

2019 CONVOCAATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH INTERIM REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The 2019 Nominating Committee presents the candidates named below for positions to be elected at the August 8-9 Convocation in Indianapolis, Indiana. We believe that all the individuals named are qualified and would do well in their service if elected.

Any delegate to the 2019 NALC Convocation may nominate additional candidates for bishop. Delegates are encouraged to submit such nominations as soon as possible to allow the nominees time to submit the required biographical information to the Nominating Committee. Additional nominations for executive council and court of adjudication must be submitted to the Nominating Committee by June 24. For more information, visit thenalc.org/nominate2019.

BISHOP

Every four years the Convocation elects the bishop of the NALC for a four-year term. The 2019 candidates for bishop are as follows (name, current call and first congregation to nominate):

- [The Rev. Dr. Catherine Braasch, STS](#), Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jackson Center, Ohio; nominated by Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa
- [The Rev. B. A. "Tim" Christ, STS](#), Joy Lutheran Church, Richmond, Texas and dean of Southeast Texas Mission District; nominated by Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa
- [The Rev. Phillip Gagnon, STS](#), St. Albert Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Albert, Alberta; nominated by Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa
- [The Rev. Dr. Jeffray S. Greene](#), Word of God Lutheran Church, Peachtree City, Georgia; nominated by Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa
- [The Rev. Marshall E. Hahn](#), Marion Lutheran Church and Norway Lutheran Church, St. Olaf, Iowa and dean of Iowa Mission District; nominated by Word of God Lutheran Church, Peachtree City, Florida
- [The Rev. Ronald Hoyum](#), Port Madison Lutheran Church, Bainbridge Island, Washington; nominated by Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa

- [The Rev. Melinda H. Jones](#), Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Charleston, South Carolina; nominated by Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Troutman, North Carolina
- [The Rev. Kenneth C. Kimball, STS](#), Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa and Old West Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waukon, Iowa; nominated by Hope Lutheran Church, Cedar Hill, Texas
- [The Rev. James T. Lehmann, STS](#), Immanuel Lutheran Church, Thomasboro, Illinois; nominated by St. Paul Lutheran Church, Rosenberg, Texas
- [The Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen](#), Trinity Lutheran Church, Ashland Ohio; nominated by All Saints Lutheran Church, Arlington, Texas
- [The Rev. Dan Selbo](#), St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, San Jose, California; nominated by Emmanuel Lutheran Church, State College, Pennsylvania
- [The Rev. Dr. David M. Wendel](#), NALC Assistant to Bishop for Ministry & Ecumenism, Jacksonville, Florida; nominated by Shepherd of the Woods, Jacksonville, Florida

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Each year the Convocation elects one pastor and one layperson to the executive council for four-year terms. The 2019 clergy candidates are as follows (name, current congregation and first congregation to nominate):

- [The Rev. Bassam J. Abdallah](#), House of Prayer, Elizabethtown, Kentucky; nominated by Trinity Lutheran Church, Norwalk, Ohio
- [The Rev. Rebecca M. M. Heber](#), Oasis Church, St. Mary, Florida; nominated by Oasis Church, St. Mary, Florida
- [The Rev. Dr. Keith G. Less](#), Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Abilene, Kansas; nominated by Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Abilene, Kansas
- [The Rev. K. Craig Moorman](#), River's Edge Ministries, Mount Airy, Maryland/First Evangelical Lutheran Church of Gray Manor, Dundalk, Maryland; nominated by Hope Lutheran Church, Cedar Hill, Texas
- [The Rev. Carl L. M. Rasmussen](#), First Lutheran Church, Kirkland, Illinois; nominated by First Lutheran Church, Kirkland, Illinois

The 2019 lay candidates are as follows (name, current congregation and first congregation to nominate):

- [Ms. Rebecka V. Andrae](#), St. Paul Lutheran Church, Latrobe, Pennsylvania; nominated by St. Paul Lutheran Church, Latrobe, Pennsylvania
- [Ms. Rosemary Johnson](#), Hope Lutheran Church, Ladysmith, Wisconsin; nominated by Hope Lutheran Church, Ladysmith, Wisconsin
- [Mr. Scott Kramer](#), St. John Lutheran Church, Boerne, Texas; nominated by St. John Lutheran Church, Boerne, Texas

COURT OF ADJUDICATION

This year two individuals, clergy or lay, will be elected to four-year terms on the Court of Adjudication. The 2019 candidates are as follows (name, current congregation and first congregation to nominate):

- [The Rev. Jennifer Gold](#), St. John Lutheran Church, Boerne, Texas; nominated by St. John Lutheran Church, Boerne, Texas
- [The Rev. Leslie Haines, STS](#), St. John's Lutheran Church, Lake Township, Fort Wayne, Indiana; nominated by Immanuel Lutheran Church, Thomasboro, Illinois
- [The Rev. Marty Ramey](#), Grace Lutheran Church, Clemmons, North Carolina; nominated by Grace Lutheran Church, Clemmons, North Carolina
- [Mr. Allyn Ray Rub](#), St. James Lutheran Church, Llano, Texas; nominated by St. James Lutheran Church, Llano, Texas

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Wendy Berthelsen
 The Rev. Hugh W. Brewer
 Mr. Erik Osness
 The Rev. Richard Tomlinson
 Mr. Marc Voigt, Chair

NOMINEES FOR BISHOP

THE REV. DR. CATHERINE BRAASCH, STS

Jackson Center, Ohio



Current Call: Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church (Jackson Center, Ohio), Intentional Interim Pastor

Congregational Membership: Trinity Lutheran Church (Gothenburg, Nebraska)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC and LCMC

Basic Biographical Information: Marital status: widowed in 2016 after nearly 50 years of marriage; one child, deceased in 2016; one God-daughter, age five

Education:

- Undergraduate studies in agricultural business management and animal science, Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo, honors at entrance
- B.S.Ed. Journalism, American Studies (1974), summa cum laude, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater; Senior Paper: “Voluntary Censorship of US News Media During WW II”
- M.A. Organizational Leadership, Gonzaga University (1993); awarded Ignatius of Loyola Magis Medal for exemplary integration of scholarship, leadership and service; research project: “Characteristics of Exemplary Pastoral Leadership in Mission Congregations”
- M.Div. Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (2002); Thesis: “Confessional Witness to an Emerging World Religion (Mormon)” – a teaching thesis for preparing pastors to lead their congregations in confessional outreach and evangelism with their Mormon neighbors
- D.Min. Applied Ministries, Graduate Theological Foundation (2012); focus: Spiritual Formation and Development, both adolescents and ministry leaders; fostering a culture of call in congregations

Hobbies and other interests: Target shooting; reading; writing; collecting and making quilts; working with 4-H and National FFA Organization (Future Farmers of America) members on their livestock projects; judging FFA leadership contests and scholarship applications (local, state, national); developing a foundation to support National FFA Washington Leadership Conferences; volunteer service as firefighter/rescue squad

member; department chaplain; county hospital and county sheriff's chaplain; pastoral support for Epiphany Prison Ministry.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. The sign of God is that I'm continually being led where I haven't planned to go, through doors that I'd never imagine opening, into endeavors that might not bear full fruit during my tenure or lifetime.

If anyone would have suggested on the day of my Baptism (at age 18), that I'd be called to pastoral ministry, and maybe even to service as bishop, I'd have laughed out loud. I'm a convert to Christianity. Four generations of my forbearers were Mormons and that's how I was raised. At age eight, though, I walked into a neighborhood Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregation's vacation Bible school. There, I was introduced to the real Jesus, crucified for my sin, risen from the dead, and calling me to follow Him. His grace and mercy stuck like glue on my soul. Nine years later, an LCMS congregation near my college reached out after I checked, of all things, Lutheran as my religious preference at registration. Since that time, I've been formed in Christian faith and life by congregations that are serious about being and making disciples of Jesus Christ, 24/7/365.

Daily remembrance of Baptism reminds me that I, a sinner, need the fullness of God — Father, +Son and Holy Spirit. My daily encounters are grounded in these disciplines:

- Praying with Scripture following the daily prayer offices: Matins (Morning Prayer), Vespers (Evening Prayer) and Compline (Prayer at Close of Day);
- Intercessory prayer for specific needs, concerns, joys and sorrows of our church body and seminary, friends, colleagues, parishioners, kin and even strangers I encounter in the course of the day;
- Ongoing peer accountability based on our ordination vows, through the Society of the Holy Trinity (STS), an inter-Lutheran order of pastors from 11 Lutheran bodies in North America. The STS Rule guides and unites our lives through praying the daily offices, regular chapter and general retreats, and individual confession and absolution with a brother or sister as our confessors, and prayerful support of our fellow clergy; and
- Daily reflection (the Examen) of where and how God has been present and/or silent during the day just passed. This discipline closes the loop of my daily discipleship and prepares me to begin anew after a good night's sleep.

These individual and community disciplines prepare me to meet our Lord whenever and however He manifests His presence and His purpose. I pray for the grace and courage

needed to keep on saying “Yes, and I ask and trust God to help and guide me.”

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. I Corinthians 12:18-26 (ESV) has significance for me as I reflect on my life and ministry, servant leadership, and the office of bishop:

¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

These verses, particularly verses 18-22, are at the heart of biblical servant leadership and especially vital if the NALC wants to be a lean yet responsive denomination with the congregation at its heart.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? According to Holy Scripture and the confessions, a bishop is to: preach the Gospel, forgive sins, administer the Sacraments, judge doctrine and defend the faith. Inherent in these responsibilities are Paul’s words to all who are ordained: “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12b ESV).

By God’s grace and through 45 years of volunteer and professional ministry, I am as prepared as anyone could be without previously serving as a bishop or being part of the current NALC Executive Council or staff. I have come to appreciate the biblical and confessional understanding of bishop – and the difference between authentic bishops and bishops in name only (also known as bishops behaving badly). I have worked with both kinds of bishops – as a member of two different bishop’s executive cabinets and planning teams, in strategic mission planning with 64 synods, and as a researcher on effectiveness of staffing and service in multiple synods, before leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for biblical, confessional reasons and fidelity to my ordination vows.

Fourteen years of lay volunteer leadership in three Lutheran denominations (LCMS, LCA and ELCA) prepared me for nearly 15 years as a lay executive staff leader in the ELCA,

17 years of pastoral parish ministry and, now in the NALC, numerous opportunities to serve on denominational committees and teams. In early retirement, being an intentional interim pastor to six congregations in four states, has given me insight into the needs and opportunities for becoming an even more Congregationally Focused church body.

The word “chief” is prominent in the constitutional duties of the NALC Bishop: chief pastor, chief evangelist, chief ecumenical officer, chief executive officer. A churchly understanding of “chief” grounds greatness in servanthood (Mark 10:35-45). Chief servants lead and guide by example – with integrity in public and private life, through courageous decision-making based on principle and the good of the church, and by growing cohesiveness – drawing all parts of the body of Christ into its life together, without compromising the basics of Scripture, creed and confessions.

My experience has equipped me to serve as chief-servant bishop in these capacities:

Chief Pastor to Pastors:

- Dean in a mission district of the NALC and a chapter of the Society of the Holy Trinity (STS);
- Trainer and coach for NALC intentional interim pastors, and, before that, selecting, training and supervising mission development pastors for the ELCA;
- Spiritual director/coach to NALC seminarians and pastors, as well as laity; and
- Consulting, supervising and mentoring pastors and congregations in diverse ministry contexts: rural-open country congregations; suburban churches and those serving inner city communities; ethnic-specific congregations in the lower 48 states and native corporations in Alaska; and indigenous congregations in the Caribbean and along the US-Mexico border.

Chief Evangelist: I teach and practice a five-point approach to evangelization. This approach focuses on changing the culture of congregations and building their capacity to:

- a) Identify those who are missing God in their lives;
- b) Invite them to meet Jesus (or get re-acquainted) and experience His grace and mercy in ways that relate to their specific circumstances and needs, hurts and hopes;
- c) Incorporate those who are open to Baptism or affirmation of Baptism;
- d) Involve the newly baptized or re-affirmed in discipleship formation and service; and

e) Inspire – recognizing the activity of the Holy Spirit, encouraging disciples to share what God is doing in their lives, multiplying them into the next wave of evangelists who Identify, Invite, Incorporate, Involve and Inspire.

Whenever these five principles become central to the culture of Christ's church, I've seen congregations grow numerically, spiritually and as holy communities. These five principles and corresponding actions become holy habits of everyday disciples, not a program to be tried and later tossed aside. Focus shifts from a consumer culture of "what's in it for me" to a missionary discipleship culture of following Jesus and focusing on the one who does not know or follow Him. This is the cultural change that's necessary throughout the NALC.

Chief Ecumenical Officer: The NALC has already made some great strides in establishing a global confessional footprint. I am prepared to continue ecumenical work that welcomes partnership with confessional Lutheran and ecumenical partners who, in turn, respect what we stand for.

Since 1988, I've had the privilege of working in several inter-Lutheran and ecumenical endeavors. I'm at ease in engaging denominational leaders, including those who disagree with the NALC on the interpretation of Scripture and ordination of women. Examples: I first learned about church politics as a lay person serving in congregational, district, regional and synodical capacities in the LCMS starting back in the 1970s. In the 1990s, while a denominational leader in outreach ministry and an ELCA seminarian, I was invited to be the keynote speaker on *Biblical, Theological and Practical Considerations of Selecting and Training Mission Pastors* for LCMS District Presidents and Mission Chairs. Previously, I wrote for Concordia Publishing House's "My Devotions" for children; and served as a representative to consultations between the ELCA and LCMS and related ministry organizations.

Globally, I'm at ease in formal meetings as well as in on-the-ground ministries of teaching, pastoral care and service. I've represented my denominations as a teaching theologian, international consultation member and/or mission worker in eleven countries: Africa (Zimbabwe, Malawi), the Middle East (Israel and Palestine), Europe (Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom), North America and Central America (Mexico, Guatemala, Canada and the US). Whether having an audience with the Roman Patriarch of Jerusalem, or meeting with international Lutheran church leaders, both lay and clergy, or contributing to biblical, theological and practical ministry considerations in consultations on the future of Christ's Church, or developing new ventures in ministry, I focus on clarity and collaboration without compromising the core tenets of our faith.

In the North American inter-Lutheran context: The Society of the Holy Trinity (STS)

is perhaps the one, best place for Lutheran pastors from diverse denominations and church practices to unite around and hold ourselves mutually accountable for the vows we made at ordination. I've served STS as a missionary dean and first elected dean of the newly formed Central Plains STS Chapter; as well as on the leadership council with officers and deans from the US and Canada. NALC pastors are well represented in STS membership and chapter leadership. STS provides a venue for on-the-ground, inter-Lutheran relationships that's not to be missed or discounted.

Living Ecumenically: I lived for a full year at Nashotah House, a classical Anglican seminary in Wisconsin. I was welcomed into the community while serving as an interim senior pastor nearby and wrapping up my Doctor of Ministry degree. I count that year as one of the best, most formative of my life and ministry. This ecumenical year grew my capacity to live in ecumenical collegiality and respect.

Chief Executive Officer: As executive director of a non-profit women's ministry organization for five years, I served as CEO with oversight of a \$5 million annual budget and investments of a like amount, plus responsibility for 20+ executive, programmatic and administrative staff. Our ministry direction was governed by and accountable to an elected executive board, with the board president and I serving as a team to assure full, seamless collaboration between governance and management. Our ministry reached throughout the US and Caribbean in collaboration with 64 synodical women's organizations and their local congregational units. We also sponsored ministries in Asia, the Asian sub-continent, Africa and Latin America. During my tenure, I secured the rare, voluntary service of Frances Hesselbein, founding board chair and CEO of the Peter Drucker Institute for Non-profit Innovation, to guide our ministry's re-visioning and commitment to a renewed vision: To mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? Those who nominated me for bishop described me as "Forthright. Courageous. Dogged perseverance. Pastoral to those who are hurting. Firm with those who need a firm response. Understanding of what it means to come from a non-Christian background to faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Understanding of the role and relationship of staff to the elected leadership of the church and what staff need from elected leadership." Their words both humble me and ring true.

I'd add these skills and aptitudes:

a) I practice Strategic Vision, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation based on the vision goals and objectives of the ministry, not on popularity, individual preference or expediency.

b) I focus on integrative thinking and action: “Connecting the dots, eliminating the silos” so that all that we do works together to the glory of God and the good of the church.

c) I understand, respect and practice good governance – the distinctive roles of governing bodies, management and staff – and the harm that comes when these roles are not understood and honored.

d) I focus on ministry health as seen in Vision and Purpose, Goals, Relationships, Roles, Accountability, and Decision-making Procedures/Processes.

e) Demonstrated experience in leading staff and volunteers in planning national/international ministry business meetings and gatherings for 3,000-5,000 participants;

f) Demonstrated experience in

- Bringing together diverse audiences (up to 100 participants) to discover and commit to strategic vision, mission and action;
- Building cohesion and commitment of governing bodies, constituents-at-large, and staff; and
- Designing and leading special-interest meetings aimed at expanding ministry participation with under-represented communities (e.g. young adults, ethnic communities).

In addition, I know and value life led by the laity. I know the business world through my ministry in daily life. Before going into full-time ministry, I held a progressively responsible executive career in academic, health care and human services. I operated my own consulting firm in public relations/marketing for small businesses and non-profit organizations. I led seminars on volunteer development and leadership at state, regional and international conferences. I was founding president of one state professional society and president of a similar association in another state. My late husband and I co-operated “Braasch Land and Livestock.” Our flock of purebred Suffolk sheep was established in 1973, and still carries on with day-to-day management by a shepherd-couple in South Dakota. Folks refer to me as “the pastor with mud and manure on her boots” – a title I’m glad to bear.

What should be the NALC’s most important ministry priorities?

a) Keep all four Core Values at the forefront and in balance, beginning with greater attention to congregations and mission districts.

b) Foster transparency in governance: beginning with publication of minutes (at least summaries of key actions) of the executive council and detailed financial reporting of

what it costs to conduct the specific ministries of the NALC.

c) Attention to strategic growth, particularly the planting of NALC congregations in places where we do not have a presence and there is no nearby congregation to foster that growth.

d) Clearly define and expand the roles and relationships of mission districts, their deans and other leaders, and congregations as integral to the mission and ministry of the NALC.

e) Create a “culture of call” throughout the NALC – raising up clergy, academics and laity to recognize their God-given vocations in the church and in daily life.

f) Continue to refocus stewardship ministries on generosity with our Time, Talent, Treasure and Testimony (legacy giving).

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? Our greatest challenges are also our greatest opportunities: to make Christ known in a time when indifference and hostility to Christ are increasing, and to remain faithful to the biblical, creedal, confessional foundations of our faith. Our Core Values must guide all our actions, from congregations to mission districts to denominational governing bodies and staff.

With these points in mind, I envision the NALC focusing on:

Grounding:

- Every home as a house-church, following the model of Martin and Katie Luther and the Holy Families Initiative established by the NALC during the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.
- Every NALC congregation as a holy community focused on the Means of Grace as the Means of Mission. Focus on evangelization, spiritual formation and discipleship at all ages and stages of life.
- Every decision – as a denomination or mission district or congregation – is to contribute to the health and vitality of NALC congregations as mission centers.

Generating:

- Identify, develop and implement the best available ministry knowledge and practices that are consistent with the NALC’s biblical, creedal and confessional principles.
- Connect congregations to these resources and to other congregations that are already putting them into practice – at the click of a computer key, with web pages

that focus on information and referral.

- Increased use of information technology and social media, lifting up congregations that are making lasting, significant change in their ministry culture and discipleship practices.

Growing:

- Prepare for sustainable growth as a denomination, including a potential doubling or tripling of NALC member congregations in the next 5-10 years.
- Maintain a lean, cost-effective, accountable organizational structure that will grow and grow with the church by equipping and encouraging NALC congregations as the heart of a missionary church.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. The bishop plays a key role in keeping all four of the Core Values in balance. Being Christ Centered is the value from which the other three flow. Mission Driven, Traditionally Grounded and Congregationally Focused values are like a three-legged stool with Christ as the seat. When one of the legs is longer or shorter than the other two, we lose stability and focus on Christ. Then we spend excess time and energy just trying to stabilize the stool, which keeps us on the stool and out of the mission field around us.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? Mission districts are key to revitalizing the NALC around these Core Values. As bishop, for starters, I would advocate for these Core Values-driven actions:

- Strengthen mission districts in matters of mission strategy – vision, action and evaluation. Strategically identify and respond to opportunities to plant the NALC’s presence in places that aren’t in existing congregations’ backyards. Don’t simply wait for opportunities to emerge. Prayerfully ask “Where would the Great Commission lead us to establish a new worshipping, serving presence in our mission district?” “What will it take for this to happen?”
- Have deans closely and consistently connected to candidacy and the call process. Deans also can take some time and travel pressure off the bishop by being the installing pastor in all but extremely rare circumstances.
- Provide a full spectrum of services to congregations in transition. Times of transition are many: becoming part of a new denomination; going through pastoral changes;

dealing with moral and ethical failure by pastoral or lay leadership; or long-term, debilitating conflict that needs to be addressed and resolved before the call process can proceed. The NALC strongly encourages congregations to take ample time to address these and other matters before calling a new, settled shepherd. Such matters take more than a weekend or a few months to address. While well-trained, equipped and monitored Pastoral Care and Transition (PCAT) Teams can be valuable to congregations, they are not a replacement for a network of well-trained intentional interim ministers, full or part-time, serving 1-3 years. With the number of retirements coming up in the NALC, we should have no problem establishing, training, deploying and supporting such a network.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

- Discipleship is every baptized member following Jesus in everything we think, say and do.
- Discipleship is both-and. It's more than having a personal relationship with Christ our Lord, important as that is. Discipleship is also about having a relationship with the Body of Christ, His Church. (See my response to the Scripture verse question.)
- Discipleship is about more than, as our documents say, moving from a solely institutional understanding of the Church. At its deepest, most vital expression, discipleship is all about moving from being a consumer church to a mission church.
- Discipleship is all about Believing, Following and Serving, all in the name of the Father, +Son and Holy Spirit. We can't make disciples unless we are being discipled, and we cannot be disciples unless we are making disciples in Jesus' name and image.
- Discipleship is more than any single, denominationally preferred program. We do well to examine what congregations were and are already doing to be disciple-makers, even as we seek more of the best practices that conform to our biblical and confessional understandings.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? This question brings me back to the challenge of the Bible verse I selected in the second question: Are we in the NALC going to be the Body of Christ or not?

I say "Yes" to being the vibrant, confessional, truly evangelical denomination that will, over time and with like-minded partners, lead lasting, significant change in how unbelievers meet Jesus and experience His life-changing body, the Church.

I could not be more excited about God's vision for this new-yet-old body of believers and disciples known as the North American Lutheran Church. I'm humbled by this

nomination. I'll be even more humbled to serve in the future, either as a servant-bishop or in any other way my church body asks.

After forming the North American Lutheran Church, we've been in a bit of turmoil. We're like a thundercloud, building slowly, dramatically, even beautifully on the outside, but in turmoil on the inside, until the storm bursts loose. Sometimes the storm is life-giving, other times it's life-destroying. This is to be expected.

As people come together in movements built on common beliefs and causes, they do so in stages that follow the pattern we find in Psalm 147: Forming (vv 1-14), Storming (15-18), Norming (vv.18-19), Conforming and Performing (19-20). We see this throughout church history, from the ministries of Noah and his family, Moses and company, to Jesus and His earliest disciples. We see it now in our North American Lutheran Church. We're forming. We strive to look good on the outside while we're storming on the inside. On the other side of the storm, we'll come together united in our norms and purpose, conformed to the Body of Christ for the sake of the world Jesus came to save, and performing, as one, in ways that will point the world to Christ and His Church. In all the biblical, confessional and constitutional roles of office, the bishop is to shepherd the church through these phases of life together.

It's one thing to quote our four Core Values; it's another thing to live them in ways that demonstrate that the NALC needs every part of the body connected, respected, serving as one, communicating, listening and being listened to. That's the kind of servant leadership culture that I've fostered throughout my 31 years of full-time ministry and, before that, during my 15 years of secular career and volunteer leadership. Without other servant leaders who raised up unlikely candidates, I would never have had the formation and experiences that have led to my nomination for bishop.

God bless our discernment and the one who the Holy Spirit is already preparing to serve as our next shepherd, our servant-bishop.

THE REV. B. A. "TIM" CHRIST, STS

Fulshear, Texas



Current Call: Joy Lutheran Church (Richmond, Texas)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: Widowed (2018) and remarried (2019); three children and spouses, two step-children and spouses; four grandchildren, three step-grandchildren

Baptized at St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church, Willard, Ohio on April 1, 1951 (April Fool's Day! Isn't that a great baptismal anniversary for those of you who know me?!); confirmed at Trinity Lutheran Church, Willard, Ohio

Graduate of Willard High School, Willard, Ohio (1969); B.A., Luther College, Decorah, Iowa (1973); M.Div., Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, OH (1984)

Served Emmanuel Lutheran (Greenville) Burton, Texas 1984-1987; Atascocita Lutheran, Humble, Texas 1987-1990; Zion Lutheran (Zionsville), Brenham, Texas 1990-2000; Joy Lutheran (a charter congregation of the NALC), Richmond, Texas 2000 - present. Supervised three NALC interns for ordained ministry.

