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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior! You might notice that this edition of The Evangel is different than previous ones. For one, it's quite a bit longer. My initial intention was to release a special Conference edition of The Evangel, specifically about the conferences and meetings that our pastors have participated in over the last year. It ended up being a little too short to release as a separate magazine. Because I wanted to get this to all of you before our National Convention, I decided to make an extended June/July magazine with a section for those conference articles. Secondly, our normal layout editor, Lynette, is getting married! For this reason, we gave her a little break. That explains why things look a little different this time around.

There are a few different themes running throughout this edition of The Evangel that I hope you notice. One is the feast day and the season of Pentecost. As we approach this season, I pray you will take to heart how the information you read here about the church calendar can inform and encourage our daily faith. Not only is the celebration of Pentecost historic, and based in Scripture, but it is also a daily reality in the life of the Christian: we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, and through baptism, and by His power we are given new hearts, and new affections. Paul goes as far to say that we are made new creations! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Secondly, you will read about how those in our churches have been discipling people. Let these stories and ideas of what other AALC congregations are doing to encourage and promote people in their communities be an encouragement to you as well. Let us be emboldened by the words in great commission: "Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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 things I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" Amen. (Matt 28:18-20, MEV)

In Christ,
Lisa Cooper

PENTECOST

A NEW KIND OF HARVEST

By the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed (Deut. 16:16).

In the Book of Deuteronomy, it is recorded that God required three pilgrimage festivals. The first was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We know this festival as Passover. It was God's will that the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus would take place during the observance of Passover. The second festival was the Feast of Weeks. It took place 50 days later (a week of weeks). God ordained that the Christian festival of Pentecost would correspond with the Feast of Weeks. The final festival was called the Feast of Booths. It took place at the end of the harvest season. Our Thanksgiving celebration, or the German Erntedankfest, corresponds with this autumn harvest celebration.

On Sunday, May 15, 2016, we celebrate the Christian festival of Pentecost. This is a glorious day of celebration for the Christian Church. But, you may not have known that it was the Jewish Feast of Weeks long before it was celebrated as the Christian Pentecost. Perhaps, if we understand why the Jews first observed the Feast of Weeks, our own Christian festival will gain even greater significance.

The Feast of Weeks was a celebration of the harvest. The Law commanded that a freewill cereal offering be made in the form of two loaves of bread (Lev. 23:17). The Law also commanded that all persons should rejoice: men and women, sons and daughters, servants and masters, foreigners and mourners (Deut. 16:11). On this day, there was to be no work for anyone.



By the time of the first century A.D., the Feast of Weeks (Shabuot), had begun to include another element of celebration, the commemoration of God's gift of the Ten Commandments. On Sinai, God had revealed His glory to Moses and His chosen people. Through the Law, which He had engraved with His own finger, He joined Himself to the people in covenant. Shabuot worship included the reading of the Commandments. Also, it included reading the Book of Ruth, the story of the Moabitess. This story was chosen not only because it took place during the time of the harvest, but especially because it emphasized God's blessing upon all the nations. Ruth, the foreigner, became the great-grandmother of King David. God's message was a word of grace for all people, Jew and Gentile alike.

We can scarcely imagine the fervor and excitement of God's people during the Feast of Weeks. This is true especially in David's City, Jerusalem. Servants and masters, men and women, Levites and foreigners, all were freed from work and commanded to make pilgrimage to keep the feast. God's people, recipients of God's covenants and Commandments, were feasting on the harvest of God's land! The account of

the Acts of the Apostles sets just such a scene for the location of Simon Peter's first Christian sermon and the birth of the Christian Church (Acts 2:5-11).

For the young Christian community, the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit was the perfect fulfillment of the Jewish Feast of Weeks. Before, God had shown forth His glory in a burning bush; now tongues of holy fire rested on the disciples themselves. Before, God had engraved His Law on tablets of stone; now the Law of God was written by the Holy Spirit on hearts of flesh. Before, God's people had gathered to praise God for the ingathering of new grain; now the infant Church rejoiced in the harvest of new believers from every corner of the world. Before, God had commanded that they offer loaves of bread in their thanksgiving; now God commanded that they take a loaf and a cup and by faith and the holy Word, receive the true body and true blood of their Savior Jesus Christ.

"Before, God had engraved
His Law on tablets of Stone;
Now the Law of God was
written on hearts of flesh."

