging in several mission projects within the Boerne community and packing kits for disaster relief. We're also looking forward to a true Texas rodeo, fun night spots, and all the fellowship of gathering with Lutheran teens from across the continent.

We are looking forward to a faith-filled youth gathering. Don't miss out. We belong to Christ, we belong to His Church, we belong to community, and we belong to each other. You belong with us for this gathering!

Registration deadline for the Continental Youth Gathering is April 15.

If you are already registered watch for information emails starting in May. We are so excited to make this event happen!

If you have any questions about the CYG or just want to get excited with other leaders contact Pastor Teresa Peters, NALC Youth and Family Ministry director, at [tpeters@thenalc.org](mailto:tpeters@thenalc.org).

## LOW ANTHROPOLOGY IS FOCUS OF CANADIAN ROCKIES CONFERENCE

"Low Anthropology: The Unlikely Key to a Gracious View of Others and Yourself" is the theme of the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference April 9-11 at the Coast Canmore Hotel and Conference Centre in Canmore, Alberta.

The featured speaker is David Zahl, the director of Mockingbird Ministries and editor-in-chief of the Mockingbird website. Zahl graduated from Georgetown University in 2001, and then worked for several years as a youth minister in New England. In 2007 he founded Mockingbird.

He lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he serves on the staff of Christ Episcopal Church.

The theme of the conference comes from the title of Zahl's most recent book in which he explores how our ideas about human nature influence our expectations in friendship, work, marriage, and politics.

The conference is sponsored by the NALC Canadian Mission Region. It is open to everyone —both lay and clergy. For more information or to register go to [thenalccanada.ca/events](http://thenalccanada.ca/events).



*David Zahl*

# NALC DISASTER RESPONSE UPDATE

Wildfires got out of control in the northern panhandle of Texas on Feb. 26. More than 1 million acres or 1,750 square miles are burning from Amarillo, Texas, to Woodward, Oklahoma. NALC Disaster Response has made four deliveries of emergency relief supplies, cleaning out four regional disaster warehouses. Canadian, Stinnett, Borger, and Fritch, Texas, have all been served in addition to Gage, Oklahoma. Long-term recovery will include rebuilding homes, barns and miles of fencing for the surviving livestock. Tractor Supply Center gift cards are needed for fencing materials.

Seven states were impacted by a series of storms that spawned tornadoes from Dallas, Texas, to Indian Lake, Ohio, on March 14. There were three fatalities in Ohio and the scope of damages is massive. NALC Disaster Response has responded with deliveries of emergency relief supplies to Winchester and Selma, Indiana; Madison, Indiana; Milton, Kentucky; Indian Lake, Ohio; and Grace Lutheran Church in Jackson Center, Ohio.

Pastor Bert Schultz is trained in emergency management operations and his church is six miles from the epicenter of the tornadoes in Ohio. We thank Pastor Bert for responding.

Monetary donations and donations of gift cards are needed for rebuilding. Donations of relief supplies to restock the regional disaster warehouses in six states are needed in preparation of future disasters.

Volunteers teams and mission trips are being scheduled now. Contact Mary Bates, disaster response coordinator, for more information at 740-509-1132 or [disasterresponse@thenalc.org](mailto:disasterresponse@thenalc.org). Updates are posted regularly at [thenalc.org](http://thenalc.org).

Gift cards and physical supplies should be sent to: NALC Disaster Response, 16500 Noble Ave., Caldwell, Ohio 43724. Monetary donations may be made online at [thenalc.org/giving](http://thenalc.org/giving) or mailed to: NALC Disaster Response, PO Box 860565; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565.

## RECENT ORDINATIONS



*Pastor Terese Whitten was ordained on Feb. 18 at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Oregon, Illinois. She serves as pastor of St. Paul and St. John Lutheran Church in Creston, Illinois.*



*Pastor Kenneth E. Campbell Jr. was ordained on Feb. 11 at Salem Lutheran Church in Elizabethville, Pennsylvania, where he serves as pastor.*

# NALC CORE VALUES

## REFLECTIONS FROM A FUTURE PASTOR

*Khrystle Sullivan of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, submitted this essay for the NALC Candidacy Committee on the four Core Values of the North American Lutheran Church as they relate to the ordination vows. Khrystle is finishing her courses at St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and will graduate this spring and enter the call process. She has been approved for ordination as an NALC pastor. The essay is reprinted with her permission.*

While the Bible is a divine gift which nourishes by relentlessly pointing to God's eternal plan of salvation in Christ Jesus, the ordained pastor is the servant whose vocation it is to relentlessly, wisely, and appropriately deliver the divine gifts of Word and Sacrament to hungry and thirsty souls both already within, and not yet within, the Body of Christ.