Worked in radio/TV broadcasting full-time after college and part-time concurrent with call at Zion, Brenham. I also farmed in partnership with my late wife's father in the panhandle of Texas while attending seminary.

Served three different terms on church camping boards of directors for LAOSC, LORMS, Lutherhill Ministries. Served as communications director for the Gulf Coast Synod of the ELCA. Have served as dean of the South Texas Mission District, now Southeast Texas Mission District of the NALC since 2015. Served on the deans' Sub-Committee on Structure. Numerous training and equipping events over the years, including parish leadership seminars, Stephen Covey Leadership Training, Myers-Briggs, 12-Keys, natural church development, coaching clinics, The Disney Institute, Via De Cristo (formerly Cursillo), etc.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Frankly, a lousy introductory question. How "I" "experience" God is subjective. The good Lord claimed me in Holy Baptism and has graciously nourished me throughout my life. His presence in my daily life is totally dependent upon His Word and promise, not my "experience", feelings or anything else. Such a subjective (and opinion-based) assessment is what led our former church body down the road to heterodoxy. Over the course of my 68 years, the Lord has graciously and finally opened my eyes to realize more and more that He is at work in my

life (and the life of all whom He has claimed as His own), whether I/we are aware of it or not, based upon His Word and promise (cf. Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 1:6, 2:16). As Dr. Nestingen oft reminds us: When it comes to the Gospel — God gets the verbs!

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. Really? “A” favorite? Depends on the day and hour. My late wife selected (among other texts) Romans 8:31-39 and the Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32) as texts for her funeral. They are among my many favorites.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? Literally everything and nothing. I’m serious with that answer. I must candidly say that I have no sense that I am being called to this office. For the sake of the conversation I am permitting my name to be submitted. However, having said that, I recognize that my opinion is again entirely “subjective,” and therefore unreliable. God’s call comes from outside of ourselves. He gets the verbs. God called me through His Body, the Church to the pastoral office and I have striven to faithfully respond to His call for 35 years (this August). Should God (demonstrating a sense of humor beyond comprehension) see fit to call me to the office of bishop through His Church gathered in convocation, obedience is my only option. But I do not anticipate nor desire that to be the case. For me it would be comparable to a certain Damascus road incident!

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? The parishes I’ve served have told me that preaching, teaching and simply accepting and loving them regardless of who they are are the things they have witnessed. I pray that God has blessed that. Whether those are gifts or skills is up for grabs. The greatest compliment I believe I have ever received was when I was told that my being a “non-anxious” presence with my sense of constant (and questionable!) humor kept a very volatile parish situation from becoming a problem. Radio training (and musical training from a young age) has given me reasonable vocal skills. I try to be well organized and I delegate at every opportunity (work smarter, not harder)!

What should be the NALC’s most important ministry priorities? THE priority is Word and Sacrament. According to our confessions, that is where we find Christ’s Church. Additionally, our Lord has given us our mission statement in Matthew 28. So, by God’s grace, striving to live into the fullness of our Lutheran distinctiveness for the sake of the mission our Lord has entrusted to His one holy catholic and apostolic Church would seem sufficient to keep us busy for centuries!

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? From my admittedly limited vantage point, some practical things seem pertinent at this stage of our young denomination. We need a more efficient and wise utilization of our national staff and infrastructure.

Kudos to Bishop John for the sacrifices he has made traveling, but even in conversation with him, he admits, no future bishop should be expected to make the sort of sacrifice which he has made. With 450+ congregations and growing, spread over North America, I'm convinced that there are better options (some of which I've shared with Bishop John) that can make us better stewards both of our leadership and their gifts and more greatly benefit our congregations.

I see transparency/communication as a weakness that needs addressing. Even as a dean, I've had difficulty learning on behalf of the pastors I oversee what we are trying to accomplish at the national level. The monthly newsletter (and the fairly recent addition of the Deans' E-Newsletter) help, but much more is needed from my vantage point in the parish.

Additionally, we have a variety of "pieties" that we've inherited and which can either be complimentary or contentious. I've been blessed to see them modeled beautifully in many and various complimentary ways in my ministry and would love to be a part of helping that continue to grow in our midst.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. Our values are anchored in God's Word. As a pastor, my job description, given me by my Lord, is to steward the "mysteries," Word and Sacrament. They are His means through which the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies.

The parish I am blessed to serve knows our four Core Values. I can't imagine why all of our parishes don't know them, and why this isn't normative in all our congregations by this time in our young life. They are simple and straightforward and after all these years? Really?

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? God is going to accomplish His will, His kingdom, with or without us. Believe me, I learned that lesson the hard way in the calling of my wife of over 40 years from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant through cancer and hospice. No tangible action on my part could change one single iota of that journey. That lesson has been further gifted me by the grace of God in the person He placed in my life to be my helpmate for the remainder of my journey. Given what I've lived through, I'm leery of words like "commitment" when I'm the one making it. As a fallen human being, I've joined the great mass of humanity in failing to live up to "commitments" at many levels. What I've grown to realize is the only "commitment" that ultimately matters is God's commitment to you and me. The more God's Word makes me aware of His commitment, His promise, to

me, the more I pray His Spirit is empowering me to live in such a way as to impact those with whom He has called me to share life with the reality that they are precious ones for whom Christ died. I believe the same is true for the whole NALC, our mission districts and our congregations.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

Discipleship has been a conscious part and parcel of my ministry since 1993, or thereabouts. I've never thought of it as a "strategic direction". That's corporate-speak. Discipleship is who we are and what we do. And it always begins with who we are, God's called and claimed children in Holy Baptism. As we grow in grace and faith, discipleship is the natural fruit of a living relationship with God in Christ Jesus, the Spirit reaching out, through us, to those who would be at one with Him. The ancient "spiritual disciplines" have served well for multiple centuries. No sense in re-inventing the wheel. Let's just use the tools God has graciously given us!

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? I hope and pray, that on that promised great day, we will all hear, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

THE REV. PHILLIP GAGNON, STS

St. Albert, Alberta



Current Call: St. Albert Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Albert, Alberta)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: I am an ordained pastor having served Golden Valley Lutheran in Viking, Alberta from 1997 to 2002 and St. Albert Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Alberta, Canada from 2002 to the present. I am happily married to my beautiful, intelligent and mostly right about almost everything wife, Patricia, and have three adult children (Elise, Elias and Sophie) busy enjoying their lives while simultaneously driving me crazy as often as they can. I attended Lutheran Theological Seminary from 1993-1997. Prior to seminary I was the director of Christian Challenge Ministries, a ministry informing the wider Church about various new religious groups or cults for three years. Later, apart from Alberta and Ontario, Canada I spoke in various diverse places on the topic of cults such as Pasadena, California, Seoul, South Korea and in Aira, in the Wollega province of Ethiopia at the Onesimus Nesib Seminary where I taught on my book *Deliver Us From Evil*, a manual on exorcism from a Lutheran perspective I developed from a seminary thesis and published with Kirkhouse Publishers in 2012. I also wrote a manual entitled *A Family's Guide to the Cults: Insights from the Lutheran Confessions* which I used while teaching at the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute for nine years while instructing two classes on world religions and new religious groups.

Prior to joining the NALC I was the chair of the Confessional Ministerium, a group of approximately 55 pastors concerned by the direction the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) was taking and involved in challenging its theological aberrations with other like-minded pastors, many are now also in the NALC.

After joining the NALC, I was appointed dean for the Canadian Mission District by Bishop Bradosky in 2013 and served as such for four years. At the same time I was president of the Canada Section and a member of the Board of Regents of the NALS where I was recently re-elected to serve again. For the last eight years I have been the co-planner and co-founder of the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference with Rev. Karl Johnsen and have planned two other conferences with Karl the "What's at Stake for Marriage" in Edmonton in 2005 and the "Courage to be Lutheran" conference in 2007.

I deeply enjoy painting and reading on a variety of theological topics. In art I can escape

the stresses of everyday life and in between the brushstrokes I find joy in creating and expressing the beauty of God's creation in my own limited palette. But in delving into that creative process I also find time to think and to pray about my family, my parish and the communion I am blessed to be part of.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. I experience God in the reading of Scripture, in the reading of theology and writings of others concerning their encounters with the promises of God. I experience God in those moments with people as we meet as beggars each needing the grace of God over a coffee or beer. I experience God in that moment I lay brush to canvas as I consider the direction not only of the oil, but of my prayers and thoughts of those whom I love.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. I have so many, but decidedly it is Philippians 1:6 because it reminds and promises me so clearly that it is God who begins the work in me, is faithful to that work of redemption and it is He who completes it, not I. So when I am tempted to despair or sorrow I am reminded of this promise and truth – it is not me, but all God.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? Considering that I have experienced what I have experienced and written about that above – nothing.

Earlier in my ministry when I was warned about myself and others standing up against the theological insanity of the ELCIC and that my activities would harm my career, I responded, “Did you not teach me that God was in charge of my ‘career?’”

I suppose I honestly feel that way about this role as well. I cannot add to what I have done as I did not seek this nomination, but I will serve if that is what the Body of Christ in this communion wills according to the Spirit. My experiences will speak to my capabilities regardless. SDG

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? It seems that I am a bit of a big-picture person and see potentials and possibilities – I am a triple D leader in that I tend to discuss, delegate then disappear (disappear meaning in the background checking in) trusting those delegates to use the gifts God has given them accordingly. I am not a micro manager but trust in those who have the gift of administration to use it. I also, because of my experience in the cults personally and then ministerially, tend to have a sense of discernment. I do not have much patience for nepotism or political infighting or lack of integrity. The Body of Christ worldwide needs to have authentic integrity to speak and live the Gospel in clarity with charity.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? I suppose for me if

the Body of Christ does not have authenticity as people of God there's not much point to any ministry or planning. As such, because of our propensity to the flesh we must be focused on basic things of ministry and pray the love of God to shine from our hearts to the world around us. Programs for the sake of programs will not be the magic bullet to anything let alone church growth, for the body of Christ ought to have nothing to do with multi-level marketing strategies or the like. The Church of God is the living Sacrament of Jesus Christ and as such growth will happen best when the people of God get on their knees to pray and love the Word as they love their neighbour and be authentic lovers of God and of people.

The world needs truth and love, not a program. People need acceptance and words of comfort and mercy, not strategies about how to fill pews. We need to know the lay of the land, but once we know the demographics it's down to loving people with the love of Christ wherever we find them. As Luther said, we are beggars all. What need do beggars have of complicated strategies? They need bread of life and the wine of love in word and deed.

Attention to basics of discipleship in catechism as already given in the teachings of the Church, prayer, worship and reaching out to those around us. Taking our precious time and sharing it with someone who needs mentoring, friendship in Christ and allowing that love and spirit to grow organically as the Church has always done will be our best avenue to being faithful – success is not our primary aim, faithfulness is and the Spirit of God will do the rest. Sorry for the rant...

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? At the leadership level, the primary challenge is not to allow ourselves to become what we left behind, abandoning integrity and transparency in order to safeguard something which we believe is God's work. At this stage we are open to the temptation to protect the institution because of the hope it represented in its founding thereby beginning the slide to becoming what we abhorred.

At the congregational level it is the temptation to become anxious and allow ourselves to settle for quick fixes of any sort.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. To be bishop is to teach and preach the gospel of Christ in all circumstances while being pastor to pastors and shepherd to the flock entrusted to that person. While performing the duties of bishop it would be incumbent to do all things in light of the Gospel as outlined by those values encouraging congregations to follow suit and for them to evaluate their ministry within and without their parish in light of those values.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

I would think that opportunities to serve your neighbour would be central – ministry to the sick, the homeless, the lost and the least in life while expressing the love of God to all. Taking opportunities to pray and meet with other Christ loving congregations to do ministry so that the kingdom of God is proclaimed. What is needed in your neck of the woods to show the love of God in meeting the needs of the soul and body of those who are in need?

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

Discipleship is not a “strategic direction” for us. It is a biblical commandment to make disciples. Once we start talking about “making disciples” as a “strategic direction” we’ve denigrated the calling of God to a marketing perspective. We are to be about the “business” of making disciples (Matthew 28) from the very moment a child is baptized – the baptismal promise parents and sponsors make is all discipleship language and if we took our baptismal promises more seriously and stopped acquiescing to society we would be more faithful to disciple-making and perhaps even more “successful.”

That being said, I believe, that yes, disciple-making is the primary task of the Church and I believe the catechism and faithful mentorship by the body (congregation) to that newborn is the most effective way to do just that.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC?

I have many hopes for the NALC. I believe God formed us together to be faithful to Him. I believe we can be with others striving to be faithful a light to the world around us. But in order to do that we must be transparent in our leading and loving. We must not be simply another new denomination with high hopes and then sliding backwards to prior behaviours and politics. My hope is for a leadership that will be open and honest in all ways, for a body earnestly seeking to love God and neighbour at every opportunity in every place we find ourselves. To be an ecumenical force for truth and reconciliation between denominations but also for those who experienced the abuses and lack of integrity of churches in their lives and have come to view the Church with suspicion and distrust. If we are to bridge those challenges we must be transparent to each other at every level as difficult as it is as frail, weak sinners. But if we embody that authenticity of the Spirit of Christ the world will notice because we are not like the institutions that have come to distrust.

THE REV. DR. JEFFRAY S. GREENE

Brooks, Georgia



Current Call: Word of God Lutheran Church (Peachtree City, Georgia)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC and LCMC

Basic Biographical Information: Born in Fresno, California, 1957; charter member Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 1959; confirmed Mt. Carmel Lutheran, San Luis Obispo, California, 1972

B.A. History and Geography, California State University, Chico, 1982; M.Div., P.L.T.S., Berkeley, California, 1989; Ph.D., Trinity, Newburgh, Indiana, 1998

Married thirty-four years to Lorene. Three adult children: Rosalynne (Daniel), Dane (Liz) and Alisa. We are anticipating our first grandchild in September.

Congregations served: Mt. Of Olives, Phoenix, Arizona (1989); interim, Advent, Glendale, Arizona (1991-1992); Mt. Zion, Tucson, Arizona (1992 - 1998); Emmanuel, La Habra, California (1998 - 2004); American, Rantoul, Illinois (2004 - 2016); Word of God, Peachtree City, Georgia (2016 - Present)

Larger Church Positions: Communications Commission/Synod Council, Grand Canyon Synod; synod council, South-Central Illinois Synod; NALC Formation, Constitution Committee; Board of Adjudication (2011 - Present); NALS Board of Regents (2014 - Present); parliamentarian for the Convocation

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. God is active in our daily life. In Him, we have life, breath and our being. He is the light shining in the darkness and as many as have been awakened by His Spirit are walking in the newness of life He gives through the truth of His promise. Through myriad ways, prayer, meditation, disciplined reading of God's Word, as well as through the iron sharpening iron that happens when like minds gather together to encourage one another with and through the Word, the Lord speaks, and we are to listen. The real question is are we actively participating in God's will today?

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. One verse? There are two chapters I often quote from, John one and Romans eight. Those are two of my favorite books. But then, they are in my favorite book, the Bible. What does this mean? I have had many theologians of the church who have been friends and mentors and almost to a person before they joined the Church Triumphant, they said to me, "All I needed to know is summed up in the song, 'Jesus Loves Me,'" to which I say, "Amen."

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? In the role of being a pastor to the pastors and congregations, as well as prioritizing the Great Commission, and as the defender of faith and promoter of the mission, the bishop has a diverse task on a larger scale, but not unlike what is experienced by every pastor in the local congregation. Yes, I am prepared. The real question is: who is the one the Holy Spirit has prepared for this task?

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? As a technical writer for Arizona Public Service during their near bankruptcy restructuring, I learned a great deal about pie-in-the-sky ideals versus rubber-on-the-road thinking. When I mingled with Ken Morris, who was founding PeopleSoft at the time while consulting with Centralized Access Billing at Pacific Bell, I learned that you pull the little things together, but you do not have to wallow in the details. The Lord has reasons for the experiences, education and skills He gives. With a Ph.D. in Church Administration, multiple other degrees and certificates, and a diverse variety of parish experiences, the capability is present. The real question is who does the Lord intend to be our next bishop?

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? When you plug in a reader in a modern car, you can read its computer and make sure everything is working as it should. As Dr. Braaten spoke a few years ago, "Lutherans do not have a systematic theology." We do not think in terms of covenants, programs or lists, but, as all of Scripture points out, relationships. In other words, we're not a modern car (thank the Lord) and we do not have that kind of thinking in our DNA. To make a list is theologically problematic as a Lutheran. Heck, that's why Luther's writings go on forever. But to get to the point I think this question is asking, the first priority is to prioritize what it means to be Lutheran according to the call the Lord has given us in this century. The second priority is to find as easy a way as possible to make that applicable, understood, and lifted up to as many people as possible in our congregations. The third priority would then be to see whom the Lord has raised up for the various tasks in His Church and plug them into the ministry to which they have been called. Shoot, as I say this, I think it has already been said in Matthew 28:19-20.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? There are evangelical-catholics who lift up our traditional focus and pietists who lift up our congregational focus as the most important value. The devil loves to pit us against each other. We are whom the Lord has made us to be and both are important. The challenge is to rejoice in who we are and learn to work together for Christ's sake. We have the Law-Gospel tension and a great confessional understanding to share with the world as a part of our mission. That has always been a challenge for Lutherans. We neither need to apologize for, nor amend

this; but we often do, and it is a challenge not to do this. The question is, how do we make sure that we keep Christ in the center of our Core Values?

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. The Core Values are listed in the answer to “what should be the NALC’s most important ministry priorities?” Our Confession tells us how to understand Scripture. Our Core Values condense our scriptural and confessional priorities. These values do not belong to the NALC but are the directive of Christ through Scripture. Our yes is to be yes and our no is to be no. The question is whether or not our next bishop will walk alongside pastors and encourage them to hold fast to the truth we have received and preach with integrity and rightly administer the Sacraments.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? What are we able to do to move from having groups meet together to talk about things to being folk who are doing things? At every level, we have those who are able to work together and do ministry. We see this best in disaster where congregations work together in tangible ways in Jesus’ name and for His sake. The question is are we able to find ways to do this that do not require a catastrophe?

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC? The will of the Father is that we believe that we have eternal life through the Son. All who believe are disciples. We go into the world that we may join disciples together for Jesus’ sake to carry out His will in the Great Commission. It is not a strategic plan, it is the plan. The strategy is in asking the question of how best do we do this?

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? The Gospel is simple: Jesus saves us because we all need saving. It is not just about keeping things easy to understand, it is about keeping things simple. In a world that increasingly makes things more complex than they need to be, we have the gift of being able to share the simple truth of Jesus and His love in a world that needs the message we have been given. Will we do this together? I hope so!

THE REV. MARSHALL E. HAHN

St. Olaf, Iowa



Current Call: Norway Lutheran Church (St. Olaf, Iowa) and St. Olaf Lutheran Church (St. Olaf, Iowa)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: Married to Karen Hahn; children – Matthew Hahn, Benjamin Hahn, Rebecca Hahn, Jonathan Hahn; M.Div. from Luther Seminary in 1985; B.S.S. from Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa; hometown – Lamont, Iowa; high school – Starmont, Arlington, Iowa; hobbies – reading, biking, camping, baseball, traveling

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. One of the things that I have emphasized throughout my ministry is how God comes to us, more often than not, in quite ordinary ways. This is a basic understanding of our sacramental theology. God comes to us in the ordinary, earthly elements of bread and wine, water and a word. As Elijah experienced in the wilderness, it was the still, small voice that revealed God's presence to him even more than the earthquake, wind and fire. This has been my experience. It is more often in simple, ordinary settings that I experience God – in the care and love of my family – the forgiveness of my parishioners(!) – in conversations with colleagues and friends – reading the Bible at the close of the day – holding a newborn in the maternity ward – offering a prayer at the graveside of a friend. What I find is that it is not that I have to wait for God to present Himself to me, but that God is waiting for me to be present to Him. When I open my eyes, truly look for Him, invariably, I can sense His presence every day, often in surprising places.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. One of my favorite passages in Scripture is the eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. From the first verse, which announces our deliverance from the condemnation of the Law, to the final rhetorical flourish proclaiming the unconquerable love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus, this passage is filled with the message of God's grace, victory and blessing. Although it is difficult to choose just one verse as my favorite out of that passage, today that verse would be verse 37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (NIV). It is not just a victory that Jesus has won for us on the cross, it is a "hyper-victory," we are "super-conquerors" in Him. It is as if Paul is running out of words to describe the wonder of what Christ has done for us. For me, it is a marvelous assurance that, no matter what I might face in life, no matter what troubles may come to me, to those I love, to the world itself, there is nothing I need to fear. There is nothing that can take away the love and forgiveness and salvation given in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? My initial response to this question is to quote Martin Luther's pulpit prayer which is posted in the sacristy for me to see each time I enter the pulpit:

"O Lord God, thou hast made me a pastor and teacher in the Church. Thou seest how unfit I am to administer rightly this great and responsible office; and had I been without Thy aid and counsel I would surely have ruined it all long ago. Therefore do I invoke Thee. How gladly do I desire to yield and consecrate my heart and mouth to this ministry! I desire to teach the congregation. I, too desire ever to learn and to keep Thy Word my constant companion and to meditate thereupon earnestly. Use me as Thy instrument in The service. Only do not Thou forsake me, for if I am left to myself, I will certainly bring it all to destruction. Amen."

The office of bishop would be a challenging position, to be sure. I have not served in a staff position in my ministry. I have served in rural ministry throughout my 34 years as a pastor. I currently serve as dean of the Iowa Mission District. And in my previous church body, I served at the synod level on the Candidacy Committee, the Board of Leadership in Ministry, the Nominating Committee, the Synod Assembly Planning Committee, as conference dean, and as secretary of the synod at various times. Whether any of that prepares me for the office of bishop, God knows.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? One of the primary gifts I would bring to the ministry is something my kindergarten teacher said about me years ago: "Plays well with others." Collegiality has always been a high priority in my ministry. No one person has all the gifts and skills to carry out the ministry of the Body of Christ alone. We need each other. I have always sought to gain from the gifts of those around me, whether it is within the parish or among my colleagues in ministry. For the bishop of the church, I believe this is of even greater importance – to lift up and draw upon the gifts and skills of the whole people of God.

Other gifts that I have would include having received a good, solid Lutheran confessional education. I have a love for the church and for our Lutheran theology of sin and grace, Law and Gospel, the priesthood of all believers, and the centrality of the cross as the hope for our fallen world. I also have a love for the pastoral ministry. It is a joy and a privilege to be a pastor in the church. I treasure the opportunity I am given to proclaim the message of God's love in Christ Jesus, and to see this Gospel transform lives, offer hope and comfort, and empower people for service.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities?

1) Preaching the Word – The NALC was formed out of the desire to uphold the authority of God's Word in our proclamation, faith and life. This should remain our priority as a

church — to proclaim the Good News of Christ Jesus to a sinful world, “in season and out of season,” “always being prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in us.”

2) Teaching the Whole Counsel of God — of Law and Gospel; the pervasiveness of sin and its consequences for all of life; the wonder of the grace and forgiveness won for us on the cross of Christ; and the life of holiness to which we are called through the power of the Holy Spirit

3) Sacramental Ministry — to bring the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation to the people in the assurance of the new creation that is ours in Christ Jesus, that we may be built up into a people holy and acceptable to our God

4) Care of Souls — by the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints

5) Raising up and training of candidates for ministry to serve the people of God — supporting and building up the North American Lutheran Seminary

What challenges do you see facing the NALC?

1) Providing pastoral ministry to our smaller congregations; particularly those that are more isolated geographically

2) Raising up and training candidates for ministry to serve the people of God — supporting and building up the North American Lutheran Seminary

3) Communicating effectively within a church body that is spread out over such a wide geographic area

4) Strengthening our connections so as to develop a stronger identity and fellowship with one another, both as congregations and as pastors

5) Providing sufficient staff and logistical support for the bishop to carry out the work of his/her office

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations.

1) Christ Centered: Following the Apostle Paul, I am determined to be a “know-nothing”: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2 ESV). Whenever we turn our focus away from the cross of Christ we run the risk of falling into some form of the theology of glory. But with the cross front and center in our teaching and preaching, we are constantly drawn back to a life of service, praise and obedience to our Lord. The cross of Christ will continue to be the

focus of my ministry, wherever I serve. As a disciple of Christ, as a congregation, or as a church body, we are called to a cruciform life of obedience to God and service to others. The NALC has made this a priority from the beginning, with the emphasis on missions, proclamation and discipleship. And I pray we will continue to lift up this wondrous cross before us as we journey together.

2) Mission Driven: The first command the risen Lord gave His Church was to “go and tell” – to the women at the tomb, and to the disciples at Galilee. This remains our mission as Christ’s Church today. The NALC has made a commitment to engage in “pioneer evangelism”, bringing the Good News to those in our communities and in our world who have not heard this message of salvation. The practice of having each congregation partnering with at least one domestic mission and one global mission is a wonderful way to encourage this mission emphasis in our church and ought to be encouraged and strengthened. We ought to also continue to encourage, lift up and support those who sense a call to serve as missionaries around the world.