The Feast of Weeks was composed of several important ingredients: a fiery bush, Commandments of stone, a spring harvest, two loaves, and a multi-cultural anniversary. But, 50 days after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God transformed the ancient observance into a miraculous, new celebration. The one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church was born of tongues of fire, heart-felt commandments, the body and blood of Christ, and a sermon that yielded a harvest of faith in the lives of people from around the world! The new believers were so excited that some people thought that they were drunk. Through laughter and joy they explained that this was just as God had promised. God has poured out His Spirit upon all humankind. "And it shall be that everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Happy Pentecost!
Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins
Presiding Pastor of the AALC



This Pentecost Icon is a Russian image from 1497 and is in the public domain.





MY FATHER'S HOUSE MINISTRY

“WHOEVER IS GENEROUS TO THE POOR LENDS TO THE LORD, AND HE WILL REPAY HIM FOR HIS DEED.” PROVERBS 19:17

No other nation on earth had a God like Israel's, who identified Himself with the widow (in a male dominated world) the poor (instead of the rich), and even the alien in our midst. Some 20 years ago, the Holy Spirit led a slumlord and his wife, Tom and Shirley Daniel, to move from their comfortable home in the suburbs into one of their old downtown units in Phoenix, in order to serve their neighbors. Eventually this led to a vibrant street ministry, in which many churches, including our own, joined in. Before they retired, the Daniels gave their business away to the ministry, known today as MY FATHER'S HOUSE. Each week hundreds of men, women and children receive water bottles, food, clothing, Biblical instruction, and love. It is a place of constant prayer and encouragement. Most of the ministry takes place in a tent, but dozens of volunteers bring warm food and caring hearts each week. One of our church Elders, Joe Ebel, leads our ministry team. Because of his enthusiasm, fellow workers from his jobsite have been drawn to help us, and they keep coming back! One of them, Akemi Smith, recently also joined our congregation, along with her husband and three teenagers. They are a powerful encouragement to us! Just this year, funds were raised to demolish useless old buildings at MFH, and we seek your prayers as our ministry board seeks to build on this quarter acre of prime real estate.



Dr. James Hoefler,
Living Christ Fellowship

Pictures provided by Dr. James Hoefler

PENTECOST: THE REVERSAL OF BABEL

BY THE REV. JORDAN COOPER

We recently came to the end of the Easter season, as we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. Through his resurrection, Christ conquered sin, death, and hell on our behalf. Yet, God's work did not end there. After his resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven, and following his departure from the disciples, God sent his Holy Spirit to guide the church and spread the gospel unto all nations. This sending of the Holy Spirit is what we celebrate during Pentecost.

One of the most famous stories in the Old Testament is the narrative of the Tower of Babel. In Genesis 11, not long after the flood, those who were on the earth continued to rebel against God. The people gathered together to build a tower so that they might "make a name for themselves" (Gen. 11:4). They were not concerned with the glory and worship of their Creator, but with the honor of their own names. Following this act of sin, God divided the nations against one another by causing men to speak in various languages. This stopped the cooperation of sinful people in scheming against God. Sin, along with its many other damaging effects, causes division.

The story of Pentecost is the reversal of the story of Babel. In the Genesis text, we are told about the division that is caused by sin. In Pentecost, we see the unity that is caused by the gospel. Pentecost was one of the great festivals of the Jewish church year, and at this particular point in the first century, Jews who lived in many different nations gathered together in Jerusalem to celebrate with one another. Even though they shared a common heritage and faith, these people did not all speak with one

common language, just as Christians around the world today speak in many different languages. God awaited this time so that he might send the Holy Spirit while many people were gathered together.

While the people congregated, the Holy Spirit suddenly came down upon them. We are told that he made the sound of a rushing wind as he entered the place where these faithful Jews were, and he showed himself through fire that appeared over the heads of those gathered. At this point, the Jews probably recognized that this was not going to be just any ordinary Pentecost celebration. The greatest miracle was about to happen. The disciples began proclaiming the gospel, and when doing so, everyone heard the message in their own language. God was beginning to overcome this division that had been caused by sin, through bringing people of all languages together, and giving them an understanding of the Apostles' message about Jesus.