But unlike a waiter, the pastor is called not only to feeding, but to the overall care of human souls. This care includes feeding, strengthening, guiding, and protecting, all of which can only be accomplished by God and within God's will. The work is beyond the limits of human capacity, yet astoundingly, God seems to delight in dignifying imperfect and faulty humans by calling us to participate in His plan.

God calls imperfect human beings to such daunting tasks in order to then accomplish the seemingly impossible by displaying His own power through and along with human agency, to the glory of His holy name and for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom.

Yet it is precisely because pastors are frail and faulty humans and because the pastoral work is well beyond any human ability that it is crucial for pastors themselves to remain deeply saturated in Scripture, in Sacrament, and in prayer so as to remain intensely focused on, and thus able to continually point toward, Christ Jesus.



**Khrystle Sullivan**

A Christ-Centered church requires Christ-centered leaders, people keenly familiar with the contours of servant leadership who will not shy away from driving every single decision—be it for outreach mission work, what they will eat for lunch, or for the installation of a second toilet—back to a basis in Scripture and in faith. This is not to say that the Bible serves as a dietary plan or a manual on toilet installation, but instead that it is only in being firmly situated in the Word that proper decisions can be made.

That Christ's kingdom is upside-down means that it is often contrary to the logic and reasoning of this modern world. Thus, it is sometimes the case that decisions which might seem illogical on the surface are precisely in line with God's will for a given group of people in a particular given moment.

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The Bible will not directly instruct us on whether or not to install a second toilet in the church fellowship hall, but it will help clarify if this or some other use of the funds best aligns with the proclamation of the Gospel and the priorities of Christ's upside-down kingdom, and one of the many pastoral duties is to continually point back to the Gospel in all of life's many movements, moments, and decisions.

Being Christ Centered, Mission Driven, and Traditionally Grounded means intentionally keeping all we do intensely focused on proclaiming the person and message of Jesus Christ as delivered to us in Scripture and as understood through the historical creeds and confessions, while maintaining the orthodox practices of worship in the Word and Sacraments as faithfully derived from Scripture and delivered to us from the early Church fathers.

Being Congregationally Focused means being dedicated to supporting local gatherings of believers as NALC congregations in their living out of these Core Values and their carrying out this mission.

Thus it is imperative for pastors, as servant leaders, to demonstrate and exemplify these very values in their own lives as well as in their leadership. This, of course, can only be accomplished through regular and continual immersion in prayer, Holy Scripture, the sacraments, and the ecumenical creeds and traditions of the church.

For while the pastor is not to attempt to water parched souls from their own limited and unreliable personal well, but from the infinite and unabating life-giving waters of Christ, still the pastor cannot point out for others that with which they themselves are unfamiliar. This would truly be the blind leading the blind.

Yet two sojourners can travel alongside one another, together looking steadfastly toward the light of



***Khrystle Sullivan leading worship during her internship at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Marion, Iowa.***

Christ as given in Scripture, Sacrament, creed, and tradition, and unsurprisingly arrive safely on the other shore.

Thus being Christ Centered and Traditionally Grounded means being centered in the traditional creedal understanding of Scripture as the authoritative source and norm by which not only all doctrines, but truly all of life must be judged.

This is the position of faith in which we must stand in order to properly perceive all that is around us so that we might then better discern God's will for us and our interactions with our neighbor in the given context. So it is that in the ordination vows we promise that faith, so grounded in Word, Sacrament, creed, and prayer, will be the center—the abiding and orienting core—of both our public and our personal lives.