3) Traditionally Grounded: One of the primary challenges facing the church in North America is the temptation to jettison anything from our history and tradition which comes in conflict with the culture of our day. We are constantly being told that “the Spirit is doing a new thing.” Yet, as Jesus tells us, it is the task of the Spirit to “bring to our remembrance all that our Lord has taught us,” not to proclaim some new “gospel.” Our Core Value of being Traditionally Grounded means not only that the past gets a vote on the questions of today, but that the Word of God, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions get veto power over any attempts by our modern culture to rewrite Christian history and theology. I believe this will become an even greater challenge in the years ahead, and that it will be incumbent upon our next bishop, with the assistance of the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, to speak a clear word to the church, to those confused by these developments, and to speak the truth in love to the culture around us.

4) Congregationally Focused: Having been involved in a number of parliamentary debates in my previous church body, I have come to pay close attention to the way a church body organizes itself and, in particular, how that organization is described in its governing documents. For that reason, I was quite pleased when I first read the NALC Constitution’s Article 3, “Nature of the Church and the Ministry.” In the article, the church is described as the creation of the Word and Holy Sacraments, just as our Lutheran Confessions proclaim. This puts the emphasis where it belongs, in the assembled body of believers. Everything else builds from there. The mission, the ordained ministry, the mutual support, the oversight of the bishop’s office is all focused on the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments as it takes place week-by-week

in the local congregation. All that we do as a church body should be done with an eye to supporting these gathered body of believers, encouraging their ministries and drawing them together in bonds of service and partnership.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

As a young church body whose congregations are often scattered and distant from one another, it is important for us to stay connected with one another, providing encouragement and support as we seek to remain committed to Christ and His mission in the world. Part of that means strengthening our lines of communication so that we can share resources, information and respond to requests. But even more important is providing opportunities to be together for worship, fellowship and service. In our Iowa Mission District we have sponsored a youth mission trip the last two years to bring youth from around the mission district together to worship and work together and become acquainted with each other. We also encourage pastors to gather for text study, hold a yearly retreat, and gather in convocation each year. Other events, such as mission festivals, could be held around the NALC to highlight the opportunities to partner with mission entities domestically and globally. One of the real blessings that the congregations I serve has been the partnership we have developed with the Ebenezer Oromo Evangelical Church in Minneapolis. Over the last eight years we have sent youth groups and others to worship with them, have invited their choir to worship with us, and have maintained a partnership with their outreach ministry. It has been a blessing to be involved with such a vibrant mission congregation. The opportunities for mission are immense, and the blessings that come with it are wonderful.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

Discipleship is central to our calling as Christ's people. In Matthew 28, as the risen Lord Jesus gathered His followers at His ascension, He sent them out, saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." And this command comes with a promise, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (ESV).

Discipleship, then, is at the heart of our life as the Body of Christ. And it is with Word and Sacrament that disciples are made, as Jesus says. We see this command carried out at Pentecost, when Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, preaches the Word with such power and authority that 3,000 people are brought to repentance and faith and are baptized that very day. And that is not the end of the story, but those people continued to grow in their faith as they gathered and "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers" (Acts 2:42 ESV). As a strategic

direction for us, discipleship means sharing the Word with others and inviting them to “come and see” what the Lord has done that they, too, may receive these gifts of grace. Few of us are like Peter, bringing 3,000 to faith at one time. But even Peter was not like Peter most of the time, I am sure. Most often, it simply means being open about what God has done for me, listening to what is important in another’s life and extending a welcome invitation. The Spirit does the rest. But as with our commitment to “pioneer evangelism” as a church body, we also, as disciples of Jesus are not to keep quiet about what is most important in our lives!

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? I have been excited about the NALC ever since we gathered for our constituting convention in 2010. There is a palpable sense of the Spirit’s presence every time we gather in convocation. Our lay representatives say the same. It is simply a joy to gather together with hundreds of pastors and lay people who share a common commitment to God’s Word, a heart for mission, and a love for the Lord. My greatest hope for the NALC is that God will continue to lead us on this path, and only strengthen us in those bonds of faithfulness, service, discipleship and Christian love. Connected to this hope is the hope that we can work ever closer with our partners in ministry from other church bodies at home and around the world who share those same commitments and values. It is becoming more and more clear that there is a realignment occurring in the Christian church, and I look for greater connections with churches who share such a commitment to God’s Word across different traditions. I believe there is much we can do together even while we maintain our Lutheran confessional commitments. And I even hold out hope that the basic Lutheran theological commitments can be received even by those of other traditions.

THE REV. RONALD HOYUM
Bainbridge Island, Washington



Current Call: Port Madison Lutheran Church (Bainbridge Island, Washington)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: I am married (Lynn), have three children (Erica, John and Gretchen) and one grandchild (Sarah).

I graduated from Washington State University (1975), Willamette University School of Law (1978) and Luther Theological Seminary (1983).

I was ordained November 17, 1983.

Pastoral Calls: Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington (1983-1994), Port Madison Lutheran Church, Bainbridge Island, Washington (1995-2001), Southwestern Washington Synod (2001 - 2013), Port Madison Lutheran Church/Bainbridge Island WA (2014 - present)

I enjoy reading and traveling. I also enjoy playing golf on my days off.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. I experience God's presence through Word and Sacrament and through the love of family and friends and my beloved congregation. I begin each day with prayer and Scripture and end each day in prayer. I live each day as a forgiven sinner made new in Christ Jesus.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. My favorite verse is II Corinthians 5:17-21. It perfectly describes my faith and my ministry. In these verses, Paul tells us that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself no longer holding our sins against us. God has now entrusted us with "the message of reconciliation." We are now ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us to the world with the message of the Gospel.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? Perhaps my most valuable experience would be my twelve years as assistant to the bishop (2001 - 2013). I was in charge of the call process and worked with over ninety congregations during my time in the synod office. I also supervised the candidacy committee and assisted the bishop with all his responsibilities. Before that (1995 - 2001) I worked as a conflict mediator for congregations. I also found that my background in law was an invaluable resource for my work in the synod office. And finally, my parish experience covers both ends of the spectrum. I have served on the staff of a large congregation and have served a pastoral sized congregation as well.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I thrived during my years in the synod office. The work brought out the best in me. I enjoyed the administrative challenges and executive decisions that came with the call. People would say that I am a good communicator. I am also a good listener. I am most comfortable working collaboratively with colleagues and staff.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? Revitalize Congregations and Establish New Congregations. This must be our most important priority if we are to grow as a denomination. It would be the primary focus of my call as bishop.

Structural Redesign and Staffing. The Lord has greatly blessed the NALC and we are much larger today than we were in 2010. Our constitutional structure and our staffing configuration must reflect who we are today and who we want to be in the future.

Strengthening our Presence throughout North America. Most congregations in the NALC are east of the Mississippi. We need to strengthen our presence in the Upper Midwest and the western part of the United States and Canada.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? We must recognize that we are no longer a new emerging denomination. We are now moving into a new period where we will be judged more and more by the quality of the work we do and the clarity of our vision.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. I learned during my time in the synod office that, first and foremost, my call was to support the congregations and pastors under my care and strengthen them in their ministry. We are Congregationally Focused because we know that that is where Christ is preached and the mission of the church carried out. As bishop I would do all that I could to foster that vision within the NALC.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? The answer to this question will be found within each congregation and mission district. I will listen carefully, encourage conversation and then help in the implementation of whatever strategic plans may be developed. We are, after all, not only Christ Centered and Mission Driven but Congregationally Focused! I would never assume that I have a better or clearer vision as bishop.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC? Discipleship will continue to be an important and valuable strategic initiative for the NALC. I understand discipleship from the perspective of Luther's doctrine of vocation.

We live out our faith and serve our neighbor through our respective callings. Luther's down-to-earth and practical understanding of discipleship is needed today more than ever!

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? I hope that the Lord will continue to bless the NALC with a clear and strong commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My hope is that we never lose sight of the fact that we are here to serve Christ and proclaim His name to all the world.

THE REV. MELINDA H. JONES

Summerville, South Carolina



Current Call: Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church (North Charleston, South Carolina)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information:

- Married 28 years to James; we have two boys: Jade and Vasa.
- University of South Carolina – Aiken - B.A. History, 1998
- Youth Ministry 1991 - 2005
- Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary - M.A.R. in Biblical Studies, 2002
- Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary - M.Div., 2006
- Ordained 2007
- Pastor of Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Charleston, South Carolina 2007-present
- My hobbies are varied, but fun, such as: writing icons, singing, watching movies, camping with the family, driving my Jeep, competitive shooting and airline travel adventures.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. On days when the cry “MOM!” doesn’t jar me awake, I begin the day with Martin Luther’s Morning Prayer. Luther’s prayer guides the day’s natural liturgy of faith and life.

“I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son that you have kept me through the hours of this night...”

Luther begins with thanksgiving and confession. I am thankful to I have been guarded through the night and thankful that God has loosed my mouth to confess the very name of salvation, Jesus. “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise” (Psalm 51:15), which prepares me to continue that confession through the day.

“and pray you would keep me this day also from sin and every evil,”

“Rescued from every evil,” through the cross of Christ, God provides the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and the saints in light which gives me the confidence to go boldly into the day knowing Christ is before me to glorify Him in all I say and do.

“that all my doings and life may please you.”

My faith life is personal, manifesting itself through prayer, daily reading of Scripture, ministering to family and friends. We are called to be lights of Christ which shouldn't be hidden under baskets, but set upon a hill. My faith, therefore, is also very public. I hope that those whom I encounter each day may see Christ in me. I am told by many that this is something of an annoyance as I stop, talk with and listen to anyone as if they were my dearest neighbor.

“For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul and all things.”

I hear Luther's words to mean that there is nothing I have to give God except my devotion, and life in response to the gracious gifts He's given me through Christ Jesus.

“Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

Amen. May this be the prayer of the world.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. John 3:30 “[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (ESV).

John 3:30 is my favorite passage of Scripture. In this short verse, John the Baptist's words to his disciples shape my understanding of my ministry and mission in the world.

The Good News is about, and is Jesus. It is not about me, my congregation or the NALC. It is about Jesus, our salvation. My ministry, indeed, the ministry of the baptized, is to give glory to the Son of God, and to point to Christ that the world may know God.

We know that John was sent before God's Messiah to “prepare the way of the Lord.” And the time did come when Jesus came and was baptized. John's disciples were perplexed at how well-known Jesus was becoming, so much so that more people were going to Jesus than to John. However, John is not fazed by this migration to Christ. John does not seem to take offense of Jesus' mission. Instead, John is excited encouraged, and even happy. To drive home this joy, John lifts the role of the “best man” at a wedding. The best man does not get the attention; the best man supports the groom and focuses on the groom. The best man experiences happiness when the guests and the bridal party give their undivided attention to the groom as he receives his bride.

The Baptist understands that people will not be able to follow him and follow Jesus. “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John's message and direction to Christ is working. Therefore, hearers of this Good News move from John's message to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

This verse, embedded in my core understanding of ministry, keeps me focused on the

one to whom John pointed. This verse reminds me that the purpose of teaching and preaching is to lead people to follow Jesus, my joy and mission. This verse reveals the hope is for those who hear the Gospel to grow and mature in faith and life in Christ.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? First Timothy 3:1-7, “The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. ²Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil” (NRSV).

The office of bishop is well defined in Scripture as far as personal character, faithful teaching and a witness to one’s own family. I firmly believe this passage reflects my consistent, faithful upbringing in the Christian faith.

Constitution: North American Lutheran Church 8.01 The Bishop shall be an ordained minister who is a member of the NALC. The Bishop shall serve as the chief pastor and chief evangelist of the NALC, responsible for ensuring the priority of the Great Commission in the life of the Church.

By the NALC Constitution and noted in article 8.01, I do meet the requirements for this office; I am an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament and a member of the North American Lutheran Church.

Beyond meeting the requirements of Scripture and our constitution, I share with you how that manifests in my life and ministry:

- United States Army, communications instructor – USA Signal School 1988-1992
- Serving Christ as pastor to NALC congregation – Advent, North Charleston, South Carolina, 2007 to present
- Safely led the congregation from ELCA to the NALC through study of the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions
- Serving Christ on the executive council of the North American Lutheran Church – Current secretary of the executive council, Task Force on Structure, Personnel Committee, sub-committee to survey the congregations of the NALC, and Transitional Team for the Election of the Bishop 2019

- Serving Christ as chair of Nominations Committee – Carolinas Mission District 2012 to present
- Served Christ as executive committee member – Carolinas Mission District 2013-2015
- Volunteer, deputy chaplain of Coastal Crisis Chaplaincy 2007-2014
- Served on the steering committee for Orthodox Lutherans – South Carolina from 2009-2012
- Working with Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation to share Advent’s worship and educational space
- Working with the city of North Charleston to prevent teen violence and domestic violence
- Working with the Charlotte County Sheriff’s Office and the South Carolina Association of Governmental Organizations on the Taskforce Against Human Trafficking in South Carolina to provide a safe space for endangered teens and trafficked victims
- Preparing Advent to be a site for transitional housing with “Tiny Homes” and a day shelter to address homelessness
- Established a women’s retreat for nine years to Bible study

My ministry experience expands five decades. Beginning at my Baptism into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Train a child in the right way, and witnessed to by the Church: Baptized, confirmed, Sunday school student, confirmation, youth group, choirs, acolyte, reader, youth leader, Sunday School teacher, professional youth ministry, seminary, ordination. All along, I learned one truth: There is one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, both God and man, is His Son.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I have been blessed with these gifts by the Holy Spirit:

- Passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
- Grounded in the Word of God;
- Passion for teaching and preaching;
- Passion for worship and the liturgy;

- A discerning spirit;
- Compassion;
- Gift of sharing ministry;
- Strong sense of boundaries;
- Able to listen to divergent points of view but must hold fast to the witness of Scripture;
- Prioritizing;
- Ability to utilize resources;
- Loyalty; and
- Egalitarian.

These gifts of the Holy Spirit keep the focus of the office of the bishop on Christ.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? The number one priority of the NALC is faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ. Other NALC priorities should include:

- Raise, from the baptized, pastors. We need them;
- Continue to develop its seminary that its reach may cover the North American continent for easier access while making good use of resources; and
- To support the efforts of the Structure Task Force and the deans to alleviate stress on the staff and provide pastoral care to the congregations and pastors.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? Challenges that I see facing the NALC are:

- The conviction to be firm in the proclamation of the Gospel in a world that is growing in its hostility toward the confessional, biblical Church;
- An urgent need for pastors;
- Maintaining a unified NALC ministerium; and
- Identifying a suitable structure that keeps the integrity of our Core Values and Mission to share and spread the Gospel.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and

its congregations. We are Christ Centered, Mission Driven, Traditionally Grounded and Congregationally Focused. These are the four Core Values of the NALC which focus our ministry and mission in Christ, for the sake of the world, through the Scriptures and the cloud of witnesses, and the local church where we are called to be the “light on the hill” where others may see our good works and glorify God, our Father in heaven.

The Core Values are the boundaries that the NALC has established in faith and sets our agenda to be servants and witnesses of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Core Values would guide my ministry as bishop, as they guide my ministry as pastor, by exposing all other agendas that are not what Christ called us to be and do.

The Core Values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations as we honor them as firm boundaries for our church and its congregations. Ministries would be observed, assessed, followed or redirected as necessary to stay within the boundaries of our Core Values.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

Tangible actions that the NALC can take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church are as follow:

- Proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world as Savior;
- The survey conducted by the executive council is a tool to find our strengths and weaknesses of pastoral ministry and the presence of the NALC in the life of the denomination;
- Identifying and calling pastors;
- Continuation of the theological conference;
- Continuation of the Pastors’ Conference;
- Support of the staff;
- Continued support of the deans;
- Continue our relationships with our partners in ministry; and
- Sharing our mission to our global partners.

Tangible actions that mission districts can take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church are as follow:

- Proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world as Savior;

- Provide pastoral care to the pastors of the mission district and its congregations via the dean;
- Gather the congregations for shared ministry and resources (youth ministry, women's and men's ministry, ministry to the aged, materials, VBS, finances as needed, etc.);
- Develop mission starts and house churches together where the Word is most needed;
- Mentoring new congregations;
- PCAT (Pastoral Care and Transition) Teams; and
- Identify local and foreign mission needs.

Tangible actions that congregations can take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church are as follow:

- Proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world as Savior;
- Biblical study;
- Faithful worship;
- Stewardship;
- Identify spiritual gifts of members and utilize those gifts to the glory of God;
- Identify members who exhibit gifts suitable to ordained ministry and encourage them;
- Be involved in the local community;
- Witness Christian faith and life; and
- Pray for the Church and the world.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC? My understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC is spelled out for us in the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV).

The Great Commission is our marching order to go from where we are into the world in faith and by the authority of the Son of God. Being a disciple is not difficult; being a disciple is following Christ and obeying His commandments to love one another as He

loved us. That said, discipleship becomes problematic when we encamp around a figure, or an institution, or a way of life that is not Christ Centered.

Like John, the NALC, its leaders, its pastors, its congregations, and its members are to point others to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? My hope and my prayer, for the mission of the NALC is that the Holy Spirit continues to guide us to the Word of God, and live as witness to the Word of God – the purpose of our mission.

Further, I hope and pray that we may honor and give thanks to God for the NALC, its ministry to the world, and for courage to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord and Savior.

THE REV. KENNETH C. KIMBALL, STS

Waterville, Iowa



Current Call: Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church (Waterville, Iowa) and Old West Paint Creek Lutheran Church (Waukon, Iowa)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: Married to Debbie for 27 years. Two step-children, both married. Five grandchildren.

1978 graduate of Bricelyn (Minnesota) High School (class of 20); two years at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (started with Naval ROTC scholarship in Nuclear Engineering – no degree earned; honorable discharge from NROTC); 1980-1983 St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. B.A. English (magna cum laude); 1983-1987 Luther Northwestern Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota (Internship: Chetek Lutheran, Chetek, Wisconsin under Pr. Wally Hunstad)

Hobbies/leisure: Grandkids. Cross-country skiing, bicycling, weight lifting, hiking with the dog, omnivorous in my reading (everything by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and Louis L'Amour; history, theology, science, current events, fiction thrillers, sci-fi/fantasy, backs of cereal boxes, etc.), guitar, writing and good cigars.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. First and foremost – in and through Word and Sacrament, which carry me through daily life as one who has been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus; as one who has received, by eating and drinking, the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; as one who has heard the spoken Word of God in the absolution, in the public reading of Scripture and in the preaching of the Word as Law and Gospel. I treasure the Lutheran insight and conviction regarding the objective reality and truth of the Word of God that comes from outside ourselves, that is not the product of my subjective self. Jesus continues to be Lord and Savior, my Lord and Savior, regardless of the ups and downs of my subjective experience and feelings. Consequently, I experience God's activity in my daily life by the faith created and formed and shaped by this external Word, best expressed in the faithful summary of God's Word in Luther's Small Catechism, especially the explanations to the three articles of the Creed (which I excerpt here to shorten my answer): "I believe that God has created me and all that exists, has given me and still preserves my body and soul...provides me with...all I need...protects...guards...out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy though I do not deserve it...I believe that Jesus Christ true God...and true man...is my Lord. At great cost He has saved and redeemed me...freed me from

sin, death, and the power of the devil...with His holy and precious blood and innocent suffering and death. All this He has done that I may be His own...I believe that I cannot by own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith....in this Christian Church day after day He fully forgives my sin...on the last day He will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life.” And yes, there is mention of and a call for our response in terms of giving thanks and praise, service and obedience, living under Him in His kingdom, and serving Him, but always and only as response to and consequence of what He has first done for us. Experiencing God’s activity in our lives begins with God’s will and action, not ours, not mine.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. Romans 5:8, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (ESV). Jesus suffered and died for me when I was still a sinner, still His enemy, unworthy and ungodly. He didn’t wait for me to repent and begin turning to Him. He didn’t wait for me to choose Him as my Lord and Savior. He didn’t wait for me to embark on a life of discipleship. He died for me when I was lost and in rebellion against Him. He didn’t do a cost/benefit analysis of my potential contribution to the kingdom of God before dying for me. He died for me because He loves me, because the Father loves me, because the Holy Spirit loves me — not because I deserve loving but simply because God loves me — and all sinners — first, last, best and always.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? I’m not sure. Bishop Paull Spring and Bishop John Bradosky both had far wider church experience. Paull had been a synodical bishop. John had been pastor of large churches in California and Ohio and then the NALC’s first general secretary. I’m a rural two point parish pastor in the hills of northeast Iowa. I’m inclined to quote Clint Eastwood here: “A man’s got to know his limitations.” I think I’m more aware of my limitations than of my qualifications and I’m pretty sure that six months into the office of bishop that list of limitations would become even more glaringly obvious. I’m surer of this: that every one of my fellow nominees (a majority of whom were nominated by the congregations I serve, based on my recommendation) are far more qualified and better prepared to fulfill the role of Bishop of the NALC.

“Then why are you running for bishop?” I’m not “running” for bishop, but then I think that no one should be. I’m a nominee for bishop because at least one or two other congregations, based on the recommendation of their pastors, nominated me. I accepted that nomination, not out of any desire to be bishop but because it is my conviction that for all offices in the church, but especially that of bishop, the filling of those offices needs

to be primarily understood and practiced as a call process, not a political campaign nor as fulfillment of any individual's ambition for achievement or desire for position. For the sake of the well-being and mission of the NALC, it was and remains my conviction that every NALC pastor — except for reasons of failing health (i.e. a terminal condition or incapacity) or a serious family situation — should be available for call to serve the NALC if nominated and elected through the Church under the guidance and authority of the Holy Spirit.

With this conviction and understanding, I approached more than a dozen fellow NALC pastors whom I and other colleagues saw as having gifts and potential to serve the NALC faithfully and well as bishop. I asked each of them for their consent to be nominated by the two congregations I serve, prefacing my request with the obligation stipulated in the last sentence of the previous paragraph. It is important to note that none of them approached or asked for my help in nominating them. Indeed, all of them were surprised, some considerably so. Of the twelve I asked, ten gave their thoughtful consent. I recommended each of them to the congregations of Old East and Old West Paint Creek, speaking of the admiration in which I hold each of them, fully aware of the diversity of all ten in terms of particular gifts and experience. At their separate annual meetings Old West and Old East voted unanimously to nominate all ten.

But turn-about is fair play, and when I was informed I had been nominated by a congregation in Texas, as a matter of integrity I had to honor their decision by accepting and entering into the NALC's call process for bishop. I leave to the NALC and its delegates at this summer's convocation the task of weighing my qualifications and limitations (including a decided absence of ambition and aspiration) for the office of bishop in light of those of my fellow nominees.

Here is what I have, as far as I can see, in terms of ministry and life and experience. I can point to 59 plus years since I was baptized, nearly 40 years since God brought me back to faith and His Church after having fallen into unbelief in my teens, and 32 plus years as an ordained Lutheran minister in rural Iowa. I had experience in the charismatic renewal (both good and bad) in the late seventies, early eighties. I served on a variety of committees in the Northeast Iowa Synod of the ELCA.

I have been through the fires with others here — the long defeat we fought in the ELCA because it was right and true to stand and confess and do all that we rightly could do to try to keep our former church body from going over the cliff. And then refusing to go over the cliff and down a road we could not go because to go down that road would have been to leave behind the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions and the faith of the Church before us. I, along with the congregations of Old East and Old West Paint Creek,

was part of the reform group Call to Faithfulness from 2003-2012 — and through that involved as a volunteer with Solid Rock in 2005. I was a member of the original Lutheran CORE Steering Committee 2005-2010, and one among many who had a part in the formation of the NALC. I made nearly 100 presentations for Lutheran CORE/NALC from 2009-2012 in six states, many of those multi-congregational. Along with Old East and Old West, I've been officially NALC since Feb 2011. I was first a provisional dean and then the first elected dean for the Iowa Mission District of the NALC (2011-2014). Presently I've put in two and half years on the NALC Executive Council.

My life history includes a failed marriage that lasted barely two and a half years and which I entered into in the stupidity and arrogance of youthful self-ignorance and desire, for which I bear 100% fault from my own side and responsibility. The depth of that personal failure still marks me deeply, convincing me of the depth and pervasiveness of my own sinful self, though it now lies 34 years behind me and though I have been blessed with nearly twenty-seven years of marriage with my wife Debbie.

My pastoral experience really only is that of serving small and medium sized parishes. My first parish in Ackley, Iowa had 150 members and they had a lot to teach to a young green pastor fresh out of seminary. My second parish, the two congregations of Old East and Old West Paint Creek in the far northeast corner of Iowa, have a total baptized membership of around 600 souls. I am well placed in that parish — nearly 25 years together, having reached the blessed point of doing weddings for those I once baptized and held in my arms as infants, and even baptizing the babies of those I baptized as babies. For more than two decades I have been at the bedsides and gravesides of dear friends. As the Lord wills, for the next 5-10 years of my earthly life, approaching the markers of the ages of 65 and then 70, my strong personal preference would be to finish out my earthly ministry at Old East and Old West Paint Creek.

But like the centurion in Matthew 8, I am one under authority, and if the Holy Spirit should will through the convocation that I serve as bishop of the NALC, I would serve to the best of my ability and energy. Like Elisha succeeding Elijah, I would need a double-portion (or maybe quadruple) of what the Holy Spirit has given Paul and John. Whoever is called to Bishop of the NALC will need the good will and help of the whole of the NALC to serve faithfully and effectively.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? This is another one of those questions to which I can only answer "I'm not sure." As I read 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 on spiritual gifts and offices, it seems that the identification and recognition of spiritual gifts and skills lies far more with the community than the individual. Our society's emphasis upon personal self-promotion

and fulfillment conflicts with the biblical model and values.