Pentecost is the reverse Babel. Through the sin of mankind, God punished us by dividing our languages. Through the gospel, God, by his grace, brings unity by bringing people together from all tribes, tongues, and nations. Because of the Holy Spirit, we have unity. God brings unity to people of all different backgrounds, ethnicities, languages, ages, and cultures. Whatever our other differences might be, we are all one in the family of Christ.

Renewal-Discipleship-Commitment

By the Rev. Rich Shields



As a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, Who is the Head of the Church, you have been granted great and precious promises, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of everlasting life in heaven. This means more, however, than attending worship services occasionally. As a member of the Body of Christ, you are a branch grafted into the Vine, Jesus Christ. Your life and health are tied to Him.

We as Christians have agreed to walk together in faith. We support, encourage, exhort, and rebuke one another — always in love. We also seek together to do the will of our heavenly Father. The primary task of the Church is to make disciples. That can be done only through a Word and Sacrament ministry (see Matthew 28:18-20). Every Christian is to be involved in the disciple-making process. God gives us the vision, the resources, and the strength for this most important work:

Regular Worship and Study of God's Word:

Worship is a precious privilege and responsibility. In worship, God comes to us through His Word and through the body and blood of His Son in the Lord's Supper. We respond by praising His Name, giving Him thanks for what He has done, singing praises to Him, and offering ourselves and our resources to Him and His people. Thus, worship is a vertical relationship between God and you. But worship involves the horizontal dimension—between you and other Christians. Your praise and worship follow the examples of saints from all generations. By your presence at worship you encourage your fellow Christians to be faithful in this vital area.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

John 8:47 [Jesus said:] "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

Luke 11:28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Regular Communion:

The Sacrament of the Altar (Lord's Supper) is a priceless gift from God. Through the body and blood of Jesus Christ the repentant sinner receives forgiveness of sins. The Supper builds and strengthens the believer's faith. Attendance at the Lord's Supper is a good spiritual barometer of your spiritual life. Disregard of the Lord's Supper is a sure sign of spiritual decay. Although Jesus did not say how often we should receive the Sacrament, He did say "often." As the Lord feeds us, He draws us to a closer relationship with Him and with one another.

Matthew 26:26-28 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. " For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

Regular Giving:

True stewardship is hard to find today. We are bombarded by abuses on all sides. People give according to law—the church's, the leaders', their own, the church budget—and the Church seems to financially be drained. This leads to long-term problems for the Lord's work. BUT Christian giving must be based on the Gospel—what Jesus has done for us. Therefore, giving results from our relationship with God. The Christian recognizes that everything is the Lord's, giving is first fruits, giving is done regularly, and giving is according to God's riches and His blessings.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Regular Prayer:

Throughout the Old and New Testaments we read of God's commands and His desire that all believers should pray, in fact, pray without ceasing. The number of prayer petitions can be as large as 5.6 billion! Pray for yourself, your family, congregational members, churches in our area, pastors and churches in our church body, missionaries, chaplains, children, parents, teachers, nurses, doctors... I think you get the idea.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Matthew 7:7-8 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."



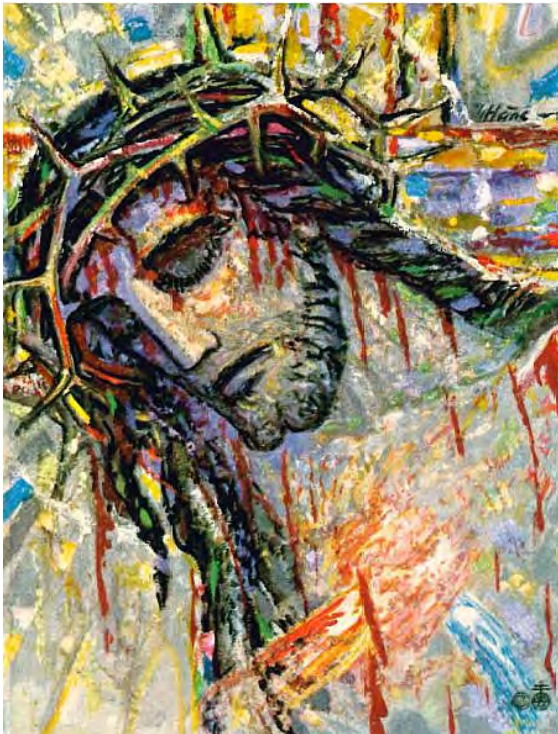
Regular Use Of Spiritual Gifts:

Many seem to think that speaking of spiritual gifts is almost “un-Lutheran.” Nothing could be further from the truth. According to Peter’s first letter every Christian is a priest. The Reformation was founded on that principle. Paul adds that every Christian is gifted by the Holy Spirit to carry out the ministry of the priesthood of all believers. Not all have the same gifts, nor are all of us in competition to see who has the more noticeable gift. God gives the gifts for us Christians to use—to bring honor to His Name, to expand the Church, and to build and strengthen those already in the Church. Your gifts and giftedness are vital to the Church!