But the point of being so immersed in Word, Sacrament, creed, and prayer is to then carry this out into our congregations, our families, our communities, and the world at large, so as to be about the work of the Great Commission, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ with wild abandon like the unthrifty sower in Mark 4:1-9.

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We are, each of us, called not to abide in Christ Jesus and then hide and huddle safe in closed rooms behind locked doors, but instead to first abide and then venture out into this world as mirrors, however imperfect and fragile, reflecting Christ's light into our present darkness, so that others will be gathered in.

It is imperative that we understand ourselves first, not as a building or an organizational structure, but as a people, as a family, forever in search of her missing members. The Church is a blind mother in search of her children. Like any mother, she cannot cease searching until all of her children are found, though in this case she cannot discern them from afar, but only once they arrive in her lap.

And so it is that, as the Church, we go about calling into dark alleyways and desperate landscapes, into places of pain and torment—whether they appear as third-world countries or as the barren deserts of suburbia—proclaiming the kingdom of Jesus Christ to any and all who might possibly hear, trusting the Holy Spirit to deliver God's children safely home.

This is what it means for the Church to be Mission Driven, and just so, in the ordination vows we promise to uphold, support, and strengthen this mission by praying for God's people—all of them, those found and those not yet found.

We promise to diligently study the Holy Scriptures and to use the Means of Grace so that lost, hurting, and hungry souls would hear God's promises proclaimed from pulpits and street corners, from soup kitchens and coffee shops, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit they would come to encounter Christ Jesus in word and then water, in bread and in wine, to be gathered in, washed clean, transformed, and nourished into saving faith within the Body of Christ.

And it is to this end that the North American Lutheran Church is Congregationally Focused—organized in such a way as to serve and support local gatherings of believers as they venture out to minister both to their brothers and sisters and to their local neighbors and to the world at large.

Coupled with servant leadership, this grassroots focus empowers the church to more effectively serve and witness in every place she is located and to more efficiently spread to locations as yet unreached. Here, once again, the ordination vows remind us of the pastor's calling to be for the local congregation an example of faithful service and holy living, to lead as Jesus led, not by standing over and above, but instead by coming as from below, by serving—by washing feet, by reaching out, by encouraging and supporting God's people, and especially by lifting them up in prayer, always with the recognition firmly in sight that none of us is any more or less a sinner than any other, pastors especially included. The ordination vows remind us that our local congregations are led by servants who must themselves crawl back to the font each and every morning.

# CANDIDACY COMMITTEE UPDATE

The NALC Candidacy Committee has announced that at its March meeting, it approved 15 students for advancement in the process leading to ordained ministry in the NALC. Thirteen of the students are seeking ordination as pastors, and two are seeking ordination as deacons.

Four people moved forward in the Ordination Under Special Circumstances (OUSC) process.

Approved for ordination were: Luke Beaver, Candice Carter, Bert Eldredge, Megan Shaffer, Khrystle Sullivan, Anthony Wick, Jonathan Thompson, and Craig Wheaton.

You can learn more about the process to become an NALC ordained minister at [thenalc.org/candidacy](https://thenalc.org/candidacy).



NALS JUNE INTERTERM 2024



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# WORD AND SACRAMENT MISSION

IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

What does it mean for the church to engage in effective mission within the context of a world that is rapidly secularizing, and increasingly post-Christian? How can we reach out more intentionally to the communities God has called us to serve without compromising our Gospel commitment to the centrality of Word and Sacrament ministry?

Join us this summer in Ambridge for an engaging classroom experience as we meditate upon what it means for the NALC to be Mission Driven at such a time as this. Our professor for this course is the Rev. Canon Dr. Dan Alger, a seasoned pastor, an experienced church planter, and celebrated author of the recent book *Word and Sacrament: Ancient Traditions for Modern Church Planting*. The final day of course content and discussion groups throughout the week will be facilitated by pastors from the NALC with a passion for mission within our contemporary context. **Auditors and pastors seeking continuing education opportunities are most welcome!**

INSTRUCTOR FOR THE CLASS



**The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Dan Alger**

Provincial Canon for Church Planting for the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) and Dean, Pro-Cathedral of the Diocese of Christ Our Hope and Rector, Church of the Redeemer at New Garden Park (Greensboro, NC)

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