I have gifts and skills of someone who's been a small church rural pastor for 32 years. My administrative skills could use improvement. In my experience nearly every preacher thinks they're above average. Like average preachers I probably over-rate my preaching and teaching skills; it's not a home run every time and I've had my share of whiffs and strike outs. I'm way more alert to the bad theology of others than I am of my own heretical tendencies. In terms of pastoral care, all I've got is the Word and prayer and a willingness to listen and a degree of compassion and kindness like most others though my patience for relentless whiners wears thin. I did okay as a dean — far from perfect — and learned I could do things I hadn't done before. Even after 32 years as a pastor, I still have a lot to learn about dealing with conflict more effectively. As I've already said, I'm more aware of my limitations and deficiencies than I am of my strengths.

I think that theology matters, that not everything should be about what seems to be practical, especially in setting directions for the Church. The upshot of that is that I'm sometimes seen as the contrarian, as the fly in the ointment, the squeaky wheel. The Lutheran understanding of the primacy of God's grace and God's initiative in matters of salvation has led others to ask, "How do you get people to do what they need to do or what you need them to do then?" The temptation is to revert to some sort of works' righteousness, raising some level of anxiety or concern about one's relationship with Christ that can be conveniently met by the adoption of a particular spiritual discipline or program. When the preaching of the Gospel (e.g. Romans 5:8) does not seem to motivate people to do what they ought to do (or what we think they ought to do), we preach Law (while calling it the Gospel) with "if...then" language: "If you want to have peace with God, then all you have to do is x, y, and z." I have a sensitive Lutheran nose for the stench of self-justification, for works' righteousness. The purpose of the Law is to kill the old sinful self while the Gospel raises and creates the new man or woman in Christ. When the Law is misused as Gospel, discipleship turns into a self-improvement program — and the old Adam and old Eve love self-improvement.

In the matter of church governance — far from the issue of salvation and grace — I think that the range of critical issues requiring centralized authority of bishop and executive council and staff is very narrow: holding pastors and congregations accountable to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and the creeds in terms of the Law/Gospel distinction and salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, negotiating ecumenical matters and decisions subject to the approval of the convocation and the congregations of the NALC, and carrying out the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations so long as the particular form of carrying out does not conflict with or undermine the Gospel. Beyond this, I think that leadership in the NALC better serves God and the Gospel by

allowing the mission districts and congregations greater freedom and authority in how they organize and carry out the mission of the Gospel in their local situations.

In contrast with how I have sometimes played the role of theological or structural contrarian, these days I also find myself in the middle between brothers and sisters who can't stand each other, attributing the worst to the other. I'm friends to a lot of folks who are not friends to each other. It's an odd role for a contrarian to find himself defending both sides in disputes, trying to remind all the parties that (1) they are still sisters and brothers in Christ, and (2) the issues over which we are in disagreement, however serious, are not the level of threatening or rejecting the Christian faith that we experienced in our former church body. The outcome is usually not perfect peace but at least being part of holding things together by remaining the one in the middle still connected to those on either side.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? 1. Remain Lutheran. The temptation seems to be that we need to become something else. How about we try and focus on being Lutheran and drawing from and upon the biblical and theological legacy and heritage we have as Lutherans? Old East and Old West (with their pastor) left the ELCA and joined the NALC in order to remain Lutheran. Ultimately, to have remained would have meant submitting to radical change, essentially becoming Unitarian-Universalists following a gospel of political-cultural progressivism with weekly Communion as a celebration of our inclusive diversity. However, neither did we leave the ELCA and join the NALC in order to become something other than Lutherans. If we wanted to be Baptists or Roman Catholics or Presbyterians, we would have done so. We are Lutheran Christians by conviction, not merely by accident of history. We see great value in the Lutheran distinctives, not just for ourselves, but as a continuing witness for and gift to the whole Church catholic.

Among those Lutheran distinctives are: (A) Word and Sacrament within the Body of Christ as the center and starting point of Christian faith and life, not as adjuncts or options to be added onto an individualistic practice of Christianity; (B) justification, that God in His grace declares and makes ungodly sinners to be His beloved and righteous sons and daughters for the sake of Jesus Christ; (C) the external objective reality and authority of the Word (as opposed to internal subjectivity of the human heart) as Law and Gospel rightly distinguished; (D) the depth and pervasiveness of our sin and sinful nature as a catastrophe that is met and overcome only by Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection — and not by our efforts at moral improvement; and (E) sacramental grace understanding Baptism and Holy Communion as primarily what God does to and for us (forgiveness of sin) rather than being symbolic actions showing our faith.

2. Raise up and support pastors and lay leaders who are knowledgeable and able to teach and preach the Christian faith in terms of the Lutheran distinctives.

3. Recognize that we will still have our differences in matters like discipleship versus catechesis/vocation, worship forms, witness, etc. Where we disagree, let's do so respectfully with love.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? 1. Externally – a culture and society increasingly hostile to the Christian faith and our learning how to engage and respond to that culture with the truth and courage, reaching out with the Gospel to lost sinners who may be attacking us today.

2. Internally – we need to find ways to support and strengthen Word and Sacrament ministry for all of our congregations, recognizing that we may need to make serious adjustments in whom we ordain and how we prepare and support them. This is the last generation where the majority of the ordained are the product of a three-year residential seminary plus one year of internship on top of a four-year college degree. We need to identify, raise up and help people become pastors where they are at – especially for many small churches and mission starts in areas of demographic decline. We need to be faithful to Augsburg Confession Article XIV about the necessity of a regular call but recognize that the model of the last century of seminaries producing religious professionals is over.

3. Internally – we're approaching our ninth year of existence as a church body. Many of us came together in opposition to what was happening in our former church. In the heat of that time, we set aside differences (some regional, some historical) in piety, in worship forms, in ecclesial organization, etc. We're still in process to reach a shared understanding and identity that positively defines us as to who and what we are rather than only defining ourselves by what we are not. We also need to let go of the bad habit of automatic suspicion of the motives and positions of others that we developed in our former church body. We also have serious theological and ecclesial disagreements that have become exacerbated by personality conflicts. Nothing new there for sinful Lutherans. The danger and temptation is that we too readily adopt the polarizing winner-takes-all politics of secular politics, demonizing those with whom we disagree. That brings division. We need to reject the model of secular politics. Unity does not require the imposition of uniformity of thought on every question. That doesn't mean we don't have vigorous and even heated debate and disagreement on theological and ecclesial convictions, making our cases biblically and confessionally. We do and we will, but we have to quit impugning each other's motives and optics.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and

how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. Values one and three, Christ Centered and Traditionally Grounded, are a call to renewing catechesis, teaching the essential basics of the Christian faith, and helping our congregations and families and members to read and discuss and learn the Scriptures, the creeds, and the confessions — what and why we believe what we say we believe.

Value two, Mission Driven. The Great Commission, to make disciples of all peoples, is the mission. We have it directly from our Lord at the end of Matthew. We don't put it up for a vote. We either obey or disobey. In our NALC Constitution we make the bishop chiefly responsible to ensure the NALC carries out the Great Commission. But we do get to discuss and decide what forms and content of discipleship are most faithful to the whole witness of Scripture. I think our current discipleship initiative is strengthened by drawing more specifically from our own Lutheran understandings of catechesis and vocation.

Value Four, Congregationally Focused. The NALC leadership structure — from bishop and staff and executive council, etc. — exists to support and help and strengthen the NALC's congregations. The congregations do not exist to support the NALC's structure. Without the congregations there can be no structure so the support of congregations is absolutely needed. I know I'm sounding utterly basic here, but it's often the basic fundamental stuff that gets overlooked. We need to seriously review and change the way we are staffed and structured to allow for more face-to-face, in-person visits by NALC leadership with every congregation in the NALC. Electronic communications are a good tool, but the medium is the message and nothing replaces face-to-face, in-person visits — and the bishop isn't going to be able to do that alone or with our current staffing structure. I'm not talking about the financially infeasible adding on of more bishops on top of our present staffing structure. If we're going to have regional bishops or assistants or whatever, it's going to require a thorough redo of all our present staffing, particularly executive staff.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? Strengthen our preaching and teaching. That means producing good pastors and making good pastors better at the basic tasks of Word and Sacrament and catechesis and teaching the distinctive Lutheran understanding of vocation, of God's callings on our lives.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC? I'm not big on strategic directions in general. Lots of time and effort gets used up working

out big corporate detailed plans and procedures that when all is said and done, more is said than done. My concerns about the discipleship initiative (and I participated in the pilot project with the Navigators in Iowa for a year 2013-2104) are that it was drawn from a hyper-individualist, decision-theology American evangelicalism that made Word and Sacrament merely the large-group component of the individual's quest for self-improvement, self-growth, self-fulfillment. I think our discipleship effort is better when it draws more or entirely from our own Lutheran heritage in terms of renewing catechesis and a sound doctrine of vocation. I think there has been some movement in that direction, but not enough yet. Certainly there is an important component of personal relationships and friendships in discipleship and catechesis and vocation, but I have doubts about professional coaches. Speaking as a parish pastor, I want to know I can trust their theology before I would give them access to the people of Old East and Old West.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? I hope we will continue to grow numerically in terms of congregations and members, but most of all I hope that we will remain faithful to the Scriptures, the creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions, and in so doing, be faithful to our Lord Jesus. Whoever the next bishop of the NALC is, I will do my best to support her or him in carrying out what is an incredibly demanding job that is getting more demanding and harder by the year, as Bishop John well knows and has done his best in serving all of us in the NALC.

THE REV. JAMES T. LEHMANN, STS

Fithian, Illinois



Current Call: Immanuel Lutheran Church (Thomasboro, Illinois)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: I have been married to Beverly (Bev) for 42 years. We have three sons, two daughters-in-law and two grandsons. I received a B.S. (1974) from Southern Illinois University with a major in Animal Industries. I received an M.Div. (1977) from Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. I have served Immanuel Lutheran Church, New Douglas, Illinois (1979-1984); Zion Lutheran Church, Clifton, Illinois (1984-1993); First Lutheran Church, Pontiac, Illinois (1993-1996); and Immanuel, Thomasboro, Illinois (1996-present). Hobbies include: camping, gardening, grilling, baking bread.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. God comes to us in a very direct and personal way through the Means of Grace. Jesus Christ, God-in-flesh, breaks into our world in Word spoken and recorded in Holy Scriptures. God comes in Sacraments: Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Absolution. All other ways — experiences, fellowship, reflection, witness — are measured and critiqued by Word and Sacrament.

When a pastor is ordained, these questions are asked: “Will you be diligent in your study of the Holy Scriptures and in your use of the Means of Grace? Will you pray for God’s people, nourish them with the Word and Holy Sacraments, and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?” The answer seems simple enough. Of course pastors would commit themselves to Word and Sacraments. But I need encouragement from and accountability to others. So, for the sake of the vows I spoke when I was ordained to the Holy Ministry, I ask the help of God and regularly seek the support of fellow pastors.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. How does a person select a favorite Scripture verse? One that shapes my faith and ministry would be St. Paul’s word to the Corinthian Christians. “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2 ESV). In a city filled with many religions, philosophies, cultures and ethnicities, and in a congregation deeply divided by personal preferences, Paul cut to the heart of the matter. For Paul, crucified is always connected to resurrected. So incarnation and salvation was central to bringing the congregation at Corinth together in faith and life.

As individuals, we have so many options in life. Every imaginable alternative in occupation, religion, politics, lifestyle, value system is available to us. In a dizzying array of possibilities, Jesus Christ and Him crucified brings us back to a solid foundation. In sinful conditions, in life's disasters, and future uncertainties, Jesus Christ and Him crucified brings forgiveness, comfort and hope. In a church that seeks to be faithful to Christ, effective in mission, and compassionate to those in need, Jesus Christ and Him crucified unites us.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? I have been surrounded by great mentors, colleagues and congregations. For 40 years, I have been a parish pastor who has also sought to be involved in the wider church. I have served on district council (American Lutheran Church), synod council (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), and executive council (North American Lutheran Church), working with six different bishops. Drawing the church close to the congregation and involving the congregation in the life of the church is a key to enthusiastic mission together. I have served as dean of the mission district, building connections with pastors and congregations. Two things have helped me to remain current in the state of theological education. I have supervised the internships for nine pastoral candidates from three different seminaries. This was a learning experience for me, the intern and the congregation. Also, I have served on the board of the Institute of Lutheran Theology.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? Of first importance, the Holy Spirit has given me the gift of faith. Only God knows why I have been so blessed, but I surely ought to thank, praise, serve and obey Him. But how does one sort out spiritual gifts and skills? The Holy Spirit works more behind the scenes. Words, actions, events work together through the Holy Spirit in ways that are not recognized until much later. If the Holy Spirit has used me, it has been through these hidden events and through the Means of Grace.

If I had to list spiritual gifts, I would start by saying I recognize the power of original sin working in every person. Individually and collectively, we are in a spiritual battle that requires us to call on our Lord to protect us (Ephesians 6:11-12). "No strength of ours can match his might! We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, whom God himself elected" (Martin Luther).

I believe the Spirit has given me the gift of patience. I recognize that in families, in congregations, in pastors, in leaders, in the NALC, things take time to develop. Patience means getting up and starting again. Patience is a perspective that looks ahead to where the church could be and the persistence to work in that direction.

I value the gift of encouragement. Shortly after I was ordained, I was given the opportunity to serve on a Lutheran/Catholic dialog committee. I knew I was in over my head, but the continual encouragement I was given shaped me in very significant ways. I seek to encourage others to use gifts which they have, especially gifts they do not recognize themselves.

I have a gift of listening. In pastoral ministry, people want to be able to be heard. In leadership, I seek to hear other opinions, to learn and to understand. I usually have more questions than answers. Listening can provide a basis to build consensus.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? Worship, adoration and praise of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; sharing the Gospel with those who have and have not heard; coordinating efforts between the NALC and the congregations for effective ministry; developing a lifestyle of faithfulness – discipleship; and caring for congregations and pastors.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? The NALC has grown beyond all expectation. In a very short time, we have developed a framework for the church; established a top-flight seminary for training and molding new pastors; cultivated relationships with other orthodox groups, on the continent and around the globe; developed infrastructure for faithful theology, for giving resources for congregations, and for receiving pastors. It is breathtaking. I was privileged to play a role in the birth and early growth.

Now we move to a new phase. One challenge before us is to develop a growing respect for one another in the face of possible division. Let me explain. One factor that has united us has been common experiences in and separation from previous church bodies. But that has covered some of the differences we have. For instance, some see the church in a more practical way and others in a more organic way. Some place great emphasis on the liturgy and others on freedom in worship. Some see the office of ministry as “I function as a pastor” and others as “I am a pastor”. We have to remember that these perspectives have been part of the Lutheran church throughout its five centuries of existence and development. Our challenge in the NALC is to honor and respect those distinctions without making them fissures.

A second challenge is to recognize that we are not alone. The NALC has worked to build relationships with orthodox Lutheran groups around the world. This is a good thing. We learn from each other. But we also have friends in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). We do not agree with the official positions of these bodies. But critiquing and criticizing are no longer our role. Lutheran CORE works in those areas. I support those efforts. We must be careful

with our language. There are many congregations, pastors and laity in these groups with whom we have great similarities. These orthodox people have the greater challenge as they remain where they are. They deal with this daily. Our congregations and pastors can seek to build relationships with the orthodox Lutherans around us. Our Lutheran neighbors and coworkers can be very isolated in these situations. We can reach out in loving care to give a cup of cold water in Christ's name.

A third challenge is to reinforce relationships between the NALC as church and the NALC as congregations. We understand the faith to be incarnational – in the flesh. In parts of the continent, NALC congregations are concentrated, with many congregations in close geography to one another. In other areas, congregations are much more isolated. In either case we need to find ways to have more direct contact between NALC leadership and congregations. How do we accomplish that? This is a tough question. It is called a challenge for a reason. It may require more people. It may require an adjustment in the priorities of the leadership. Neither of these are easy. We must balance the strengths of the person with the needs of the church. In congregations, pastors serve according to their strengths. But they also work in areas where they are not as strong – for the good of the congregation. The same holds for the leadership.

A fourth challenge is in the development of pastors in the church. The North American Lutheran Seminary has done masterful work in not only teaching, but also in forming our seminarians in preparation for ordained ministry. Some of our students attend other seminaries. That is fine too. In the NALC we have made some very clear decisions. First, on theological grounds, we want well educated clergy. Second, on theological grounds, we want both male and female clergy. We are not going back on either of these. We will value all whom the Holy Spirit has called into the Office of Holy Ministry. As more of our pastors retire, we need a growing supply of those ready to serve. We continually pray that God will call and raise up people into the ordained ministry. Are you identifying and encouraging individuals, male and female, to consider becoming a pastor? Pray that God would call someone from your congregation to serve in the church.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. The true Core Value is that we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8). We recognize that only the death and resurrection of Jesus makes any difference in life. Everything else is given greater clarity and practice of this singular value.

It seems obvious that the church is Christ Centered. But we cannot assume that the church stays focused there. The devil distracts us with “But what about...” As bishop I

would seek to lead by preaching and teaching that is focused on Christ. Christ is the One who keeps us united with one another. The theological conference helps us stay on track. We must keep this strong and understandable to clergy and laity alike. Great theology is the best defense against creeping heresy. The busyness of schedules can overwhelm. To be Christ Centered includes letting some things go in order to be reminded that it is Christ's Church. He has already died for it. Part of Christ Centered is to remember that one's responsibility is first to God, second to family and third to church. I would seek to practice those priorities for my own well being and as a model for the church.

Mission Driven takes many forms. As bishop, I would seek to lead by example. One must recognize and honor the diversity which motivates others in mission. Global mission and continental mission are all mission. We need a balance between the two. Our primary mission fields are the locations in which we live and work. Discipleship is directly connected to mission (Matthew 28:19-20). And we are most effective in making disciples of those near us.

Traditionally Grounded places us in a context. The Sacred Scriptures are the foundation of our faith. The church fathers of the first millennium helped the Church to solidify the faith in creeds and doctrines. Although they were academic giants, the ancients saw the study of Scripture, not merely as a theoretical exercise, but as an illumination of the faith. As bishop, I would seek to continue to be a learner. A resource I have found very helpful is the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Since we have no desire to recreate the faith, we learn from those who have faced the same challenges and yet contended for the faith that was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Congregationally Focused reminds us that the congregation is at the intersection between God and the world. The NALC is a church. We do some things together. And the NALC is congregations. The two go hand in hand. It is easy for either to become overly focused on its own ministries. As bishop, I would seek to do everything possible to bring the two into closer proximity to each other. What would help this? The first Christians did that by devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and through prayer (Acts 2:42). Can we model ourselves on that pattern?

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? If the mission district is to be the intersection of the NALC and the congregation, then the first tangible action we can take is to come to a much clearer understanding of the purpose of the district and the role of the dean. The mission districts do not have to be uniform. They cannot be. Our congregations are not evenly distributed across the

continent. We can work to bring greater similarity and coordinate efforts between the districts. The role of the dean is to be the extension of the bishop's office. What authority does the dean have? My experience is that congregations very often see the dean as simply the pastor down the road (sometimes a very long road). We need to clarify and strengthen that position. For example: the dean could have input into the call process. Pastoral Care and Transition (PCAT) Teams can be helpful. However, the dean may have information or perspectives that need to be considered. All of this would be done in conversation with the deans.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

Discipleship has two aspects — being a disciple of Christ and forming disciples of Christ. Those are two sides to the same coin. Discipleship is grounded in Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit, given in Baptism, begins to work in us. I look to the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism for the structure of discipleship. “You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear his Word and share in his supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?” This gives us an outline for being a disciple. It gives us content for making disciples. It ties us to the Church, to the Sacraments, to outreach, to Christ, to the world.

Discipleship has to do with relationships. Start with the person who sits across the breakfast table with you. Start with the person who sits in the pew with you. Start simply. Speak to someone with whom you work, play volleyball or shop. We need to start where we are, living the Christian life as a viable alternative to the values of the culture. The culture has no idea where it is going. As Christians, we offer a stability and a restoration that gives life.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? When Johann Sebastian Bach would begin to write a piece of music, he would put the Latin letters “JJ” at the top: “Jesus help me.” When completed, at the bottom he would write “SDG”: “To the glory of God alone.” My hope for the mission of the NALC is: Jesus help us — to the glory of God alone.

THE REV. DR. ERIC M. RIESEN

Ashland, Ohio



Current Call: Trinity Lutheran Church (Ashland, Ohio)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: I'm married to Terry Lynne Riesen. We've been married for 43 years. We have three grown children: Erica (Scott), Paul (Jessica), Tristan (Karleigh). I'm a graduate of Indiana University, Fort Wayne (B.S.), Fuller Theological Seminary (M.A.), Luther Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (D.Min.). My theological interests include the dialogue between theology and science. My Doctor of Ministry project focused on the moral and theological questions raised by new genetic technologies. The title of my work was, "When Worldviews Collide: The Christian Faith and the New Genetics." In 2016, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau published my book, *The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious*. I've also had two articles published by the online edition of First Things: "Missing Mary" and "Is there Prayer on Mars?" Both of these are available online.

As for hobbies, I'm an avid reader. I also play guitar and enjoy traveling. Of course, spending time with family is very important to us.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Faith is an ongoing conversation with God who speaks to us in many ways. C.S. Lewis says somewhere that God is always speaking, but the difficulty is staying "attuned" to God's voice. Prayer is a discipline of staying awake, attuned to what God is saying. I try to listen to God. This is why I've learned (and here I must give thanks to the Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative in the NALC) to make my own devotional life a priority. Early in my ministry my devotional life too often consisted in preparing sermons and Bible studies. This is important, but I wasn't always taking time simply to read, meditate and listen to what God was saying to me personally. Doing good things can sometimes hinder doing the best things. Mary and Martha come to mind.

Scripture forms the primary language through which God speaks to us. This language also forms Word and Sacrament ministry. The Sacraments are "visible Words" of God (St. Augustine). It's also important to realize that Scripture also helps us to articulate our prayerful response to God in praise, thanksgiving and lament. Lament is the language of faith addressed to the God who is sometimes silent. This is why the historic liturgy is so important. It is the language of God's people who are shaped by God's Word through time.

Of course, I also have a mystical side. God works in mysterious ways, therefore sometimes God speaks to us in extraordinary ways; but always echoing Scripture. On a personal note, one morning I was driving to the church I now serve. My mind was racing with things and I was feeling anxious. Then, these words popped into my mind, "in quietness and confidence is your strength." It was comforting. Please note, these words echoed Scripture (Isaiah 30:15 NLT), but that promise spoke directly to me.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. It is really difficult, perhaps impossible, for me to give only one verse from Scripture as a "favorite." However, one verse that has always meant a lot to me is Romans 8:38-39. Paul, who experienced so much persecution and suffering for the sake of the Gospel, could write with confidence, "I am sure that neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (ESV). When I've experienced things which I cannot understand, these words inspire confidence in God's final victory in Christ Jesus. Nothing will ultimately separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. That's very, very Good News.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? I've been a parish pastor for 34 years. During this time I've served four congregations. I was an associate pastor in a large suburban congregation near Pittsburgh; a solo pastor in a rural congregation; a senior pastor for 22 years at Zion, Pittsburgh (Brentwood); and now the senior pastor of a large congregation in a small city. I've learned a lot and understand the joys and challenges of parish ministry. The bishop is the "first" pastor of the NALC. He/she will be the pastor to our pastors.

I also give thanks to God for the many people in those congregations who have loved, supported and forgiven me. I've preached thousands of sermons; baptized, married, confirmed and buried hundreds of God's people. I've sat through some grueling council meetings, prayed with the dying, wept with the grieving and rejoiced in celebration at the goodness of God. If elected bishop, all of this would serve me well.

My work in the NALC is also important to mention. I currently serve on: the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, the Lutheran/Anglican Theological Consultation and the Life-to-Life Discipleship Team (chair).

I've also served on: the Candidacy Committee and as the first dean of the Mid-Northeast Mission District.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? My two primary gifts are preaching and leadership. My preaching ministry has been affirmed many times in the congregations I've served. I should add that preaching has never been easy for

me. The task of preparing sermons is demanding. I'm a natural introvert and put a lot of time into preparing sermons.

In regards to leadership, I prefer to seek to build consensus. It's important to listen to other points of view. However, sometimes leadership requires that difficult decisions be made.

On the DiSC profile, I'm consistently in the SC quadrants (conscientiousness and steadiness). That translates as reserved, precise, systematic, patient, tactful, etc. My personality type is INFJ.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities?

1. Pastoral formation and support
2. Congregational support and development in North America
3. Life-to-Life Discipleship
4. The structure of the NALC to support mission and ministry
5. Ecumenical and international relationships

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? The NALC faces the same challenges that all denominations face. We live in an increasingly post-Christian culture. More and more people, especially those under 35, are simply dropping out of congregational life and worship. Given this new normal, it's tempting for the Church to look for the proverbial silver bullet or quick fix for this problem. It's tempting for many to forget theology and focus solely on what attracts people. This is a temptation to be resisted.