Romans 12:4-6 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

1 Peter 4:10-11 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.



Our Challenge: Note well that the above paragraphs can be threatening and unnerving—or they can be signs of God’s patient leading of His people to full maturity in the faith. As we mature in the faith, we also reproduce other disciples, bringing others with us. God called us that we as Christians share the Gospel one-on-one, as well as during the formal gathering together on Sundays.

Our walk of faith looks like this: Jesus Christ redeems, guides, encourages, and loves people, sinful people, like you and me. We who have received from God have something great to share with others who do not know or have not experienced that love.

A great task, a great responsibility, a great promise, a great privilege!

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BIBLE PRESENTATION

ANOTHER FAITH MILESTONE

By Shanda Knight
Photographs by Mark Halberg

ASCENSION LUTHERAN
WATERLOO, IA

Baptism... It is a precious time, often filled with lots of excitement of the cute little baby, the darling little gown, dress, or suit, the sponsors, the family, the service, the pictures.... The promise.

Yes, baptism is about a promise God makes to us, however, before baptism, the parents are asked to make some very important promises as well.

The pastor asks the parents and sponsors some pretty poignant questions before he baptizes the baby. I remember the great responsibility I felt when Pastor Brokenshire spoke them to my husband and I and our daughter's sponsors "You should, therefore, faithfully bring them to the services of God's house, and teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments.

As they grow in years, you should place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith, that living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the Church, they may lead godly lives until the day of Jesus Christ. Do you promise to uphold these promises?" And we answered "I do." Those words—they carry weight. It is our promise to God. We all want to do our best by the help of God.

As a parent, how do we nurture faith in our children? We bring them to worship. We read the Bible at home. We bring them to Sunday School, or AWANA, or youth group. But it is intentional.

We talk about the Bible and spiritual topics as we walk through life. We teach the Bible. We worship together. It is intentional.

It doesn't just "happen." Life gets busy. I heard it said: if we don't teach our children to follow Christ, the world will teach them not to. But how?

In 1989, Ascension Lutheran, Waterloo, Iowa, began a program to walk alongside parents in keeping their promises of baptism and it continues today. When a child enters third grade, part of their Sunday School is what has been titled "Bible Presentation." They memorize, recite, and complete a workbook that helps them understand items such as baptism, communion, and important terms in the Bible.

When the child begins Bible Presentation, they receive a binder with a workbook, a list of memory work, Luther's Small Catechism, and a small banner. The banner has velcro arrows for them to attach as they pass each section of memory to keep them motivated and seeing progress tangibly.

Here is what the children complete:

- * A workbook with faith questions to work through at home with their parents. It includes questions where they find answers both in scripture as well as Luther's Small Catechism.
- * Memorize The Lord's Prayer
- * Memorize the Ten Commandments
- * Memorize the Books of the Old and New Testaments
- * Memorize Matthew 28:18-19, teaching about baptism
- * Memorize 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, teaching about communion
- * Memorize John 3:16 and Philippians 4:13
- * Memorize three additional Bible verses of their choice.

This basic memory work and the workbook intermingled give our parents an aid in working with their children, teaching them to understand and use the Bible at a very age-appropriate level.

This is a self-paced program, however, once all the students in the class have completed their work, the class stands before our congregation and recites all they have learned. Then, our pastor places a Bible in the hands of the parents who then, in turn, present it to the child in the front of church. It is a special day - a milestone day - a day the children look forward to and are excited to receive their very own Bible with their name inscribed on the front.

This is not an end of the teaching in the home of scripture. This is another milestone, a milestone where children are now encouraged to bring their own Bibles to church and use them at home as well, to grow in faith and keep learning from Scripture, even as they are being taught by their parents, pastors and Sunday School teachers.