If there's to be an answer, then it will happen at the congregational level. Congregations in which the truth of the Gospel is truly, if imperfectly, reflected in its life and worship will be congregations that will reach people. This is why the formation of pastors and the support of congregations is so crucial to our future.

Also, to make this happen we need to look at structure. Having one bishop made sense when we had a hundred congregations. We can't expect one bishop to provide episcopal oversight of more than 400 congregations. We must look at possible ways to restructure, but not to create an inefficient and expensive bureaucracy. Any restructuring must be implemented for the sake of ministry and mission.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations.

Christ Centered: In 1934 the Confessing Church in Germany issued the Barmen

Declaration which said: “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.” Keeping Jesus Christ Centered in the Church’s worship, preaching, teaching, witness and works of charity is key to being the Church. If Christ isn’t in the center, something or someone will fill the void.

Mission Driven: The mission of the Church is given to us. We are a mission-given people. The Great Commission tells us to go into the whole world sharing the Gospel, baptizing, teaching and living in the promise of Christ’s gracious presence.

Again, all of this mission takes place most concretely in and through congregational ministry. As bishop, I would make the support of congregational ministry the major priority. This includes supporting pastors and lay leaders in their ministries. I’d also add that while the Great Commission is defining of our mission, it cannot be read alone. We always need to remember Matthew 25 and other passages that give shape to the Church’s mission. We are called to bear witness to the Gospel with our words and deeds. Care for the poor, the hungry, the prisoner, the unborn and all those who suffer is also at the heart of Christ’s mission.

Traditionally Grounded: Jaroslav Pelikan famously said that, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” Traditionalism kills congregational ministry, but the Great Tradition is a deep well of theological and ethical wisdom from which we must draw and drink. At the risk of redundancy, we simply must form pastors who love to draw and drink from the well of the sacred Tradition of faith. We also need to help these pastors communicate and incarnate the Great Tradition in ways that speak to modern (or post-modern) people. We do not need, nor should we try, to reinvent the Church or the Church’s faith. Having said that, it isn’t helpful to hold fast the faith in a joyless or graceless way. As bishop, I would want to help congregations develop ministry and worship that is Traditionally Grounded in Word and Sacrament ministry, and also filled with the joy, beauty, wonder and mystery of God’s living presence.

Congregationally Focused: It’s important for us to realize that being Congregationally Focused does not mean that we are congregationalist in polity. The congregation is not independent, it is interdependent with the other congregations of the NALC – and the Church catholic. The NALC is not a sect, it is an expression of the Church catholic. I want our congregations to be faithful, healthy, Spirit-led communities which are grounded upon the catholic faith evangelically confessed. Growth in numbers and in depth, if it happens, will happen in congregations that support each other, pray for each other and love each other. Integrity is key.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations

take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

First, we need to make certain that we are constantly recruiting and training faithful, gifted, called men and women for ordained ministry. We also need to provide support for them as they move from seminary to their first calls. The Life-to-Life Discipleship Team is currently working to recruit and train “discipleship guides” who will work with pastors (and lay leaders) involved in this initiative.

Second, the Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative needs implementation in every congregation. I know that many of us have had difficulties with elements of this initiative. Early on we connected with the Navigators. Some of our pastors and congregations loved this, but some didn't. I've chaired the Life-to-Life Discipleship Team for five years and we've spent a lot of time and effort learning from the Navigators and others. We've also spent a lot of time and effort making certain that this initiative is solidly consistent with our confessional identity. We need to make this our own.

The goal is that each congregation intentionally make discipleship a major part of its regular ministry. What this looks like will differ from congregation to congregation. However, the heart of discipleship is worship under the forms of Word and Sacrament.

Third, as mentioned previously, we need to look at our structure. We should explore the possibility of having one “presiding” or “lead” bishop supported by several “suffragan” or “assistant” bishops. How this would change the calls of our current “assistants to the bishop” would be determined by what's best for the ministry and mission of the NALC.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

I think our initial involvement with the Navigators both helped and hindered us. I can speak from personal experience. I've worked with two Navigators “coaches” who helped me in many ways. In particular, my own personal devotional life greatly improved. I found that prayerfully reading Scripture and journaling are two important ways for me to stay connected to God in daily life. I've also appreciated getting new perspectives on issues I faced in the ministry. So far, so good.

The hindrance comes from the fact that the Navigators, and other evangelical resources, miss some important theological insights. For example, there's little appreciation or understanding of the importance of the Sacraments, the theology of the cross, Law and Gospel, liturgy, etc.

So, the strategic plan of the Life-to-Life Discipleship Team is to take the good things we've learned and make the discipleship strategy thoroughly confessional. We're poised to offer a vision and pathway for discipleship which has the promise of transforming congregational ministry.

We're also working ecumenically with the Anglican Church in North America. We're planning a joint conference on discipleship with the Anglicans. We've also recently drawn inspiration from Roman Catholics.

If I were elected bishop, I would work to continue and strengthen Life-to-Life Discipleship, but I would also listen carefully to those who have expressed theological concerns.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? I want every congregation to be a healthy and faithful expression of the Church of Jesus Christ. I hope that we grow wide and deep. Some of this growth will happen when existing congregations leave other Lutheran denominations and join the NALC. But, we need to put resources into developing new congregations in North America. To do this we must be strategically smart and committed to supporting new congregations. We also need to train pastors who may need to be bi-vocational to serve these congregations.

Another hope I have concerns worship. Vibrant, faithful and beautiful liturgy is at the heart of worship and discipleship. Currently, I serve a congregation with four worship services each weekend. There is a great deal of diversity between these services. So much so, that they "feel" like different congregations, and to an extent, even different confessions of faith. Form is important. The form of worship shapes faith (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). Faithful, vibrant and beautiful worship is at the heart of congregational renewal and discipleship. The Church exists where, "the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments administered rightly...it is not necessary that human traditions or rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere" (The Augsburg Confession, VII). At the same time, we "do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it" (XXIV). Faithful, confessional and evangelical worship keeps the truths of Articles VII and XXIV always in mind.

THE REV. DAN SELBO

San Jose, California



Current Call: St. Timothy's Lutheran Church (San Jose, California)
Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: Married for 33 years. My wife, Mary, and I have been blessed with four children and just recently with two grandchildren. I graduated from San Jose State University in 1982 with a B.A. in Religious Studies. I received my Masters of Divinity in 1986 from Luther Seminary, and earned a Doctorate of Ministry in Biblical Preaching in 2013, also from Luther Seminary. I enjoy golfing, fishing, working in the yard and spending time with family and friends.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. My experience of God's activity in my life is directly related to the priority I give to the relationship He has established with me in His cross and in my Baptism. On days when my relationship with Christ is central, giving Him the time and the place in my life He deserves, I see His hand at work in many ways. In contrast, when my relationship with Him gets set aside and I busy myself with other priorities, even though He is still actively at work, my experience of His activity is not the same.

Personally, I experience God opening and closing doors in response to specific prayers I offer. He provides opportunity, on a daily basis, for witnessing to people I had not on my own even considered. He strengthens the relationships I have at work. He grows and develops the partnership I share with other sisters and brothers in the Church. He strengthens and increases the love I have for my wife and family.

He also, on an even more personal level, enables me to grow in my individual relationship with Christ. Through His Holy Spirit, He strengthens my faith, provides an assurance and a peace that I know come from Him, and gives me the gifts and insights and wisdom I need to live each day as a follower of Jesus. The more disciplined I am in making time to spend with my Lord, the more fully I realize and recognize His daily activity in my life.

In my role as a pastor, the same relationship-driven principle has proven to be true. Having had the joy and privilege of serving for more than 30 years in a Word and Sacrament ministry, I have seen God actively at work in the lives of countless people. The power of His Word, faithfully preached and taught, and His life-giving presence in the Sacraments, regularly and properly administered, have had an eternal impact on the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of people I have served and for whom our Lord died.

Particularly, over the past eight years, since the time our congregation made a conscious and deliberate decision to move away from being a program-driven ministry to becoming a disciple-making ministry, I have seen God's Spirit at work in transforming lives in ways I would never have imagined. Regardless of how long they have been connected to the church, the same life-transforming work is taking place. Regular Sunday morning attenders are being transformed into faithful and committed followers of Christ. People who used to volunteer their time because of their membership in the church are now serving in ministries because they have fallen in love with their risen Lord. Vocations in life are being viewed not only as a means of earning a living to support their families, but as an opportunity for living out their faith as members in God's family. Priorities are different. Life's purpose is not the same. The definition of success has dramatically changed. God is at work, through His Holy Spirit, to grow and transform lives into the shape and image of Christ.

I have seen it happen in the lives of congregational members as they have committed themselves to worship and opened themselves to a new and a living relationship with Jesus. I have experienced it in my own life as I give priority to the disciplines of the Christian life and to the relationship God has established with me in His Son. I know it works. I have seen it happen. I experience it on a daily basis. God is active and faithful in His promises as we open our lives to His guiding and life-changing presence.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. A Scripture that has become more meaningful to me over the years is one that is at the heart of our witness to the world. The apostle Peter says, "In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

I have grown to love this verse and take it to heart because it speaks to the essential nature of our shared calling in Christ. We are not simply called to place our hope in Jesus for the sake of our own salvation, but to be ready and willing to speak to others about the hope we have in Him.

At the heart of our Lord's Great Commission is a call to each of us to share openly and confidently with others about our relationship with Jesus. We need to live in ways that reflect the relationship we have with Him and then be ready to tell why that relationship is so important and the difference it has made for us.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the Word of Christ. God works through our spoken words to open and prepare hearts for His saving work. The Holy Spirit uses our witness to lead people to Jesus. If we, as the Church, do not share the faith and the name of Christ, no one else will. As a result, He calls us to "set apart Christ as Lord"

and “always be prepared” to share what we have been given with others who are loved eternally in Him.

If every believer in the Church would take seriously the importance of this calling in their life, our witness to the world would naturally follow.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop of the NALC? For more than 32 years as a parish pastor, I have served in two large congregations, each with Christian schools and multiple staff. I served as president and on the Board of the Fellowship of Confessional Lutherans from 1988 to 2008. I was an active member in Lutheran CORE in the years leading up to the NALC. I served on the eight-member Visioning & Planning Team that led to the NALC’s formation in 2010. I served for seven years as dean of the Central Pacific Mission District and have served, since its inception, on the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Team. During these years, I have grown to love the Church and its Head more than anything else in life. The experiences, the challenges, the blessings and joys of these experiences have served to prepare my heart to accept whatever calling the Lord gives.

In the role of bishop, as pastor to the pastors, my experience as a pastor has prepared me to understand the challenges of the ministry, the opportunities it avails and the helpful and harmful expectations that come with the office. Some of those expectations are self-imposed. Others come from outside of and from within the church. My years of experience will enable me to support the pastors of the NALC in ways that will be life-giving to the clergy and that will keep the priorities of the ministry and its function in its proper place.

As mentioned in my response to how I experience God active in my life, the past eight years in leading a congregation from a program-driven approach to ministry to a disciple-making commitment have prepared me to provide insight and perspective on what needs to happen in a congregation for disciple-making to become the central focus, and why such a focus is needed in today’s world. My experience with disciple-making is one in which we have used many outside resources to shape our congregational efforts but always with the goal of contextualizing those resources for maximum benefit in the particular setting. My years of experience have given me an appreciation for the work that has been done in developing those resources, as well as for the contextualization that is needed to enable them to have their most effective impact.

Having worked alongside Lutheran pastors throughout the country, I have come to appreciate the different pieties found within the NALC congregations and clergy, and the differing approaches taken in various places to reach people for Christ. No one evangelical approach or pietistic perspective will work for everyone or in every place.

As a church body that spans North America and that is building partnerships throughout the global community, my experience will serve to recognize and support the vast and varied ways in which God is working to build and grow His Church.

I have also enjoyed partnering in my ministry with both male and female clergy. For the past ten years, I have experienced firsthand the benefits of serving on a pastoral team in which the strengths of each have blessed our congregation. The life experience and the differing perspectives that each have brought have complemented the preaching and teaching ministry, and have served as assets in our counseling and disciple-making efforts.

Finally, God has developed within me a strong personal relationship with Jesus and I have come to realize the importance of that relationship as the power that drives my ministry. I would be a strong advocate as bishop for pastors to be disciplined in their time each day with the Lord. They would hear that encouragement from me regularly. They would be challenged by me to make it a first priority. All of our work is for naught if it is not grounded and rooted and driven by a deep and abiding relationship with Christ.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I have a pastor's heart, a love for Christ's Church and a passion for reaching those who do not yet have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. I have a deep desire to lead people not only to a saving faith in Jesus Christ in which their eternal salvation is secure but to also use their lives while on this earth for His service. The abundant life Jesus describes begins here and now as we live each day in relationship with Him.

Having served in team ministries throughout my pastorate, I have seen and experienced the benefits of the varied gifts in the Body of Christ. I am not afraid of delegating responsibility, nor afraid of making hard decisions when needed. I have strong administrative skills and have developed the ability to manage several tasks at the same time.

I am a good listener and take a humble approach and attitude in my work. I have lived through a wide range of pastoral experiences in which I have seen the value and importance of setting clear priorities for ministry and clear parameters for congregational expectations and life.

I am a good preacher, Christ Centered in my proclamation, and view the preaching of God's Word as the primary and most important task of the pastor. I would lift up this priority in my care and support of NALC pastors. I have worked with traditional and contemporary worship settings for nearly 20 years and understand and appreciate the value in both. I will not allow myself or the NALC to promote any single approach to

worship at the expense of other life-giving and Christ-honoring styles that include the basic and essential worship components.

I have developed a strong theological understanding of God's Word. I can rightly divide His Word of truth in Law and Gospel terms, and am able to clearly communicate each in my preaching and teaching. I understand the distinction between our justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the ongoing process of being sanctified throughout life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, until we conform to the image and likeness of Christ. I recognize the importance of allowing each to hold their proper place and giving each their proper focus. I am committed to the Lutheran Confessions, to the centrality of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and His cross in our proclamation, to orthodox teaching and to the Means of Grace offered to us in the Word and Sacraments.

I acknowledge and respect the strengths and differences within the ecumenical community and find tremendous value in working within the Body of Christ for the greater good and witness of the Church in the world. I believe the NALC can grow in becoming a recognized, reliable and theologically faithful resource for supporting other church bodies in their disciple-making efforts.

I have gifts for visioning that I believe will serve and strengthen our collective witness and work. As we focus on what needs to happen in the short-term, we need to always be thinking and planning and praying for what God is leading us to do in the years ahead. Those gifts have been used in the ministries I have served.

One of the strengths I would bring to the office of bishop is a deep and abiding relationship with Christ. I have grown to understand from my own experience the apostle Paul's words that "when I am weak, then I am strong." In the same regard, in the words of Jesus, in His depiction of He as the Vine and we as the branches, and that "apart from Him we can do nothing," I have learned and taken to heart the importance of staying closely connected to Him if my ministry is to bear any lasting fruit.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities? Disciple-making should continue as the key and central emphasis for our denomination. Bishop John has done a tremendous job of setting a vision for the NALC, based upon the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus. For this emphasis to continue, we cannot allow it to be reduced to simply one thing we are doing among many. To be faithful to the calling we have been given, this priority must remain first and foremost in our efforts.

So important is this disciple-making emphasis that it can and will directly shape and define the impact we have in the world for Christ. If we move away from this priority as our central focus, we will not only quickly lose what we have worked so hard to put into

place over the past several years, but we will also, just as quickly, lose our relevance and impact in the world.

I would keep this priority central in our national efforts and would work to increase the support we provide for pastors, lay leaders and congregations in developing disciple-making cultures in their ministry settings.

Second, our support for seminarians and their training must remain high on our priority list. We need to increase our commitment to training pastors who are well prepared for reaching a culture that has pulled away from the Church and who are also fully equipped to engage that same culture in discipleship conversations that lead to Christ.

I would work with the NALS President and our board of regents to more fully incorporate a disciple-making emphasis into the required seminary curriculum and would solidify our commitment to continuing this same emphasis by providing support for it during internship and the first two years of pastoral ministry. I would also work with our NALC staff and leaders to expand the financial support we offer to our seminarians in order to reduce, if not eliminate, the financial debt load they carry after their training.

Third, the unique challenges facing smaller congregations and those with pastoral vacancies must be addressed. We need to find creative solutions for offering pastoral support to our smaller congregations and for reducing the time between pastorates.

I would work to provide educational support and training for laity who could serve in short-term pastoral roles and services. Deployed seminary staff, retired clergy and soon-to-be-retiring clergy would be potential options for training laity and supporting pastoral vacancies.

We also need to take more seriously the development of models for “tent-making” ministries. In places where full-time pastoral support is not viable, we need to raise up and support pastors who would be willing to serve in part-time pastoral roles, while also working in other part-time employment. In the same way, we need to provide models for congregations to carry out full-time ministry without full-time pastoral support.

Fourth, strengthening relationships with our international church partners needs to remain a priority for our denomination. We have much to offer in terms of training, resources and theological education to our younger and developing partners. We also have much to learn from our partners who, in many cases, are more openly and effectively sharing the Gospel and reaching people for Christ. As our relationships with our international partners develop, we need to keep our commitment to disciple-making central in those relationships.

I would work to listen to our partners and learn from them, as much as I would be committed to offering what we have in support of their work. I would remain committed to our Lutheran and confessional theological roots in all of our relationships, and would work to increase the effectiveness of our shared efforts for the advancement of the Kingdom and the glory and honor of Christ.

The same commitments, number five, would guide our conversations with our ecumenical church partners. In a culture that has moved away from denominationalism and that has become skeptical of the organized Church, we need to find ways to engage with our ecumenical partners to offer a shared witness and voice to the world.

I would work to strengthen our ecumenical relationships on the national level in order to provide a foundation from which pastors and congregations can share in ministry on the local level. Central in our conversations with our ecumenical partners would be our ongoing commitment to disciple-making. If we are to be faithful to our Lord in truly being united as One Church catholic, we cannot allow our relationships with our sister church bodies to be guided by anything other than the primary task and commission we share together in Christ.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC? As a still relatively young church body, we need leadership that will keep the course set during our early years. Our commitment to the four Core Values we share and to disciple-making must remain our central focus, if we are to avoid being distracted and dissuaded by other good efforts that would ultimately lead us away from what is most important.

Much progress has been made during the first nine years of our life together. We need to build on the work that has been done and stay committed to not taking on too much. I believe the focus of our early years, on disciple-making and our Core Values, are the key to our continuing growth and success. I would err on the side of doing our primary tasks well, rather than getting caught up in doing many other secondary tasks at their expense.

Second, the challenge of reaching the next generations for Christ must be an ongoing awareness we have and commitment we make as a church body. In a culture where an increasingly smaller percentage of people are engaging with the Church, an increasingly greater percentage is seeking caring relationships and communities.

Recent studies and my own experience have pointed to two elements in our ministry that must be visible and tangible for the next generations to connect. One, we need to be authentic in our efforts to share the faith. If we are not living what we are preaching, the doors to open conversation will quickly close. We cannot simply talk in generalities

about caring for others, if we are not willing to enter into relationships with the others for which we profess to care. And, two, our ministry to the world needs to become more hands-on and visible as well. Young people want to see the impact we are having in the world before hearing about the impact we tell them will take place in Christ. I would be an advocate for congregations to look for ways to be identified and known in their communities by the tangible serving ministries they offer.

The third challenge we face, with a high percentage of our clergy nearing retirement, is to continue to attract new clergy to the NALC. To address this challenge, we need to move forward with the model for seminary training and development we adopted when the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) began.

With our seminary center at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, we committed ourselves to developing satellite campuses throughout the country. We made an intentional decision to not invest our resources in buildings, but to take advantage of the buildings already in place in other established seminaries, putting Lutheran faculty on those campuses. Our evangelical, orthodox, confessionally-strong and theologically-centered Lutheran presence throughout the country will only increase our attraction to future pastors.

On the congregational level, we need to be encouraging our young people to consider the ministry as a vocation. Starting in junior and senior high, we need to be more intentional about talking with our youth about the need we have in the Church for godly leaders and praying with them about where God's Spirit might be leading them in their lives. On the national level, good work is being done through organizations such as NEXUS in providing opportunity for our youth to consider a career in ministry and exposing them to what that calling looks like. We need to increase these efforts to raise up future pastors and to pray for God's Spirit to send more laborers into the harvest.

On the flip side, with many of our clergy nearing retirement, we also have an opportunity to use their years of experience, in creative ways, to support the NALC during these years when new and younger pastors are being trained. I would explore a variety of options with our retiring clergy to see where and how their gifts and experience could be best used.

Short-term interims, longer term part-time roles, mentoring relationships for seminarians and newly ordained clergy and serving as on-site support for laity serving in ministry roles are only a few of the possible options for leveraging the giftedness of our retiring clergy. I would also work to find ways to engage those same gifts and years of experience in disciple-making efforts to support the overall work and witness of the Church. The voice of experience and support from this well-respected part of

our ordained clergy would go a long way in enabling the disciple-making efforts of the NALC to grow and flourish.

Fourth, we need to explore new ways to provide pastoral support for our smaller congregations and for congregations in pastoral transition. The traditional models for filling pastoral vacancies must continue while, at the same time, being open to finding new ways to fill the pastoral vacancies that exist.

Along with deployed seminary staff, more effective use of our experienced clergy, and options and models for “tent-making” ministries, I would work to increase the hands-on training and continuing education opportunities for pastors and laity. We could make better use of our mission district gatherings and provide greater and more frequent options for regional training events throughout the country. We need to find creative ways for congregations to work together, as well as for seminarians and laity to serve in pastoral roles.

We have explored many options in our first years together. There are many options yet to be explored. The answer to the challenge is not simple. What we cannot do is to allow these smaller congregations and pastoral vacancies to go unsupported. We must be willing to explore new options and change our approaches to serving and supporting these valued members in the Body of Christ.

Number five, our infrastructure and communication needs to be strengthened as we grow in size and as we strive to be effective in a 21st century world. We can and should make better use of the technology available for meetings, support and communications, to become more effective in our ministry efforts and to make better and more efficient use of our resources.

I would build upon the steps already taken to strengthen this part of our work by engaging some of our more technologically-versed members to outline plans and strategic steps for implementing new technologies into our system to reach a more highly-technological culture. New ways of doing things are not easy, but we must be willing to change if we hope to reach an ever-changing world with the message of Christ.

Finally, I would work to increase the level of stewardship support offered to our national church by developing a strategic vision for our future and a clear understanding of how and where our gifts would be used. I would then work to communicate that vision to pastors and lay leaders who could share it with their congregations. When people see a vision for where their gifts will be used and how they can impact the world for Jesus, they are more than willing to share what they have been entrusted with for a greater and eternal purpose.

The challenges facing us as a denomination are many, but the opportunities for impacting the world for Jesus Christ are even greater. I would make it a high priority in my work as bishop to develop a vision for our future as a denomination and a clear and strategic plan for how and where our financial gifts would be used to support those efforts.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations.

Christ Centered: Beginning with the preaching of the Word and lifting up Christ who will “draw all people to Himself,” the centrality of Christ and what He has done for us on the cross must remain the primary focus of our preaching and teaching. My preaching and teaching ministry would continually center on what God has accomplished for us in His Son and how, in Jesus, we are made right with God.

I would like to see greater opportunity for preaching seminars and ongoing training for NALC pastors. Perhaps in mission districts and/or at national gatherings, a renewed focus on the importance of our preaching and teaching ministries would be a priority I would provide.

My leadership would use this Core Value as a litmus test against everything we are asked to do or consider as a denomination. If the proposal being offered serves and furthers our witness to Jesus, then it will be worth considering. If not, then it will not be among the considerations we make. Jesus is our identity, our priority and our purpose for existing as a church body. Nothing else will ever take that first and primary place.

In the same way, I would challenge each pastor and congregation to ask the same Christ-Centered question about its own ministries and apply the same litmus test to what they are doing. As a church, we cannot afford to waste our energies on anything not centered in Jesus. If it does not further the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then it needs to be set aside in favor of something that does. It is that important.

Mission Driven: The emphasis on disciple-making is central to our Mission-Driven efforts. We need to become better equipped at speaking and sharing the faith with others. We need to focus on helping our members see themselves as being as responsible for fulfilling the Great Commission as the church is responsible for doing the same, all the while equipping them for the task.

We need to continually remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit is the one who ultimately leads people to faith. He is our Helper, our Advocate, our Counselor and our Guide. He takes our witness to Jesus and uses it to change people’s hearts and lives and lead them to Christ. The work of creating faith is the Holy Spirit’s primary and essential work. As

we seek the Spirit's guidance and trust in His power, our Mission-Driven efforts will bear fruit.

We also need to clarify the difference between ministry and mission. The former can serve the latter, but it is not intended to become a replacement for it. Only as the name of Jesus is shared are people drawn to a living faith in Him. I would work to make that distinction as clear as possible, without devaluing the importance and essential nature of our serving ministries.

In making this Core Value more prominent in the NALC, I would challenge each pastor and congregation to identify at least one new area, each year, in which the Gospel-mission they share could be furthered in their particular ministry setting. The goal would be to identify the opportunity and then to develop and implement a strategy to carry it out. I would also work with our international partners to identify specific challenges they face and opportunities there might be for us to support their mission efforts, and then challenge our congregations to become directly involved in supporting that work. If being Mission Driven is a Core Value we hold, then we cannot claim it as a value if we are not finding tangible ways to make it happen.

Traditionally Grounded: Central to this Core Value is our commitment to a strong Word and Sacrament ministry. Everything we do grows out of our regular worship in which the Word is preached and the Sacraments are rightly administered. As bishop, I would emphasize the importance of this central part of our life. I would challenge pastors to continually be growing in their preaching skills and would work to provide opportunities for that to happen.

I would also lift up the spiritual disciplines that have played such a significant role in the life of the Church since the time of the early apostles and challenge our pastors to make them more prominent in their own lives, as well as in their congregations. The disciplines of prayer, meditation, a quiet time with God, Bible reading, worship, fasting, solitude and service, only to name a few, have been powerful disciplines that are part of our tradition. From my own experience, I have seen how these disciplines can serve to strengthen my relationship with Christ. I would lift them up as a means through which pastors and congregations can be strengthened and renewed in their faith-walk with Jesus and would work to provide opportunity for such renewal to happen.

As a denomination whose roots go back to the early apostles and whose traditions have played such a central role in our history, we need to continually remember the importance of our traditions and why our roots are so essential. The Lutheran Confessions and the three main creeds of the Church are more than just historical documents we share and theological understandings we support. We believe they are accurate interpretations

of Scripture and a clear and concise confession of what we believe to be true. As a result, they hold a place in our tradition that continues to give direction and identity to who we are today and what we are about as a denomination.

Having said that, we must never allow the maintaining of our traditions and our roots to become the purpose for which we exist. They are to serve the work of the Church, and not vice versa. I would work to ensure that the traditions in which we are grounded are maintained and the roots from which we have grown are not lost, without allowing the maintaining of those traditions and protecting our roots to become the end goal.

In order to reach a new generation with the Gospel, we cannot be afraid to put new wine in new wineskins. Old wineskins serve a purpose, but new approaches and opportunities must also be identified and claimed. I would work to encourage us to always be moving forward in our efforts to reach people in new ways, without losing our purpose-serving and identity-giving traditions.

Congregationally Focused: My leadership would continually reinforce our understanding that the congregation is the primary place in which the ministry of the Church takes place. The national church and its structure are to serve the local church and its ministry, and not the other way around. As a staff, we would be available to pastors and congregations as needed, and would continually be looking for ways to support them in service of the Gospel in their settings. Identifying helpful resources, providing education opportunities and building training elements into every mission district gathering are among the priorities I would set.

Without compromising our Congregationally Focused Core Value, we need, at the same time, to increase our national support for hands-on congregational ministry. I would structure our staff in such a way as to best serve the local congregation in its ministries. I would also make it a priority to move forward with the restructuring plan proposed at the 2018 Convocation. If we expect to continue to provide national support for local congregations, we need a staffing structure that is scalable to support growth. This would be a high priority for me as bishop if I were chosen to serve in that role.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? For our Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven commitments to become real and tangible, I believe there is no better place to start than with the training of pastors, lay leaders and mission district deans to become equipped as disciple-makers. By providing training at mission district gatherings, regular support and guidance offered to clergy at pastoral conferences and events, and ongoing encouragement for congregations to become centers for disciple-making, these two Core Values will remain solid and central in our

shared work.

As bishop, I would give serious consideration in our staffing structure to having a person on staff dedicated full time to strengthening our disciple-making commitment. I would also give strong priority to shaping our staff to best serve the Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven values we hold.

On the local level, every congregation would be challenged with prioritizing prayer, financial support and relationship-development with at least one domestic and one international mission effort endorsed by the NALC. Tangible commitments to developing relationships with missionaries and mission agencies, along with regular prayer and financial support will naturally strengthen our Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven efforts.

Every mission district would be challenged with identifying and supporting one new mission start within the district every three years. Although a modest and certainly attainable goal, this commitment will keep our Mission-Driven value clearly in sight and will expand our Christ-Centered focus in new congregations.

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC? I have a deep personal commitment to discipleship as the main and central calling and commission we have from Christ. My understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC is driven by the fact that this is the strategy given to us by Christ Himself to grow His Church. I also have a deep theological conviction that disciple-making efforts work best in settings where support, encouragement and accountability are built into the very fabric of the work taking place. This only happens when and where there is a conscious and intentional effort to develop such disciple-making cultures.

As bishop, I would challenge our deans to support and provide accountability within their mission districts to continually lift up disciple-making as our primary focus. I would work with our Life-to-Life Discipleship Team to increase the training opportunities for discipling guides and to move forward in our commitment to support our pastors in developing disciple-making cultures within their congregations.

I would also continually encourage pastors in their own spiritual disciplines for the purpose of strengthening their relationship with Jesus. In the same way, I would challenge them to encourage their own leaders and congregational members to become more disciplined in those daily commitments that allow the Holy Spirit to do its transforming work in us.

Having led the congregation I serve to set its own strategic direction in discipleship, I know and have experienced first-hand its value and benefits. All of our ministries are

framed with discipleship in mind. Each of our ministries has disciple-making as its goal. Real outreach is happening. Serving ministries have emerged. God is changing lives, through His Holy Spirit, and followers of Jesus are being shaped for His purposes.

If our strategy as a denomination is to be consistent with the calling and commission we have been given, and if our work on the national level is for the purpose of supporting local congregations and furthering the work of Christ, then the two cannot be separated in any way. Our strategy is discipleship, and discipleship is our strategy. Everything we do as a church body should serve the purpose of reinforcing our strategic discipleship efforts.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? In general, my hopes for the NALC and its mission revolve around the promise of Jesus to grow His Church as we are faithful to the Great Commission He has given and dedicated to living out the two Great Commandments in our life together. My hope is that we will remain united in our commitment to lifting up Jesus as Lord and Savior of all and, in so doing, that He will draw all people to Himself. I hope that our shared witness to Christ as a church body will become a public witness to other church bodies in North America and throughout the world.

More specifically, my hopes for the NALC are tied to our four Core Values. As a Christ-Centered church body, my hope is that we will continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus as our Savior and Lord. I hope each member of the NALC will become stronger in their own personal faith-walk with Christ. I hope our preaching and teaching will lift up the name of Jesus. I hope our sharing and serving will be a reflection of the heart and love of our Lord. I hope Christ will be seen in the lives of our pastors, our congregations, our individual members and our national staff, as well as in our mission district and national gatherings. My hope is that Christ will be seen in us because we have fallen in love with Him and we have no greater purpose in life than to live for Him.

As a Mission-Driven church body, I hope we will grow in numbers. I hope the number of congregations and baptized members in the NALC will increase. Although we are not in a numbers game, defining our success by the number of people in our churches, we live in a world where millions, if not billions, of people are living and dying each day without a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Because “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” we must be tireless in our efforts to increase the number of people who come to know Him as Lord.

As a Traditionally Grounded church body, I hope we will never lose the foundation of our faith and the solid ground upon which the Church of Jesus Christ has been built. I hope we will value our traditions and claim our heritage, without compromising our

higher commitment to serving and honoring Christ. Because Jesus Christ is the same “yesterday and today and forever,” we must always seek new ways to share with others the One we have come to know as our Lord, without losing the foundation upon which we will forever stand.

And as a Congregationally Focused church body, I hope our commitment to disciple-making will become the priority of every pastor in the NALC. I hope disciple-making cultures will be formed in every congregational setting, transforming the people through the power of the Holy Spirit into lifelong and ever-growing disciples of Christ. I hope our witness will be felt in every corner of North America and our relationships with Jesus will be visibly seen in every community in which we are found. I hope our congregational life in worship and in the sharing of the Sacraments will be the ways in which we are renewed and refreshed in our relationship with Jesus for the purpose of witnessing without fear of failure in a world that is in desperate need of what only Jesus can give.

In the same way, I hope we grow in our reputation with our international and ecumenical partners as a church body that has fallen in love with Jesus. We want to know Him. We want to serve Him. We want to honor Him in all we do. As a result, we have no greater purpose in life than to commit ourselves fully and faithfully and finally to the commission He has given to us.

My commitment to you as bishop would be to hold to the commitments and priorities I have offered as commitments and priorities for our Church. My passion and commitment is to Christ. My heart and purpose are to know and to serve Him. He is the reason I am willing to serve. He is the resource from which I will serve. And He is the rest in which I find my hope and my strength.

Thank you for reading what I have shared. It is an honor to be considered for this calling. To God be the glory as we pray for and choose our next leader.

THE REV. DR. DAVID M. WENDEL

Jacksonville, Florida



Current Call: Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, NALC

Congregational Membership: Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran Church (Jacksonville, Florida)

Denominational Affiliation: NALC

Basic Biographical Information: The Rev. Dr. David M. Wendel was born and raised in Columbus, Indiana, graduating from Columbus High School in 1977. His home congregation is First Lutheran Church, Columbus, Indiana. He graduated from Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, with a bachelor's degree in speech communication. He is a 1981 graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, having served his internship at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Los Alamos, New Mexico. He earned a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching from the Association of Chicago Theological Schools in 2001.

He served as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Hobbs, New Mexico, from 1981-1986 before being called to Saint Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1986. After serving as pastor of Saint Luke's for 25 years, he was called to serve as assistant to NALC Bishop John Bradosky, relocating to Columbus, Ohio, in January, 2012. They currently live in Jacksonville, Florida. As assistant to the bishop, Pastor Wendel assists congregations and pastors in the call process, serves as the ecumenical officer of the denomination, and assists the bishop as needed.

Pastor Wendel and his wife, Susan, have two adult children, Christopher (Candena) serving as an NALC pastor at First United Lutheran Church, Hammond, Indiana, and Rebekah, married to a U.S. Army Command Sergeant Major (James) living in Fort Benning, Georgia. Susan and David have two grandsons and two granddaughters.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Let me begin by saying I have always experienced God active in my life, growing up in my home congregation in Columbus, Indiana, raised in a faithful Lutheran home, having experienced some sense of call to ordained ministry at a fairly young age. My most profound experience, in younger years, was as an acolyte, as I held the one remaining candle in the sacristy during the Good Friday Tenebrae service, considering what it might mean to be a "Christ-bearer" in the church and in the world. I could detail, since then, the myriad ways God has been at work in my life, from day-to-day pastoral ministry, to being husband and father and now grandfather!

More recently, I have experienced God's activity in my daily life in powerful, surprising, life-changing ways since that time when Bishop John asked if I would accept a call to come serve with him in the North American Lutheran Church! We had anticipated retiring in Colorado Springs, from my congregation of 25 years. We had no intention of leaving beautiful, colorful Colorado, nor did we have any desire at all, whatsoever, to serve in a larger church position, in OHIO! God had other plans for us, however, and every day serving in the NALC, I experience God active in my daily life, in our home, our family and even more, I experience God active in our staff meetings, our executive council, and in the people I meet and greet as I have the opportunity to worship with our congregations! I am blessed to see God active in the many, many congregations I have visited, pastors I have worked with, deans I interact with, as they share with me and I see firsthand, how God is actively involved in the lives of those I minister with every day. I believe more strongly now than ever, that God is working out miraculous things in my own life and the lives of the faithful in the NALC! I see it as new congregations are planted, grow, build church buildings, and reach out into their communities. I see God's activity as new warehouses are built for our disaster response efforts, and NALC people hurry to ravaged areas of our country to assist, help and rebuild. I see God's activity as young people go to seminary and prepare for ministry in the NALC, committed to believing and teaching what the Bible believes and teaches! As I witness God active, it brings me great joy to see, again and again, how God loves us, nourishes us, comes to us!

That's what it means to experience God active in our lives, not in some spiritualized, abstract form, but through our incarnate Lord who promises to come to us in Word and Sacrament, in the assembly of believers and in the Body of Christ, wherever two or three are gathered in His name.

Thankfully, God comes to me in and through Jesus Christ, in tangible, touchable, form – in the Holy Bible and the Holy Sacraments, as through means, Luther says – so that I receive the presence of Jesus whether I am ready or not, whether I am in the right frame of mind or not, whether I believe I am worthy or not. This is how I experience God active in my daily life – through His Word, trustworthy and true, speaking to me every day, and through Christ's incarnate presence in the Sacrament of the Altar, as well as through the community of believers.

In these seven and a half years I have been visiting our NALC pastors and congregations, there have been times when I have wondered, as we all do, "where are you, Lord, in the midst of this?" It is when we gather for worship, hear God's Word, receive Christ's Body and Blood as we are gathered, two or three in His name, that I experience God most active in my life, in my home and family, in the NALC, and I am reassured of the presence and power of the Living God!

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning to you. I have never been a fan of “favorite Scripture verses.” As one of my seminary professors quoted, “It may be more fruitful to read those passages in Scripture which you don’t like so much! That may be where God is speaking to you!” While I, too, have lots of highlighted verses in my Bible, I would prefer to share a passage that has been most meaningful to me, throughout my years of ministry and which I believe speaks to us, particularly, today.

“Then I fell down at (the feet of the angel) to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God’” (Revelation 19:10 RSV).

My strategy in life has always been to do the hardest thing first. Newly ordained in 1981, I decided my first congregational Bible study would be Revelation. After that, I assumed, any other Bible study would be easy! And I fell in love with the Book of Revelation at that time, and that affinity has never diminished. Christians at that time were challenged and persecuted by a government and a culture that was decidedly anti-Christian. Followers of Jesus were put to death for refusing to burn a single grain of incense to Caesar, who claimed divinity for himself. The Revelation to St. John was intended to convey one message to Christians being challenged and persecuted in any age, and that message is, “Worship God.” I have preached and taught on those two words many times in my 38 years of ordained ministry, because they continue to be relevant for disciples of Jesus today. We, too, are challenged to deny Christ Jesus daily by a secular and in many ways, anti-Christian culture. We, too, are lured astray by many tempting idols. We, too, are encouraged to take the easy, wide path in life, rather than the difficult, challenging narrow way. We, too, have been tempted to give up biblical, confessional faith and teaching, tempted to accept and adopt the ways of the world, especially with regard to marriage and sexuality, the value of human life, and, yes, the false teaching that there are many paths to salvation, rather than through Christ alone, the way, the truth and the life.

To us, the call comes through Revelation loudly and clearly – do not give up and do not give in! Do not follow false pastors, teachers, bishops! Do not turn away from God, but **WORSHIP GOD! WORSHIP THE ONE TRUE GOD AND HIM ONLY SHALL YOU SERVE!**

This is a message the Christians in the early Church desperately needed to hear, in the face of trial, tribulation and temptation. It is a message we need to hear in our day, as well. Worship God. Worship only the God of Holy Scripture, revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In your ministry and life experience, what has prepared you to fulfill the role of bishop

of the NALC? I gave my wife a small plaque some 29 years ago. It is a quote from Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch watchmaker who helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust. She says, “Today is the perfect preparation for the future only God can see.”

Members of the congregations I served in Hobbs, New Mexico, and Colorado Springs, Colorado, will likely remember me saying, “I love being a parish pastor. I have no other wish than that.” When I was called to serve with Bishop Bradosky in the NALC, parishioners asked about that, saying, “Why would you leave the parish?” My simply answer was, “Susan and I are committed to God’s call. We also made a commitment to the NALC. God is calling us to serve in the bishop’s office of the NALC, so we’re being obedient.” We believe that still and will serve however called.

As I look back on 30 years of parish ministry and seven and a half years of serving the NALC alongside Bishop John, it seems every day was the perfect preparation for the future only God can see.

My first two calls were to congregations which were struggling with division, conflict and lack of vision for mission. The first congregation was a merger of two Lutheran congregations. The merger was complete on paper — the reality was much different. Our five years together were marked by a clear vision for mission, unity of direction and purpose and significant growth. After five years, the bishop asked me to consider serving Saint Luke’s, Colorado Springs, where they had been fighting for 15 years (they were only 15 years old) and had “kicked out” six pastors. I accepted the call and served there 25 years. We embraced a congregational vision focused on the healing ministry of Jesus, the Great Physician, and had three building expansions, five capital stewardship campaigns, developing an educational childcare ministry with 119 children, from newborn through age six. We were leaders in ecumenical activities in Colorado Springs, and I served as worship planner and chaplain for several years within the synod. During my years of congregational life at Trinity, Hobbs, and Saint Luke’s, Colorado Springs, I was able to deal with tension, conflict and division in helpful, healthy ways, allowing me to develop understanding and skills which would serve me well as assistant to the bishop for ministry in the NALC.

Since my call to serve alongside the bishop in January, 2012, I have been involved in many aspects of the NALC’s life and ministry.

- I continue to serve as the bishop’s representative in critical situations of congregational/pastoral conflict and division, having intervened in numerous situations throughout North America.
- I developed the NALC’s call process, writing the Manual on the Call Process, the

Congregational Profile and Profile of Pastor Available for Call. I developed the Congregational Workshop in Preparation for the Call Process.

- After traveling around North America responding to congregational situations of tension and conflict, I developed the Pastoral Care and Transition Team (PCAT Team) model, which is serving the NALC well, highlighting and developing “first-responders” within mission districts, as well as a cadre of pastors and lay leaders who assist locally with congregational transition, facilitating the Congregational Workshops.
- Because of my experience with pastors and congregations in the call process, I developed a new template for vetting and certification in the NALC, creating a “Vetting Panel” to assist the general secretary and staff.
- I have appreciated the opportunity to write monthly “Ministry Matters” newsletter articles and Advent and Lenten devotional booklets. In each, I have tried to address real-life challenges and issues facing our pastors, congregations and individuals within the NALC, in ways that are direct, honest and easily applicable to daily life and ministry!
- I have met with numerous congregations considering membership in the NALC, meeting with councils, pastors and congregations, introducing them to the NALC, its four Core Values and the exciting work we are doing. It’s been essential in this work having actually led a congregation, (Saint Luke’s, Colorado Springs) as their pastor, through the study and discernment process, finally voting to leave the former church body with almost unanimous consent.

In addition, I have served in these ways:

- I served on the Theological Education Task Force and was involved in writing the founding resolution for the NALS, as well as the founding documents. I have continued to serve as the bishop’s liaison to the NALS Board of Regents.
- I have been involved in the Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative and Leadership Team from the beginning having received discipleship coaching for three years, together with Bishop John and the executive staff, prior to the development of the strategy for the NALC’s commitment to discipleship.
- I work alongside the bishop and staff in planning the annual Lutheran Week and wrote the proposal for the development and implementation of a Lutheran Week planning team, which is the model in use today. I maintain the evolving Lutheran Week agenda each year and coordinate ecumenical and international guests. I serve

as the bishop's liaison to the Lutheran Week chaplains, assisting in the planning and implementation of the various worship services.

- Realizing the need for increased focus on stewardship at all levels in the NALC, I proposed and was instrumental in forming the NALC Stewardship Task Force, now the Living and Giving Stewardship Task Force.
- I was instrumental in planning the first NALC Pastors' Conference (which was actually a "Preaching Conference") and continue to work with the bishop to develop themes, recruit speakers, plan the agenda, serve as chaplain and emcee the conferences.
- As assistant to the bishop for ecumenism, I assisted in the drafting of the "Initial Statement on the Ecumenical and Inter-Lutheran Commitment of the NALC", approved in 2011, the resolution regarding application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation and ongoing negotiations regarding that application, and I guide the ongoing conversations with the International Lutheran Council. I am co-chair of our consultation with the Anglican Church in North America, co-chair of our consultation with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Lutheran Church—Canada, and I coordinate our annual meeting with representatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and our annual meeting with representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). I also co-chair our Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum, as well as support our ongoing relationships with Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and other international Lutheran bodies. I manage and coordinate the bishop's ecumenical and international invitations and communications.
- I serve as the bishop's liaison to most committees, task forces and teams, including, in addition to those already mentioned: the Commission on Theology and Doctrine, the Candidacy Committee, the Church and Ministry Task Force.

Let me say, before concluding this answer that I am known for being able to stand firm when being challenged, persecuted and in the midst of adversity; I am able to work well with others, being direct and honest in interpersonal and organizational communication, speaking the truth in love; I am knowledgeable and form opinions based on Scripture and fact, while also being a good listener, truly valuing what others think and feel; I continue to be "teachable" and willing to admit my own faults, apologizing freely, and I am a hard worker, highly self-motivated and organized, always seeking to move forward myself and to conduct myself in a productive manner. I believe these are necessary and helpful traits for a pastor!

Thankfully, I have been blessed with varied and extensive experience in parish and larger church service which have prepared me to assist and lead in most any circumstance. To serve in the NALC, even in difficult, challenging situations, energizes me for ministry and gives me great joy. It is for the NALC to determine whether that is to be in service to the church as bishop.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? In addition to the gifts and skills mentioned above, my greatest gifts and skills are: love and commitment to Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church; heartfelt devotion to our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a pastor's heart that is reflected in love and respect for each and every one of our pastors, congregations and members; dedication to faithful and effective preaching of the Word of God (my Doctor of Ministry is in preaching); ability to preach biblical sermons that speak to the heart and life of everyday followers of Jesus; familiarity with and commitment to discipleship and disciple-making as God's means for renewal in the Church; competency in and commitment to the Lutheran Confessions and our biblical, confessional stand in the NALC; ability to handle conflict and tension in a non-anxious, productive manner; ten years as planner/convener of pastoral retreats in the Rocky Mountain west region; ability to strategize, problem-solve, guide and direct staff on the basis of Holy Scripture; faithful husband, father and grandfather.

One of my greatest gifts from God and my upbringing, is the ability to relate to and communicate with people from varied backgrounds, experiences and congregations. I am always aware that I am a called and ordained servant of Jesus Christ, but also aware that I stand with every NALC pastor and member before God, humble sinners in need of grace, mercy and forgiveness. This has helped me throughout my ministry (and life!) to be faithful and effective whether in rural Iowa or Alberta, suburban Colorado Springs or Winnipeg, western Pennsylvania or southern California! I am a "people person," and for that, I thank God!

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities?

A. Hold fast the Word of life (Philippians 2:16). From the beginning, we have taken our stand on the basis of the truth and authority of God's Word. As we receive pastors from other Lutheran bodies, as congregations join the NALC, as our pastors preach and teach on a weekly basis, as we prepare seminarians for ministry within the NALC, my concern and prayer is that they will share our firm commitment to the Bible as God's Word, never weakening that commitment, never watering it down because of cultural, secular or progressive Christian pressure, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain for the NALC.

B. Continue to preach and teach “in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions” (Rite of Ordination, Occasional Services Book, LBW). As I work with congregations throughout North America, it is clear — our people want their pastors to be Lutheran pastors who will preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions.

C. Affirm our four Core Values in every way possible, as congregations continue to come to the NALC because we are “Christ Centered, Mission Driven, Traditionally Grounded, Congregationally Focused.” These values laid the groundwork for a Lutheran body for the 21st century, and we dismiss or diminish them to our own detriment.

D. Continue the good work of our Life-to-Life Discipleship Leadership Team and our movement in the NALC from institutional maintenance to discipleship and disciple-making. We have made great strides so far, developing a much more Lutheran framework for responding to our Lord’s Great Commission. We have a long way to go till the majority of our pastors, congregations and members are being renewed as disciples and followers of Jesus.

E. Structural and organizational development. It is all too common for pastors and congregations to want to return to and rely upon previous experiences of church structure and organization. Not everything from the past is wrong or negative. Much of it, however, is unsustainable. We appreciate the faithful and extensive work completed by the executive council and mission district deans thus far. We need to continue moving forward with appropriate, financially viable structural growth. It is my commitment, though, only to do so when necessary and when it is supported by the “rank and file” members of the NALC. It would be my intention to meet regionally with mission districts as soon as possible, to assess the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful, with regard to structural/organizational changes. As with any transition, it will also be time to evaluate and assess all staff positions, especially in light of possible structural/organizational changes. We will want to strengthen our staff relationships, functionality and communication. We have made progress in these areas, but as a member of the executive staff for these years, it is my commitment to assess and address areas needing attention.

F. As we take time to reflect upon our time together these last eight to nine years and look to the future, if called to serve as bishop, it would be my suggestion that we reshape our executive council meetings, deans’ meetings and other appropriate occasions with an even more spiritual focus. This is not to say they haven’t had a biblical, prayerful shape in the past, but there is always need for more time in the Word of God and prayer. I believe the executive council and deans’ meetings, in particular, would benefit from a

“retreat” format, rather than that of a business meeting. This was true of my work with councils as a parish pastor. We can attend to “business/ministry” items effectively, while still having significant time in God’s Word, prayer, spiritual attention and discernment.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC?

A. One of the greatest challenges, both within the NALC and our congregations, is that of financial support. Denominationally, we have been working hard with our support staff to balance income and expenses. Congregationally, we have created the Living and Giving Stewardship Task Force to provide information, resources and encouragement in the area of stewardship, realizing this is always a challenge and a need. Realistically, congregational giving to the NALC has remained the same the last several years, with income not meeting expenses. However, as we are in partnership together, it is important for us to emphasize faithful stewardship at all levels. Congregations need to preach and teach faithful stewardship because they have seen offerings and income decline in recent years, as attendance has slowly declined. Giving to the NALC needs to grow to support growth in mission, staff and structure. Still, I am committed to balancing income and expenses in the NALC, not budgeting beyond our means, yet always being bold and excited about preaching and teaching about stewardship!