I am thankful for Ascension and their commitment to walking alongside families to raise our children in the Lord. I wanted to share this program to encourage other congregations to reach out similarly. Some parents grew up in the church and had great examples at home teaching them in faith, others are newer to faith, and need the church to walk alongside and help them keep those very precious baptismal promises.

What kind of ministries are working in your congregation? I love to hear ideas that are working elsewhere and ponder if they can enhance the ministry here. Please share in the Evangel! If you'd like more details about Bible Presentation, please contact our church - we would be glad to share. May God bless the ministries of your churches.

Shanda Knight

Ascension Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA



I AM THE DOOR

Pastor Dean R Johansen

Typically when people speak of this passage in John 10 (or similar "I AM" passages) they point out that Jesus didn't mean to say that He is a literal door. They are correct as Jesus doesn't speak of Himself as a "literal" physical door. How do we know that? Physical doors are finite. They have a limited scope and function. Any door opens from one space to another space; but a door never opens from all spaces to all spaces. That would be nonsense because doors cannot do that. As I mentioned physical doors are finite. Wood doors can be burned; metal doors melt. So any door that is a physical door; made of material can be destroyed. Literal doors are finite in function and durability; that is limited to space and time.

This applies to people as well. If I were to say as a "pastor" that I function in providing a doorway for "worship" for the congregation, that would be accurate. Yet, it would be so in a finite way as to function, and again to durability. I am not infinite as is Christ. My function as pastor is for a time and place because I am limited. I'm also limited as to durability or endurance, for one day I will die. Therefore, I as pastor will pass on to be pastor no more.

**"ALL ARE WELCOME
AS HE DIED ONCE FOR ALL, FOR ALL SIN."**

Let's go back to where people say that Jesus didn't consider Himself a literal, or real door. If He had we would consider Him mentally unbalanced to say the least. People are not physical doors. The claim is that since Jesus didn't consider Himself a "real"; that is a physical door He was using a metaphor to explain who He is. Therefore, Jesus is comparing Himself to a real door. I understand the reasoning but disagree Jesus made Himself a metaphor for a door.

Metaphor - 1. "A figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity." 2. "Language used in a figurative or nonliteral sense." (Both definitions taken from vocabulary.com)

"I Am The Door of the Sheep." (John 10) Of course we are not literal physical sheep in that we walk around eating grass and saying, "Bah Ram Ewe". We never claimed to be literal sheep and Jesus Christ never claimed this for us. However, Jesus said, I Am the Door. Unlike a physical door He cannot be destroyed. Unlike a physical door His function is not limited. Every single human being throughout the world may and must go through Jesus. (I say must or He ceases to be, "I Am the Door." He would be "a" door). All are welcome as He died once for all, for all sin. Jesus saying "I Am the Door" does say it metaphorically; but the metaphor lies with the door, not with Jesus. The truth is that the physical, finite, destructible door represents Jesus. It is Jesus who is infinite in purpose



JOHN 10:7

calling for all who will go through Him into the Father's presence. It is Jesus who cannot be destroyed, and for eternity functions as the true door. Apart from truth Jesus is a metaphor for a door. Truthfully, the physical door is a finite, imperfect metaphor for the eternal divine Jesus Christ.

How do we get this wrong? We as human beings because we are physically joined to our five senses; make those senses measure everything around us. Walking by sight not by faith as contrary to scripture. Since we are away from the Lord, "we walk by faith not by sight." (2 Cor 5:7) We trust in His word rather than experience. The physical door is the "real" door. See! I bumped into it last night. The halogen light is the "real" light. That burns! The water we use for washing is "real" dirty water. Yuck! Therein lies the lie. What we perceive with our five senses is elevated to truth; though by faith we know that experiencing a door, light, and water are temporary experiences in time and space. However, God's truth is infinite. His Word shall never pass away. Jesus Christ does not represent a door. The One who says, "I Am the Door" is imperfectly, finitely, illustrated by a literal or real door. The Christ is the true infinite eternal door to God's grace. AMEN



Attribution: John Manuel
(Wikimedia commons)

A BOOK REVIEW

BONHOEFFER**Martyr, Prophet, Spy**

Rev. Robert M. Dennis

A biography of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxis is an outstanding presentation of one of the outstanding churchmen of the 20th century.