B. We are making great strides forward in discipleship and disciple-making, as our Life-to-Life Discipleship Team is developing a truly Lutheran and NALC initiative. Many congregations and pastors are being energized and renewed by their response to the Great Commission. It will be a challenge not to become complacent and put discipleship “up on a shelf” after a few years. We need to remember that Life-to-Life Discipleship is no magic program — there is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the Gospel, the Sacraments and the Great Commission!

C. The structure and organization of the NALC will continue to be a challenge. While most agree we want to have a manageable, sustainable structure, we dare not re-create a bloated, hierarchical, expensive institution. There are many ways for us to move forward without creating that — and it will largely mean smaller, logical, reasonable steps, rather than a bold, big move, all in one step, that may not have the support of pastors and congregations in the NALC.

D. The North American Lutheran Seminary will continue to be a challenge and a blessing! The vision for the NALS, approved by the NALC in convocation, is that of a central hub, with houses of studies in various locations. That vision has not become reality. We will make significant strides forward with a new seminary president tasked specifically with developing and implementing the original vision. Once the various houses of studies are in place (or a few of them, at least) it will be a challenge to ensure consistency from

house to house, all forming faithful pastors for the NALC.

Describe how the Core Values of the NALC would guide your ministry as bishop, and how those values can become more and more prominent in the life of the NALC and its congregations. Simply put, together with our regular reading and study of the Word of God, we should also be reading and considering our four Core Values at every opportunity. Regularly, we should be asking, “How are we living out our four Core Values? What more should we be doing to embody and live the Core Values of the NALC?” The danger is that our Core Values will become nothing more than a slogan or a motto.

The bishop of the NALC should find clear and specific guidance for his or her ministry, in the four Core Values:

Christ Centered: The bishop of the NALC has no other message or agenda than the sharing of the Good News of Jesus’ saving death and resurrection. The bishop is the chief pastor and evangelist in the NALC. Supporting pastors, congregations and members in their proclamation is the role of the bishop, as pastor, while communicating and embodying the love and care of the Great Shepherd of the sheep. This love and care is at the heart of the bishop’s desire to reach the lost, the lonely, those who have not come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. To be Christ Centered is to seek the salvation of souls, to bring people to saving faith, to communicate forgiveness, life and reconciliation, through Jesus Christ, to give hope and joy for living!

Mission Driven: Because one is Christ Centered and seeks to save the lost, one is necessarily “Mission Driven!” There should never be a time when the bishop (and the NALC) is not asking, “How can we reach people with the Gospel?” In Lutheranism since World War II, we have been lulled into thinking that there is no mission field in North America. We expected our congregations to grow as inquirers walked in the church doors and signed on the dotted line. Most realize this is not the case today, and to reach people with the Good News, to have congregations which are stable and growing, we must regain a mission-mindset! Everything we think, do and say as the NALC should be driven by MISSION—the mission to go, make disciples, baptize and teach!

Traditionally Grounded: There are those who believe “Traditionally Grounded” has to do only with “traditional” worship forms. It is true that we are committed in the NALC, to continuing the tried and true traditional form of worship that communicates God’s grace in Word and Sacrament. However, that has little to do with style of music or musical setting being used. Even more, Traditionally Grounded means, for us, that we “preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions,” as quoted above. We confess Jesus Christ and “the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional

writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world" (NALC Constitution 2.07). The bishop of the NALC upholds and defends this Christian faith, passed on to us through the centuries.

Congregationally Focused: This may be the most difficult transition for congregations to make when joining the NALC. The bishop of the church must continually remind pastors and congregations of this, while interpreting it for the church. When speaking with congregations, I state simply, "We believe you know better about your life and ministry than we do!" We trust our congregations. Congregational life is on the cutting edge of all mission and ministry. We are here to support, empower and encourage the local congregation. We will readily offer advice and counsel, but we allow our congregations great freedom with regard to their constitution, day-to-day ministry and decision-making. We are careful to share, also, that this does not mean congregations are left on their own without support and assistance! We are the Church – the Body of Christ, together!

I believe Core Values are intended to be just that – values that serve as our core – values that guide and direct our preaching, teaching, and yes, administration at all levels so that we are true to who we say we are! We seek to be a church body which takes seriously our Core Values. I believe how the bishop attends to the Core Values models for congregations, what it means for them to embody being Christ Centered, Mission Driven, Traditionally Grounded and Congregationally Focused at the local level. It is not enough for us to describe the NALC as a whole with these Core Values, without them being reflected in our congregations, documents, executive council, mission districts, etc.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

First and foremost, we want to continue to be a denomination, with mission districts, pastors, congregations and members who are committed to the Word of God! To depart from the Holy Scriptures is to depart from Jesus Christ. When Christians dismiss or diminish the truth and authority of God's Word, there will necessarily be a lack of commitment to Christ-centeredness and mission! We see evidence of that in church bodies where a diminishment of the Bible as God's Word leads to withdrawal of missionaries, lack of support for mission and decline in faith, vitality and numbers.

To be Christ Centered, we are to abide in His Word. Jesus says, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7 RSV). Because we hold fast to the Word of life; because we say we believe that "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and

for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 RSV), it is now for us to take that commitment seriously and to stand on that Word of life firmly!

Here are some tangible steps:

1. Always more Bible, never less! In addition to worship that is centered on the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments, let us make intentional and intensive reading and study of the Holy Scriptures part of every mission district meeting, church council gathering, fellowship activity in the NALC. Let’s embrace the three-year cycle of Scripture readings that may be found on the NALC website, so that we have more and more folks reading through the Bible. Let’s try any and every format to get more people into the Word, because abiding in the Word keeps us Christ Centered and Mission Driven.

2. Make Life-to-Life Discipleship the focus of your home, your congregation, your mission district. More on this in my response to a later question (“What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?”), but it is a reality that the NALC and many congregations are being renewed by attention to the Great Commission. The unchurched and unreached are not drawn to congregations which are focused on constitution, organization and institutional concerns. People are drawn to congregations which have Jesus Christ as the center of their life together and are committed to touching lives and sharing Jesus one life at a time.

3. Always more prayer, never less! It is exciting to see how committed many of our pastors and lay people are to intentional, intensive prayer! A beloved pastor friend shared a quote recently, “You can expect more from your prayers, even than from your preaching!” Sometimes when a call committee is lamenting the lack of interest in their congregation, they want to know what else they can DO? I suggest they engage in more intentional prayer. To which they often respond, “Yes, but what can we DO?” The answer is the same – pray! St. Paul writes, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; and pray for us also, the God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ” (Colossians 4:2-4 RSV).

4. Be involved with the community outside your church doors and be involved with the people outside your church doors! Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others, not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others” (Letters and Papers from Prison). This is not to say the Church and the congregation is to adopt every social and activist agenda. This is not to say the Church and the congregation is to be nothing more than a social service agency. It is to say that the Church exists for the sake of those who are not members, those who do not know Jesus Christ, those

who have not received the forgiveness, mercy and grace won for them by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

5. Meet as a congregation, or as a group of congregations and ask, “Where can we and how can we plant a new mission congregation in our area?” This is the first step, and mission districts and congregations are already taking that step – and finding the more they commit themselves to mission outside their congregation, the more fired up their members are for mission within the congregation, local community, nation and world! The future of the NALC is not congregations leaving other Lutheran bodies to join the NALC. We welcome those who come, and give thanks for their partnership in the Gospel, but the field is wide open for new mission starts throughout North America! This is not easy, nor will it happen without much prayer, dedication and commitment. Remember, though, it was not easy for our forebears who came to North America, cleared the land and built churches, often with no pastors available to lead the way. The NALC has much to offer – we are doing great work for the Kingdom, but there are so many opportunities for mission!

What is your understanding of discipleship as a strategic direction for the NALC?

Life-to-Life Discipleship is an initiative that has been at the heart of the NALC from its inception, although the name came later! The NALC Constitution speaks of the Great Commission, as it states:

3.03 It is also the mission of the Church to obey the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16- 20); to preach the Gospel to all people, to do the ministry of evangelism, and to witness to others the mighty acts of God. In Holy Baptism, God calls all members of the Church, both lay and ordained, to testify in word and deed, that God has acted for the world’s salvation through Jesus Christ. The NALC is mission-driven, relying on the Holy Spirit to lead it.

The constitution gives primary responsibility for the Great Commission to the bishop of the NALC, stating:

8.01 The Bishop shall be an ordained minister who is a member of the NALC. The Bishop shall serve as the chief pastor and chief evangelist of the NALC, responsible for ensuring the priority of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16-20) in the life of the church.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the constitution does not also indicate the responsibility of the local pastor for “ensuring the priority of the Great Commission” as well! Nevertheless, life-to-life discipleship grows out of the Great Commission, as well as the incarnate God who became flesh to dwell among us! The Risen Jesus is risen, to be with us always, even to the close of the age. The Risen Jesus is where two or three are gathered in His name. As Jesus walked with the two disciples along the road to Emmaus,

the Lord walks with us on our journey through life, revealing Himself to us as He unfolds the Scriptures to us along the way and makes Himself known in “the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:13-35).

As the Lord gives Himself to us in Word and Sacrament, we give ourselves to others, “life-to-life.” Disciples become disciple-makers, as they invest in the life of another, embodying Jesus, introducing the other to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, helping the other to know what it means to be a disciple and follower of Jesus, manifesting love. Although there are many ways to emphasize the Great Commission, and the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship Leadership Team is lifting up materials, resources, programs and approaches, the bottom line is this—each pastor and every congregation is being called to attend to and address Christ’s call to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20 RSV).

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC? My hope and prayerful expectation is that this mission – the mission given to us by the Lord of the Church, that we are to go, make disciples, baptize and teach – will continue in the NALC as the Holy Spirit renews our church and our lives! As Bishop Bradosky likes to say, “There is no mission but this! This is our mission statement!” It is exciting to see this mission being lived out in our pastors, congregations and mission districts. It is exciting to see the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) embracing discipleship and disciple-making! It is exciting to see our partners in the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum sharing the NALC’s focus on mission and discipleship within their own churches! It is exciting to be working with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) on a joint conference in 2020, called “Disciple-Life 2020!” It’s exciting to be talking with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters who are also lifting up “missionary discipleship” in their parishes and dioceses! Lives are being changed, congregations are growing, people who don’t know Jesus as Lord and Savior are becoming disciples and followers, because one NALC pastor or member walked alongside them, investing in them, “life-to-life.”

I believe that the NALC is being renewed and restored, and will continue to be renewed and restored only as we faithfully confess the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, seek to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23); “preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2 RSV); “do this for the remembrance” of Jesus (Luke 22:19); and go, baptize, make disciples and teach (Matthew 28:19-20)! This is how Christ is reforming His Church today – and my hope and trust is that He will continue to do so in the North American Lutheran Church!

NOMINEES FOR EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (CLERGY)

THE REV. BASSAM J. ABDALLAH

Prospect, Kentucky



Congregational Membership: House of Prayer (Elizabethtown, Kentucky)

Occupation: Retired

Basic Biographical Information: I was born in Jerusalem. Katy and I have been married for 42 years. We have one son, Joseph. Two grandchildren. Education: University of Louisville, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, United Theological Seminary, California Graduate School of Theology. Hobbies: studying Islam, reading, traveling, weather charting, space exploration, learning languages and global politics, especially the Middle East.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position.

I was pastor of two congregations in my almost 40 years of active ministry. Redeemer Lutheran, Bryant, Indiana (1977-1989) and First United Lutheran, Hammond, Indiana (1989-2016). I initiated the start of Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries in the ELCA. I helped start five Arabic-speaking congregations and one Armenian. I was the ELCA's consultant on Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries. I currently serve on the Candidacy Committee. I write extensively on Islam and I am very active in reaching and converting Muslims. For many years I held a weekly Bible study class for truck drivers in a truck stop with an average of 70-80 truck drivers attending the hour and a half long Bible class. The joy of that ministry will always be etched in my heart and mind.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry?

Prayer is a very important part of my day. In my chapel at home, I spend a few hours on my knees in reading Scripture and prayer. I love to serve the church, on the local and national levels. I enjoy reaching out and evangelization. I am proud of my faith and I want people to know about Jesus and His love for them. I enjoy reaching Muslims and leading them to the baptismal font, the greatest joy of my life every time this happens. Teaching and preaching have always been a priority in my ministries.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years?

With the election of a new bishop, there could be the possibility of changing ministry priorities. This could cause us a challenge. Second, complacency, we are reaching a level of comfort believing that making disciples and bringing the faithful to the fold should be someone else's mission. Third, the quality of seminary students. We need to work with seminarians

who have been truly called for ministry. Fourth, the NALC's outreach and mission starts need to become a priority. Home churches and home Bible study groups should be talked about at all clergy and lay gatherings.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? My prayer for the NALC is to focus on the Great Commission and take it with great urgency. My hope is that we will keep the Gospel at the center of our mission and to maintain the integrity of the Word of God. I see the NALC growing greatly in the next few years. Our leadership has been phenomenal in lifting us among the more established denominations. My hope is that we will forge deeper relationship with international Lutheran churches and partner with them in ministry and growth. We are becoming known and we are becoming the beacon of hope for Lutherans in the United States who want to be a part of the Body of Christ that is home for the faithful where women continue to be an integral part of this church body.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? Start of new congregations; maintain and further the Life-to-Life Discipleship; be more proactive in working with congregations that are interested to learn more about the NALC and welcome them in our midst; recruit called and qualified seminarians to become the future leaders and pastors of the Church; deepen the relationships we have with international church bodies and partner with new church bodies; and encourage all pastors to get involved in workshops and pastor gatherings.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? In many regions of the country, distances between NALC congregations can be an issue. Pastors and congregations need the support of each other. We need more ministry support gatherings of mission districts rotating between all congregations. With the possibility of regional bishops on the horizon, the new bishops will be able to reach out to congregations and pastors to support their ministries and provide for assistance. Deans need to be more proactive in identifying new congregational starts or plants. Pastors and lay members need to be encouraged to reach out in their communities, take time for Bible study, communal time for prayer and celebrations of our faith.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. My study at home is half office and half chapel. My wife and I start our day with reading daily Scripture readings. Three days a week we celebrate the Eucharist. Every evening I return to my kneeler for prayer and meditation. We invite friends, those working around our house, neighbors and family members to join us. At noon, my wife and I stop whatever we are doing to say our noon prayers. This is a tradition I learned in my youth when I lived in a monastery in

Jerusalem. I pray, almost every day, the Lutheran Rosary. And I love to tell others about Jesus and His love for all.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. “²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV).

Growing up a minority Lutheran within the minority Christian community in Jerusalem were enough reasons for Muslims to physically abuse, mistreat and discriminate against us. The joy and assurance these verses brought me made me, in later years, stand up and push back such individuals and tell them about the love Jesus has for them and for all. These verses were recited in my childhood home many times a day. These were the verses on which I based my homily for my father’s funeral.

THE REV. REBECCA M. M. HEBER
Lake Mary, Florida



Congregational Membership: Oasis Church (Lake Mary, Florida)
Occupation: Pastor

Basic Biographical Information: Married to Bill 37 years and co-pastor with him of Oasis Church; B.A., Sociology, Carthage College; Master of Divinity, Trinity Lutheran Seminary; avid traveler and enthusiastic student of Martin Luther and the Reformation and, by extension, co-hosting Oberammergau and Reformation Heritage Tour, June 2020.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position. Member of executive council during formative years of the NALC; member of Lutheran CORE Steering Committee when it voted to establish the NALC; Church planter and co-pastor of Oasis Church, the first NALC church in Florida, and one of four mission churches among the 17 charter congregations of the NALC; pastor 31+ years; former provisional dean, NALC Sonshine Mission District; former Lutheran CORE Steering Committee coordinator for Region 9

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? A demonstrated commitment and ability to fulfill the responsibilities necessary for being a hard-working, productive member of the council who will, with God’s help, continue to build up the Body of Christ and extend the reach of the Gospel through the NALC, utilizing organizational abilities and effective communication skills, together with a passion for God, compassion for people and a see-a-need, meet-a-need attitude.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? The successful transition to the leadership of a new bishop; the growing and planting of NALC churches; the aging demographics of NALC membership; and the cultural marginalization of Christianity and the Church, and the undermining of the Judeo-Christian values upon which our nation was founded.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? Continued fidelity to the Word of God and Common Confession; continued outreach to, and strengthening of relationships with, other orthodox Christian and Lutheran bodies; continued support of persecuted Christians here and abroad; and expanding outreach to youth, young adults and younger married couples and families.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? Loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves; continuing to be an unapologetic witness to the Gospel and the moral teachings of the Bible; strengthening the sense of identity, collegiality and collaboration among our members, pastors and congregations; providing sufficient staff to meet the needs of the NALC; supporting the NALS as it prepares pastors and leaders; and getting the word out that the NALC exists.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? Continue creating mission districts of more manageable size and geographic proximity to the churches they serve; continue utilizing the NALC Network as an effective communication tool; continue intentionally raising up and supporting missionaries; partnering with faithful, boots-on-the-ground ministries; and encouraging the use of SOLA Publishing and other teaching materials available through the NALC.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Through regularly reading, studying and listening to God's Word; through the ministry and music of Christian radio; through theological reading, studies, and continuing education experiences; through helping people; through the presence and conviction of the Holy Spirit to confess and repent of my sins and receive God's forgiveness and help to follow in Christ's steps; and through the steadfast love of my husband.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. I have cast my life, my soul, my all on the One about whom God declared, "This is my Son, my beloved," and I do so with confidence that this declaration is trustworthy and true, for "It is impossible for God to lie." (Hebrews 6:18)

THE REV. DR. KEITH G. LESS

Abilene, Kansas



Congregational Membership: Trinity Lutheran Church (Abilene, Kansas)

Occupation: Pastor

Basic Biographical Information: Married to Denise Less. One adult child, Kiri. Ph.D. in Pastoral Theology, M.Div. from Concordia Seminary, B.S. in Ag. Econ. from The Ohio State University. Hobbies: travel, reading, working out, crochet and cigars.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position.

I have been a pastor for 35 years and have served in a variety of ways as a pastoral supervisor, a regional supervisor, and seminary professor at St. Paul's. I am currently the dean of the Great Plains Mission District West. I was a medical chaplain for a major regional trauma center in the psychiatric department. I believe this gives me a broad background in dealing with people from all walks of life and situations.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I come from a business background and I am a good communicator as well as being a good, compassionate listener. I like to look at all aspects of a situation before making a decision, but I don't like to drag out the process. I can also see the humor in most situations as well as dealing with pretty heavy issues.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? Integrating the new ministries that will be developed along with the congregations that will be joining us. Learning to work with a new bishop. Providing competent pastors for the coming need. Continuing to provide discipleship training to laity and pastors. Funding the work of the church.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? To expand our ministry to more parts of the United States. To begin new ministries in a creative and thriving environment.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? Continuing to make biblical discipleship a priority. Mission work at the local, national and international levels. Provide well educated, competent pastors. Continue our mission focus.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

Make Bible study a priority. Have a definitive mission plan. Learn how to regenerate and reengage people. Focus on reaching out to others, both individuals and congregations looking for a Christ-Centered, biblically-based church.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Through the study and reading of the Bible. The people I encounter. A vibrant prayer life. The support of my wife and congregation.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. Psalm 121. I can't look to myself to be a good pastor or even a good Christian. This psalm reminds me that God is the author and manager of my relationship with Him and the world around me. He sustains me and carries me. There is nothing I do that God doesn't touch, and I am out of my depth unless He is leading me.

THE REV. K. CRAIG MOORMAN

Mount Airy, Maryland



Congregational Membership: River's Edge Ministries and First Evangelical Lutheran of Gray Manor (Dundalk, Maryland)

Occupation: Pastor/Mission Developer

Basic Biographical Information: I have been married to Nancy for nearly 34 years with five children and one grandchild, graduated from Purdue University with a B.S. in Residential Architectural Design and then Trinity Lutheran Seminary with an M.Div. Writing, homesteading and table tennis are my most intense interests.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position. Serving in the local parish for nearly 34 years and as a mission developer for the past 22 years. Led multiple disaster relief efforts. Involved extensively with family ministry, publishing *The Awe-full Privilege: This Thing Called Parenting*. Served on the initial mission teams for the developing NALC; designed and wrote the proposal for Mission Training and Support Centers, presently being considered for implementation. Discipling through small groups has always been a priority.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? Because of my experience from a grassroots perspective — boots on the ground — I believe I can more readily integrate a practical missiology with a deeply rooted theology. In light of Ephesians 4:11-16, I perceive my gifts to be more prophetic and evangelical in contributing to the greater whole on the executive council. I'm especially concerned that leaders of the NALC are more clearly discerning the spirit of this present culture (1 Cor. 2:6-13, etc.) to implement faithful and effective mission.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? I believe the NALC stands – along with the orthodox Church (as compared to the apostate Church) – at, arguably, the most difficult time in our history as a nation. The following represent only a few of these challenges:

- The need to out-think ‘the world’, especially in light of the current dramatic political shifts. Is the NALC (USA) prepared to function in a political climate less tolerant of Christians;
- The need to implement more expedient ways to train-up/disciple leaders ... who will disciple leaders ... who will disciple leaders. Now, for this day and age; and
- The need to remain vigilant in our missional work throughout the rest of North America, specifically in Central America and the Caribbean.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? I am hopeful that the NALC will remain focused on her Core Values and deeply rooted in her mission as presently articulated.

But, I am hopeful, too, that we will once again consider Lutheranism as a viable ‘movement’ within the larger Body of Christ. In other words, one of my hopes is that we’ll continue raising questions about how the Lord might be working in His larger (faithful) Church in our present day. I’m praying that we’ll consider how the Holy Spirit might be leading us into another season of reformation. But this time, within the Church. My hope is that the NALC will be used as a conduit to bring together other orthodox bodies to usher in – not only a season of reformation – but another great awakening ... for such a time as this!

What should be the NALC’s most important ministry priorities over the next few years? I envision five primary concerns of missional importance, not necessarily in order of priority:

1. Mobilizing the next generation in/for Christ – Simply stated, we are one generation away from extinction;
2. Encouraging leaders to operate out of a posture of rest/sabbath NOT work – Otherwise, we could easily ‘lose our way’ (once again) on many levels;
3. Building stronger relational ties with other orthodox Lutheran bodies and the broader Church, etc. – “that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know“ (John 17:23 ESV);
4. Broadening our work with ‘the family unit’ by resourcing it even more. Restore the

family – reform the church – revive the nation; and

5. Developing a strategy to navigate our way through and engage a culture that is growing more and more antagonistic toward the Church.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

Over the course of the past four decades, my brother (Cary), and I have envisioned establishing regional Mission Training and Support Centers (MTSCs) throughout the country. This vision of MTSC has taken on different names as it's evolved to its present proposal. I believe a tangible action that the NALC, its mission districts and member congregations can take is to consider such a proposal and begin to build these out regionally as the Spirit leads and provision is made.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. I experience the Lord's activity in my life during the morning breakthrough time, at the 'the top' of the morning, when I'm bound up in His Word which inevitably establishes and determines the day. This is pure grace.

The Lord is active in my daily life through my dear wife and precious children; and now, through my first grandchild, Noah. So, so many signs of His activity through daily living: crying, laughing, rites of passage, mission trips, significant accomplishments, etc. ... just doing life together!

I see His Holy Spirit actively working through His people as they grow in their own sense of call and giftedness, out in the disaster zone as lives are re-built, and in simply stopping 'for the one' ... listening to a story ... and hearing of the Lord's goodness.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. Matthew 9:37 (ESV) has been a critically important verse for me because of its missional implication for the Church, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." I am only now beginning to appreciate the enormity of what it means. Since D. Elton Trueblood spoke of these words at my ordination in 1986, I have been asking ... WHY are the laborers so few? Of course, we Lutherans need to consider a particular verse in the context of the whole. I finally read the previous verses through a new lens ... with a new mind and heart. Prior to verse 37, Jesus "went about the region ... teaching ... preaching ... healing ... he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Then Jesus spoke verse 37.

Before a laborer can become an effective laborer to partake of the harvest, he or she is called first to see as Jesus did AND travail with compassion as Jesus did.

THE REV. CARL L. M. RASMUSSEN

Kirkland, Illinois



Congregational Membership: First Lutheran Church (Kirkland, Illinois)

Occupation: Pastor

Basic Biographical Information: Married to Nancy 41 years. Three grown children: Andrew, Matthew, Peter. Four grandchildren: Samuel, Grace, Noah, Elijah. B.A. in Music from Dana College, M.Div. from Luther Theological Seminary. Internship at Trinity

Lutheran, Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Music is my main hobby; play piano and guitar, direct choir.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position: Ordained pastor for 40 years. Served congregations in Hodgeville, Saskatchewan and Calgary, Alberta. Have served current congregation, First Lutheran, Kirkland, Illinois, for 30 years. Conference president (similar to mission district dean) in Canada. Served on various boards (Lutheran nursing home, Lutheran campus ministry, agency for developmentally handicapped, subsidized housing organization). Served for several years on the Great Rivers Mission District council. Member of NALC Executive Council for the past four years, chairing two task forces.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I love Jesus Christ and His Church. I love the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. I am grateful and happy to be part of the NALC. I believe I am an effective preacher, teacher and counselor, an able leader of my congregation, a discerning and knowledgeable theologian and a good communicator. I enjoy teamwork, and always commit myself to fostering happy and productive relationships with co-workers and within the church as a whole.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? A major challenge will be to provide our congregations with faithful, able, inspired pastors. We need to continue encouraging the young people of the NALC to consider whether God is calling them to the ministry of Word and Sacrament! Secondly, as our growth continues, we need always to foster strong, gracious, Christlike relationships throughout the NALC, with the leaders of the church trusted and loved, and congregations and members experiencing belonging and being valued.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? That through our witness, many will come to know Christ, and know the joy, peace and fulfillment that is life in Him; that we will continue speaking, lovingly and courageously,

for the holy estate of marriage as taught in Scripture, and for the lives of the unborn; and that congregations, pastors and members of the ELCA who inwardly support the convictions of the NALC will increasingly be ready and able to join us.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? Continued support for our seminary, with the leadership of the NALS and the NALC enjoying a strong relationship and a common vision; a strong call process, with hands-on caring for vacant congregations; continued emphasis on discipleship and evangelism; continued commitment to our four Core Values; and internal strength and mutual affection as a church body, with all congregations and pastors experiencing the NALC as a place of belonging and being valued.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

- Congregational worship life is the most important thing: honoring the Church's liturgy, especially the lectionary – while resisting liturgical legalism. We are a Traditionally Grounded, confessional church. Our belief that there are matters of freedom is an important part of that confessional tradition.
- For the NALC and its mission districts, the most needed tangible actions are for the congregations and pastors to be encouraged, inspired and engaged by the bishop and the deans.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life.

- Daily devotions, Bible reading and prayer. Luther's Morning Prayer has proven especially meaningful, year after year.
- Conversation and consolation, and Bible study, with fellow pastors and with congregational leaders and members. God speaks His word to me on the lips of fellow believers.
- Suffering and cross bearing, understanding that this too is an encounter with God, as He seeks to conform me more and more to the image of His Son.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. Joshua 1:9 (ESV) - "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Meditation on this verse reminds me never to lose heart, despite any discouragement or conflict. It gives me courage and freedom from fear, knowing that God is with me in both the struggles and the victories of life and ministry.

NOMINEES FOR EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (LAY)

MS. REBECCA V. ANDRAE

Greensburg, Pennsylvania



Congregational Membership: St. Paul Lutheran Church (Latrobe, Pennsylvania)

Occupation: Administrative Assistant for the Mid-Northeast Mission District, Social Worker

Basic Biographical Information: I earned my bachelor's degree in family studies and child development (minor in business administration) from Seton Hill University (Greensburg, Pennsylvania) and am a trained family mediator. I am the proud mother of three children: Adam (26), an attorney; Maria (15), a high school sophomore; and Sara (14), a high school freshman. I am a native of Sweden and a fan of soccer.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position: My experiences and involvement in both local and regional expressions are varied and extensive including (but not limited to) chairing various committees (Membership, Christian Education, 50th Anniversary Committee), teaching Sunday school, serving on congregation council (including one vision team), serving as voting member to synod assembly (1994,1998, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), serving on the West Penn Lutheran CORE Fellowship Steering Committee, serving as parish secretary (paid position), attending the constituting convocation for the NALC and signing the charter (2010), attending subsequent NALC Convocations (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017), and working as the administrative assistant for the Mid-Northeast Mission District (paid position) since 2014.

In addition, I spent my early life as a member of the Church of Sweden where my father, a pastor, was actively involved in various confessional movements. I have been a member of congregations in various settings such as a rural church in a potato-farming community in northern Maine and small-city churches in Sweden and Pennsylvania. All these experiences have combined to provide me with a global perspective that is balanced with the opportunities and challenges of small-town ministry.

(While my experience in the non-profit, social agency world is not experience within the Body of Christ, it has been relevant to honing my visionary and long-range planning skills along with short-term action plans which have been very beneficial to me over the years while serving on various congregation councils and committees.)

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? Through

prayerful discernment over many years, I believe that I have been granted the gifts of administration and wisdom to be used to build up the Body of Christ. I am able to apply this gift both to administrative tasks and to the administration (leadership) of groups and teams. Both are inherent in the gift.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? The NALC appears to face several challenges. As we reach critical mass in several areas, we must address and solve these challenges in a thoughtful, deliberate and intentional way while not losing the inherent momentum. One challenge I see is in the structure of the NALC itself. We are committed to a lean structure yet there are multiple demands within that structure and requests from congregations, pastors and individual laity. We saw this materialize over the past several years in the areas of communication and family/youth ministry. The NALC leadership was able to thoughtfully respond to this challenge and to do so in a timely manner. More recently, some other restructuring has been suggested/taken place with the intention of easing the responsibilities of leadership and for streamlining the geographic regions. Some of these perhaps overlooked local context and should continue to be evaluated for best “fit.” The key is to always view challenges as opportunities and to evaluate each challenge in the light of the mission of the NALC. In other words, we want to address challenges in a visionary manner that ultimately makes sense and makes good use of our resources. One challenge that is rising from the grassroots level is that of the annual convocation. Timing (annually) and location (varies) has been questioned by some due to the cost of travel. I, however, view the annual convocation as an opportunity to come together as disciples of Jesus Christ for a time of learning, renewal, worship and fellowship as part of the wider expression of our church. The NALC is Congregationally Focused and this is evident in that every congregation may send a delegate whereas in our predecessor body, one had to be elected from the regional expression. The fact that all pastors on our roster, whether serving under call or retired, and that every congregation may send a delegate should be viewed as a privilege and an opportunity. I do believe, however, that serious consideration needs to be given to other options for locations that will be more cost-effective for the body without compromising the integrity of the process.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? I am hopeful that we will continue to build relationships and partnerships in the Gospel with other groups and church bodies throughout the world that share our orthodox biblical understanding. I hope that these relationships will be not only denomination to denomination but congregation to congregation and congregation to ministry partner. I believe that a culture of discipleship is the foundation for building these partnerships as well as for living out our baptismal covenant. I firmly believe that we must not engage in

partnerships simply for the sake of unity but must engage in thoughtful and deliberate dialogue, by the Holy Spirit's guidance, with potential partners in order to ascertain common ground from a biblical foundation. All else is folly.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? I believe that we need to focus on youth and young adult ministry, especially in light of the ending of Youth Encounter. We need to provide a national youth and young adult gathering and offer it during Lutheran Week. The timing is critical as it will likely keep costs down for everyone involved. In the Mid-Northeast Mission District, we have now had five consecutive summer youth camps and have expanded our facilities and our programming at Camp In-Tents. It is my hope that more mission districts will also be able to build their youth ministry offerings and that mission districts will be able to share in their resources with those who are more limited.

In addition, I see campus ministry as an untapped opportunity thus far for the NALC and this should be something we begin to explore intentionally and regionally. It is something that can, and should be, a local/mission district focus in addition to being supported by the church body as a whole.

It is imperative that we continue to support and build on our seminary education so that we have trained pastors to lead our congregations and laity equipped and trained for Gospel work. We must support the seminary itself and its leadership and we must continue to find innovative ways to support those studying at the seminary. Thus far, great strides have been made, both financially and in other ways (such as online course offerings and tuition scholarships) and it's important to continue with this momentum and look at other ways to support and expand.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? Discipleship needs to be a primary focus at every level within our church body as it will, and should, undergird all else in the worshiping community. As congregations, we are worshiping communities and as a church body, we are a worshiping community. Disciple-making does not occur in isolation. It occurs in one-on-one mentoring, in small groups, and in larger groups. It is woven together throughout the entire Body of Christ. To that end, some tangible actions may include workshops and planning for pastors, congregational leaders, and laity in the pews on the subject of a culture of discipleship. A paradigm shift never happens overnight. We must be intentional about the training, the biblical foundation, the vision and the step-by-step process. Too often, we find something useful and we implement it in isolation. This rarely works to change mindsets as it is being implemented in isolation with no follow-through. A step-by-step process

to build that culture of discipleship, to make spiritually mature followers of Christ, is critical to change the culture. That plan must be in place, with goals and objectives, prior to implementing any activities and actions. It takes patience, lots of it. Change like this doesn't take a few years. This type of paradigm shift will likely take at least one generation, maybe two.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. God is woven throughout my day. He is always with me and I feel His presence as I begin my day (most days, it's a work in progress) with prayer which carries me throughout the day. I turn to Him at various times, to rejoice and to lament, as He carries me to the evening. I pray that He will keep me safe from all the evil forces so that I may awake anew in Christ. Through our congregation's "faith conversations" initiative, I've become more intentional about sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 NIV).

This reminds me of the reassurance that Jesus loved me so much that He went to the cross for me. He lives in me; I am dead, but I am alive in the Body.

MS. ROSEMARY JOHNSON

Conrath, Wisconsin



Congregational Membership: Hope Lutheran Church (Ladysmith, Wisconsin)

Occupation: CFO/HR Corp Secretary of small custom cabinetry manufacturer

Basic Biographical Information: This year I will be married to my college sweetheart for 48 years. Our daughter teaches at a Catholic high school and coaches girls' basketball. Our son is a corrections officer at a Wisconsin facility. We have six grandchildren. I attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls a long time ago. I enjoy reading about World War II, the history of the United States and Christian history. I like to be outside — biking, walking, gardening and enjoying nature. I also am learning to enjoy cowboy poetry and music.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position: Ever since I joined Hope Lutheran Church over 35 years ago, I've been involved in my church's life. I've been and am currently chair of Adult Education and Fellowship and on council. Previously, as a council secretary, I participated in calling a pastor and also in

transferring membership from the ELCA to NALC. I've helped revise the constitution, build an addition, taught Sunday school, served on Evangelism and facilitated two Alpha classes and other adult education classes. Since being elected in 2015 to the NALC Executive Council, I've been on the Election of a Bishop and Personnel Committees. I appreciate being a part of the work being done to support the vision and mission of the NALC and its pastors.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? God has blessed me with administration and organizational skills, perseverance, patience, a good work ethic and I hope, humility. I have experience in negotiations, business, finance and human resource issues. I have a passion for defending the unborn and all life. God has given me opportunities to do His work by being on a public school board, our local Care Net Pregnancy Resource Center board and Thrivent board over the years. He has blessed me with abundant love and I am ever aware of this grace and mercy.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? The three largest challenges I see over the next few years are balancing the lean administrative structure with our congregational growth, guiding people into the ministry and getting the message of our Core Values out to congregations and communities. I've seen upfront at NALC Executive Council meetings that steps are being taken through leadership to address these on-going challenges. Additional challenges are staying true to the Word, to support and strengthen the community of believers, and to figure out ways to reach out and teach Jesus' love and redemption to all who don't know Him.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? We have been called by Christ to make disciples. I hope and pray that is our priority and we continue to focus on strengthening this call of mission. May our church body be the light that guides others to His redemption and love.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? One is to equip and empower lay people to speak out and build relationships with non-believers, to defend the truth and to show compassion for all. Another is to encourage youth and adults into ministry and to help with the costs of seminary. A third is to provide support for our new ministers through mentoring and fellowship.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? We've seen how the NALC Disaster Response has drawn folks together for a common good. As we get to know each other more (within mission districts, common geographical areas and on the national level) I believe we'll figure out other needs where we can band together to show Christ's love and our commitment to be a Mission-Driven church.

The tangible actions are to meet with each other, to listen to God's calling and to act.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Back in 2015, I wrote these words and they are even more true now: "God is in everything and is everywhere. I pray. I have verses posted all around. I listen to Christian music and talk radio even at work. I read the Bible and daily devotions. He gives me peace. He forgives me. He made me for a purpose. He's always been there since I was a little kid. I do the best I can because all I do is for Him. Then I mess up and he's right there to clean me up and start forward. I love that He loves me."

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God!" It sets me back on the right path when I get too busy and am not listening to the quiet and seeing the beauty around me. This verse grounds me. Years ago when my mother was in a nursing home and it was getting toward the end of her life here, I would take her in her wheelchair down to a glassed-in room that faced the river. It was winter time – cold outside but the sun shone. We would sit side-by-side for hours – not saying a word – just being still. God loves us – we don't have to do anything or be anyone "important", we just need to believe and trust in Him.

MR. SCOTT KRAMER

Boerne, Texas



Congregational Membership: St. John Lutheran Church (Boerne, Texas)

Occupation: Retired

Basic Biographical Information: Scott and his wife Diane have been married for 45 years; they have two daughters and two grandchildren, all members of St John Lutheran in Boerne, Texas. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering and an M.B.A. His hobbies are model railroading and running marathons.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position: Scott is a lifelong Lutheran. He grew up in the Lutheran church of his ancestors. Since then, he and his wife have been members of seven Lutheran churches in five states. They have served in urban, suburban, small town and rural settings. They have witnessed the long-term results of decisions made decades before. Scott has served as president, vice president and member of call, mission, endowment, administration and property committees.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? Scott has been blessed with a gift for strategic thinking, leading teams and innovation. From

his childhood, he has witnessed how the church's long-term planning has borne good fruit, the direct result of patient strategic thinking. He has been blessed with many experiences in leading teams, enabling groups to far exceed the results of their individual contributions. And he has been a change agent to stimulate creativity and innovation.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? We in the NALC are faced with headwinds caused by societal trends. One is a negative perception of denominational churches. Another is a political climate that devalues religious institutions or is openly hostile toward them. Yet another is a trend away from volunteering, making a commitment to serve others. Finally, most of our Lutheran churches are located in the geographies of lower population growth.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? My hope and prayer is that the NALC can feed and nourish our people with the Gospel, that we are well known for preaching and teaching the Scriptures. At the same time, I pray that the NALC can bolster outreach to those high growth areas of the world, spreading the Good News to all nations. By tending our solid foundation in North America, we can strongly project the Gospel abroad and change many lives.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? The NALC should put a priority on making and growing disciples in our existing churches. Churches should provide tools for every individual to move forward on the discipleship path. The NALC should also provide tools and resources to change lives abroad, such as water wells, schools and churches. And the NALC should have a strong, long-range effort to build the seminary; pastors and teachers are crucial for our future.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? For international missions, the NALC should build on existing relationships in Africa, with personnel and resources to spread the Gospel. We should build on the momentum established in recent years. For discipleship making in member congregations, the NALC should lead a calendar-based Bible study sequence. Let NALC churches be renowned for being Bible based. And conduct intentional, focused fundraising for our seminary; we must be unyielding in our determination to train future pastors.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. I experience God in my Bible study, prayer time and sprinkled throughout my daily life. The Bible is an amazing book; in my seventh decade of reading it, I continue to learn each time I read or hear the words. Prayer is a calming influence in my life, where I am reminded that God remains on the throne. And just to make sure I fully understand, He touches me with "coincidences" in my daily life.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV) – “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” I recently finished my 40th marathon. A marathon is a very tough athletic challenge, but one which teaches many life lessons. Tenacity, endurance, preparation, focus under pressure. Since God has given us these many talents, we must use them to finish the race.

NOMINEES FOR COURT OF ADJUDICATION

THE REV. JENNIFER GOLD

Helotes, Texas



Congregational Membership: St. John Lutheran Church (Boerne, Texas)

Occupation: Pastor and Director of Commission Expeditions

Basic Biographical Information: I have been married to Chris for 22 years. We have two boys, Zachary and Zane. I graduated from Texas Lutheran University and Trinity Lutheran Seminary. I served as pastor at Zion Lutheran, San Antonio for nine years before God called me into international missions.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position: I have 10 years of family systems classes. I assisted a previous bishop in settling congregation/pastor disputes by conducting interviews and providing counsel. I was trained as a healthy congregations consultant and led workshops with church leaders. The congregation I served in as pastor was healthy. All of these experiences have prepared me to serve on the court of adjudication should I be elected. I have a desire to help pastors and churches become healthy.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? My spiritual gifts include faith, words of wisdom, leadership, counsel, understanding, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Skills God has given me to bless this ministry include a pastoral heart, listening, a challenger, ability to see both the big picture and details, training in family systems theory and pastoral skills and leadership.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? The election of a new bishop will bring joy and challenge. In leadership transitions, a “system” will get anxious because of change, which is normal. But with new leadership comes new ideas and opportunities that some will welcome, others will not. It will be important for us to stay focused on our mission/vision – to stay focused on our identity in Christ in order to embrace the challenge and opportunities we have before us!

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? I hope we, the NALC, will continue to be a Mission-Driven church. I hope we will continue to be a disciple-making church. I hope we will continue to stay grounded in the Word of God. I hope we will continue to grow in faith and in disciples within our churches. And I hope that churches will begin to see themselves as mission centers sending out missionaries instead of growing in members.

What should be the NALC’s most important ministry priorities over the next few years?

Our priorities should include continuing to develop and put into practical application within every congregation the discipleship initiative that’s already been started. We should continue to ignite local and international mission initiatives and as part of that develop a strategy for existing churches to plant new churches where NALC churches do not yet exist in the United States and around the world.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

Local congregations can take the initiative to create a discipleship and discipling culture within their churches. Local churches can help disciples to become regularly engaged in the Word of God. Local churches working in partnership with mission districts and the NALC can be challenged to plant churches, and raise up and train pastors and lay leaders to lead those churches.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life.

I engage in the Word daily and experience God come alive jumping off the pages into real life. I’ve been asked by unreached people who practice witchcraft/cannibalism “how can I be born again?” I have been compelled by the Spirit to take risks to share the Gospel, witnessed healing miracles, seen visions/dreams from the Lord, and so much more that I have been completely changed by the power of God active in my daily life/ministry.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you.

A verse I memorized from confirmation is my favorite: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9 NIV). Fear once held me back, but God used this to encourage me to not be afraid. Now the Lord empowers me to be “strong and courageous.” This verse compels me to take risks for Him.

THE REV. LESLIE HAINES, STS

Fort Wayne, Indiana



Congregational Membership: St. John’s Lutheran Church, Lake Township (Fort Wayne, Indiana)

Occupation: Chaplain, Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries, Inc. Executive Director

Basic Biographical Information: I am single, with two cats and two dogs. Education includes; A.A. in Music, B.A. Criminal Justice, graduated with M.A. from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. I served 33 years in the Army (MP). My hobbies include creating

period specific military miniatures (WWI), and studying both military history and British history.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

In my role as a pastoral counselor I work with veterans and their family members who have unique challenges and experiences well outside that of most civilians. When dealing with sometimes very troubling moral issues I have to get down to the root cause of what is going on, and challenge, educate with a goal of bringing repentance, and reconciliation to the offender and those offended.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I believe my particular gifts and talents are spiritual discernment and the ability to look at issues from all perspectives. With that I look at problems with the view to finding a solution or resolution when possible. I work well with conflict resolution.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? One of the biggest and most divisive challenges we must address is deciding whether we are truly a Lutheran confessional body regarding what we teach and believe. With that, we have to address the issue of pastoral standards both educationally, and doctrinally including those already ordained pastors who come from different church traditions. Accountability for what we teach and believe can not occur until these issues are decisively addressed.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? Many people in the church tend to define the word mission with leaving the country to go to some third-world country all the while ignoring what is next door to them. My prayer is that before we lose another mission start or congregation that the larger church would seek to find ways to assist, invest, nurture and strengthen the churches we currently have. This is not to say we should not go to third-world countries, but we need to look closely at how our missions are planned.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? The priorities include: deciding whether we are truly a Lutheran confessional body in what we teach and believe. Address the issue of pastoral standards both educationally, and doctrinally including those already ordained pastors who come from different church traditions. Strengthen our churches so that they will be effective in their mission outreach. We need to also encourage and strengthen our relationships with church bodies we are in pulpit/altar fellowship with.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

The NALC needs to review the amount of necessary versus costly unnecessary internal and overseas travel as well be better stewards of our resources. Before we add another layer of bureaucracy by adding “regional deans” we need to first allow deans some authority over the churches in their mission district. If we are going to add regional deans, then they need to be elected by the deans – not appointed from the top. Pastors must be faithful to the tenets of our faith, and held accountable for doing so.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. As a counselor I see God’s activity in the lives of those I work with. I see Him in the ministry opportunities He gives me and my staff serving Him as we care for those we are called to minister to. I’ve seen Him take some of the seemingly most hopeless cases, and completely turn them around. I feel His presence even during my toughest days.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. Psalm 23:4. This psalm has been an inspiration, comfort and promise for me that has strengthened me in combat, and during life’s most challenging moments. I wore a dog tag inscribed: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (KJV).

THE REV. MARTY RAMEY

Dallas, North Carolina



Congregational Membership: Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
(Gastonia, North Carolina)

Occupation: Interim Minister

Basic Biographical Information: Married 23 years, husband Marion, retired/disability; daughter Tricia has two children: Jared 16 and Abby 14; son Mike and wife Courtney have two daughters: Makenzi 9 and Addisyn 2; daughter Brynn single. I earned B.S. in

Microbiology from Purdue University, M.Div. Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. Completed Clinical Pastoral Education Residency for Chaplaincy at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, NC.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position: Certified intentional interim minister, Centers for Congregational Health, Winston-Salem, North Carolina; served several congregations in conflict, currently serving as intentional interim minister at Grace Lutheran Church, Clemmons, North Carolina. Served as chaplain at Lutheran Homes in Hickory three years, chaplain at Hospice of Lincoln County three years, working with families in conflict and crisis.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? Gift of

discernment of underlying issues in conflict, patience and compassion in working with those in crisis, insight into how God can work in crisis to effect spiritual growth in individuals and congregations.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? Continuing focus on mission, not falling back into patterns of behavior from predecessor churches that inhibit outreach and evangelism.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? Increasing commitment to growth in discipleship, both lay and clergy, to help develop deeper spiritual understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? Support for mission congregations and encouragement of new starts. Encourage individuals and congregations to prioritize commitment to Jesus as primary reason for outreach, not numbers or budgets. Let's bring in new Christians and reach out to those who have fallen away.

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church? Offer one to two day retreats with Christ as center. Encourage congregations to institute or continue small group Bible studies and one-on-one relationships that are centered on God's word.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. Daily devotions with meditation and contemplative prayer, during walks as part of exercise regime. Relationships with family and congregation provide frequent reminders of how God is present with us through the love we share with others. I feel very blessed in my family and church family to receive continuing encouragement and affirmation on a daily basis.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. Romans 5:1-5. Having had a goodly share of suffering in my life, I am able to see how God strengthened my faith through that suffering; how He used it to produce hope in times that seemed hopeless; and in how many ways God's love has been poured into my heart through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Like St. Paul, I have learned how to rejoice in all circumstances. Even our darkest despair can bring us to new spiritual awareness of the goodness of God and the magnitude of His love for us in giving His Son to die for us so that He might rise victorious over sin, death and the devil. And living in the way God calls us to live is the most important outcome of realizing the depths of His love. I thank God every day for the grace so freely given and the faith so lovingly nurtured.

MR. ALLYN RAY RUB

Llano, Texas



Congregational Membership: St. James Lutheran Church (Llano, Texas)

Occupation: Retired Police Officer

Basic Biographical Information: Spouse: Carla Kay Strand Rub. Daughters: Ashlee Rub (West Texas A&M University) and Geraldine Rub (Central Texas College). Education: Texas A&M University Central Texas, B.S.: Political Science with social studies (grades 7-12) certification. I enjoy spending my spare time serving where ever needed at the church.

Experience within the Body of Christ that has prepared you for service in this position:

My experience within the Body of Christ includes service on our church council (president, secretary, building maintenance), assisting minister/liturgist, and Sunday school teacher.

What spiritual gifts and skills has God given you to bless this ministry? I have been told that I have a gentle and calming spirit. I feel a constant urge to teach and spread God's love. I find the most joy in my life serving and helping others. I have a strong faith and I encourage others to possess the same.

What challenges do you see facing the NALC over the next few years? I see the same challenges facing the NALC that the Church of Christ has endured from the beginning of time, persecution. Those who oppose God and His teachings will continue to persecute the Church and its followers. Sinful nature will never stop seducing and gathering followers. The Church must remain strong in the Spirit and faithful to the teachings of Christ.

What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC over the next few years? My hope is that the mission of the NALC will continue to be blessed with growth as it continues to spread God's Word around the world. I would like for the NALC to remain Christ Centered but to continue its outreach to the faithful around the world.

What should be the NALC's most important ministry priorities over the next few years? We should be our brothers' keeper. We who are spiritual should be watchful and mindful of those who are caught by evil. To combat the evilness that surrounds us we need to work hard on spreading the love of Christ to everyone. Forgive others and love one another as He so loved us. Let's really focus on doing what we can to love, help and support all of God's children. "Let us do good to all people, especially to those who

belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10 NIV).

What tangible actions can the NALC, its mission districts and its member congregations take to live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church?

To live out our commitment to be a Christ-Centered and Mission-Driven church, we should be a truly evangelistic church. Christ was an evangelist. He reached out and touched 12 souls before spreading His love to others. He commanded His mission not only be carried out by the first twelve but also everyone else who confesses to be His follower. We need to focus on His teachings and love and spread these to others. This could be as simple as just talking to others about Christ and His love.

Describe how you experience God active in your daily life. I experience God in my daily life through prayer and meditation. I see God and His purpose in the students I teach. When I feel like things are not going right, my wife reminds me, God is in control and He will take care of us. I feel God pulling at me when I am at church. God is the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing when I go to sleep.

List a favorite Scripture verse and tell why it has meaning for you. “I know the plans I have for you’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV). When I retired, I felt lost and did not know what to do. My wife pointed me to this Scripture and it has been guiding me daily ever since.