Metaxis presents the record of Bonhoeffer's family life as one son among several children of Dr. Karl Bonhoeffer and his wife, Paula. They had one son, Walter, who was killed in WWI, and two sons Deitrich and Klaus who were hanged by Hitler on April 9, 1945 in Germany.

Bonhoeffer received his PhD at age 22. He was a very astute and well educated churchman. In his role as pastor, theologian, and leader in the Confessing Church of Germany, he went down as one who purposefully travelled the road which leads to martyrdom. He had full knowledge that this pathway could definitely lead to death. He did not seek martyrdom, but his commitment to Christ, God's Word, and the true church—the Body of Christ—lead him to his untimely death at age 39 on April 9th, 1945. "He was born for such a time as this." He was God's spokesman against Hitler's rampage of evil against the Jews and non-Jewish Europe, especially Christians who opposed him.

Dr. Bonhoeffer was an Orthodox Lutheran theologian. However, he learned that the church was truly catholic—universal. He spent time teaching at Union Seminary in New York City in '30-'31. He spent time in '34 and '35 in London pastoring two German congregations. It was upsetting for Bonhoeffer to see the German Church being misled by naïve pastors. They had fallen for Hitler's message of reclaiming Germany's position of leadership in Europe as THE nation in Europe with great brilliance and superiority. Hitler was bitter about the Treaty of Versailles from WWI. He and many other Germans were furious about the requirements placed upon Germany.

The primary motivating factor in Bonhoeffer's life was not the Lutheran Confessions, important as they are, but God's Word. He contended that the higher critical method of study tore the Scriptures apart and left them scattered, greatly troubling the student who did not understand that the Bible is the Word of God. He stressed when one reads Scripture they are reading what God said.

Bonhoeffer's life demonstrated the words of Jesus in the Gospels, "If you love me you will do what I say." James also gave the informative statement, which caused Luther to declare James to be "an Epistle of Straw": "Faith without works is dead." (James 2:17). One must do what the Scripture calls us to do, thereby demonstrating that one is truly a disciple of Jesus.

Bonhoeffer is a book, though a biography, that reads like a novel. We get to know Dietrich as he ponders and studies Biblical truths. We see him as he expresses deep love for the Church and Germany. He demonstrated these loves by teaching children in confirmation class, young men in his seminary, and fellow prisoners. They all learned to love and respect this gentle God/Jesus loving man of God called Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

I urge you to read Bonhoeffer. You will discover a Lutheran theologian; you will find a man of very deep faith in Jesus Christ, and a godliness that approaches "unmatched holiness." Even his prison guards did favors for him!

This is a great read. Mr. Metaxis is an outstanding Christian historian and author. He has authored many materials for children. He is also a Yale graduate, and an Episcopalian.

542 pages of reading plus notes, bibliography, etc.

Total 608 pages.

Published by Thomas Nelson Publisher, Nashville,
April 2010—65th Anniversary (4/10/1945) of
Bonhoeffer's Death



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Tartu Academy of Theology

Siimon Haamer

The AALC has seven approved benevolences that we support: **East European Missions Network (EEMN), Evangelical Lutheran Church of The Gambia, Lutheran Church of (an Asian nation), The Sending Place, Paul & Lea in (another Asian nation), Servant Unique Family Ministry, and Tartu Academy of Theology (in Estonia). Individuals and congregations can support these ministries through special gifts to The AALC World Mission Fund.**



Estonia

Located in Eastern Europe

Bordered by Russia from East

Population: 1.3 million

Area: 17,000 sq. miles

Only 16% of the population are religious

The largest denomination is Lutheran with 31,000 members

Suffered for 50 years under Soviet occupation during which time Christians were persecuted

Regained independence in 1991

Tartu Academy of Theology (TAT) was founded in the Autumn of 1992 with the financial support of a group of American pastors who had visited Estonia earlier that year. TAT worked as an independent Christian college until 2013 when it merged with the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Theological Institute. It is now a separate department within the Institute, maintaining the TAT name and identity. As the result of the merger, a single strong Christian college was created to prepare Lutheran pastors, as well as to train Christian lay leaders and specialists to serve as Christian or Pastoral Counselors, Christian Youth Workers, Chaplains, Christian Family Therapists, etc.

Additionally, the merger has provided for better stewardship of gifts, as the two institutions now share both professors and administrative costs, resulting in a more fruitful preparation of pastoral students and church workers at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Already we are experiencing exciting results as enrollments increase and successful accreditation has been achieved.

Mission of TAT

Provides theological education based on the Word of God, in the context of the spiritual inheritance of the Estonian people.
Offers Bible-based education.
Appreciates the Estonian culture.
Values each student's personal relationship with God.
Promotes Interdenominational Christian cooperation.
Instills the ability to apply theoretical knowledge and obtain practical experience.

Key facts

11% of Lutheran church pastors are TAT alumnus.
108 graduates since 1992 (equivalent to 25,000 graduates in US)
130 students (equivalent to a US college with ~ 32,000 students)

Impact on Society

Graduates of TAT are working in a wide range of fields:

Teaching religion and ethics in the public schools
Serving as Ministers in the Estonian Lutheran Church and other denominations
Engaged in Pastoral counseling and chaplaincy in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, Defense Forces etc
Teaching Sunday school in local congregations
Serving as Youth workers in churches, community organizations and local government programs
Working as Writers and producers in Christian and public media

Challenges we are facing today

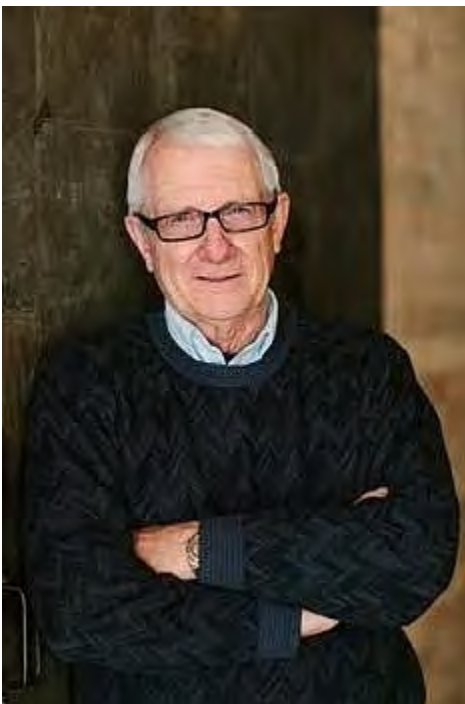
Only 16% of the population say religion is an important part of their daily life.
Only 2.4% of the population are members of Lutheran Church which is biggest church in Estonia.
Church membership is declining each year.
Tuition fees cover only 15% of the budget of TAT. This is because salaries for graduates are very low and students are unable to afford higher tuition rates.
TAT has outgrown its current rented facility and needs to seek a larger space.



Friends and supporters in USA

The bond created 1992 is the reason why we are still connected with the USA these days. Unfortunately, Estonian society is not yet ready to carry the responsibility of financing our school. Sadly, it's due to Estonia being one of the most secular nations in the world. It is also not possible to finance the school only with tuitions because for the professions we offer, the pay grade is quite low, and to expect steep tuition payments from them might prevent them from entering studies altogether.

For over 20 years now, we have partnered with the East European Missions Network (EEMN). Their support has brought others from the USA to assist in prayer, teaching, and financial assistance. Especially important has been connection with pastor Bob Nordvall and his late wife Karen. They became key friends of TAT during their first visit to Estonia in 2006. When Pastor Nordvall joined the EEMN staff in 2010, they became ambassadors for TAT, helping to spread Eenoks vision for TAT and the rebuilding of the Estonian Church.



(Picture: Pastor Bob Nordvall)

Pastor Ove Sander is president of the joint school - Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Theological Institute. He made his master degree at the American Free Lutheran Seminary, located in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, suburb of Medicine Lake.

Leadership today

The school established by Pastor Eenok Haamer as the result of a vision from God and the inheritance of his father is being carried forward today by Eenok's youngest son, Pastor Siimon Haamer, who serves as dean of TAT. One of the first graduates of TAT in 1998, Siimon works tirelessly to continue and expand the work begun by his father. Eenok continues to serve as the spiritual leader of the school, as well as to teach various courses, especially in the field of practical theology.



(Picture: Pastors Siimon and Eenok Haamer)

PRAYERS FOR THE AALC

Composed by the Rev. Myke Main

Prayer of Reflection and Thanksgiving for the Blessings of the Past Year and This Present Season

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, dear Father, is Your mercy and loving-kindness toward us; that You would give Your only-begotten Son to redeem us slaves. For through His precious blood shed for us, You have once and for all set us free from the enslaving power and dominion of sin, making us Your very own. And so we are. Grant that by Your ever-faithful Word and Your ever-present Spirit, we may believe this eternal truth and live as Your redeemed and restored children.

As You have given shepherds to the Church of Your holy Son, Jesus, to teach and nurture those whom You have predestined to embrace this most holy faith, hear this prayer on their behalf and the work You are enabling them to do. Bless our Presiding Pastor - the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, and those who assist him in our national office and on the Executive Committee. Bless also our seminary and its President - the Rev. Confessor Richard Shields, as well as those who assist him in the teaching and formation of our present and future pastors and teachers. Bless our congregations' pastors and church workers, that they may know that their labor in the Lord is not in vain. Enliven, encourage, and empower them all so that the gifts You have bestowed upon them for equipping the saints and building up the body of Christ may be fully engaged to bring Your light and truth to those whom they touch with their respective ministries, having a ripple effect across our congregations, this land, and even beyond our shores.

Where there is division or disharmony, Father, bring the healing power of Your Gospel to mend those wounds. Where there is doubt or fear, bring the faith and courage which come from knowing who You are and whose we are. And, move us daily, so that with our lips as well as our lives, Christ Jesus and His love might be made known for Your glory and the expansion of Your kingdom; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This we pray in the Name of Your Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer Bookmark

JUNE

- 1 Local AALC church**
- 2 AALC Publications Commission**
- 3 Anthony Baio, seminary student**
- 4 American Missions Commission**
- 5 Ailing pastors**
- 6 For the lost**
- 7 Nigel Brown, seminary student**
- 8 Women of LIFE commission**
- 9 Pensions commission**
- 10 Michael Callahan, seminary student**
- 11 Commission on Higher Education**
- 12 Shane Cleminson, seminary student**
- 13 For our Youth**
- 14 Lisa Cooper, seminary student**
- 15 Commission for women**
- 16 Ryan Dexter, seminary student**
- 17 Tom Elder, seminary student**
- 18 AALC Nominating committee**
- 19 For the National Convention**
- 20 Board of appeals and adjudication**
- 21 Michael Giuliani, seminary student**
- 22 AALC Committee for men**
- 23 James Graham, seminary student**
- 24 Protection for those in the military**
- 25 AALC Board of Directors**
- 26 Daniel Hansen, seminary student**
- 27 World Mission Commission**
- 28 Jay Hendricks, seminary student**
- 29 Parish Education Committee**
- 30 Protection for our military**

Prayer Bookmark

JULY

- 1 Abraham McNally, Seminary Student**
- 2 Our nation's leaders**
- 3 Unity in the Church**
- 4 Alexander McNally, Seminary Student**
- 5 Regional Pastors**
- 6 Dave Spotts, Seminary Student**
- 7 John Morley, Seminary Student**
- 8 Your local community**
- 9 Association Council**
- 10 AALC Leadership**
- 11 Scott Neumann, Seminary Student**
- 12 Local AALC church**
- 13 Future of seminary**
- 14 Janet Price, Seminary Student**
- 15 Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations**
- 16 Seminary Professors**
- 17 Regional Chairmen**
- 18 Nathan Rinne, Seminary Student**
- 19 Our national and local mission developers**
- 20 Chris Rosebrough, Seminary Student**
- 21 Charles Sandison, Seminary Student**
- 22 Board of Trustees**
- 23 Michael Stuhr, Seminary Student**
- 24 The Wittenburg Door Ministry**
- 25 Karl Tervo, Seminary Student**
- 26 Clergy Commission**
- 27 Andrew Virkus, Seminary Student**
- 28 Our future Seminary students**
- 29 Commission for Commissioned Church workers**
- 30 Protection for unborn**
- 31 Clergy Commission**

Prayer of Anticipation and Expectation of the Blessings in the Year Ahead as Christ Leads Us

Lord Jesus, though we are beggars and paupers, You have given us confidence to draw near to You, because of Your abundant mercy and Your never-failing love. We trust that You will meet our every need, both in Your Church and in each of our lives. As we continue to sojourn through this new year, we pray that You would enable us to keep our eyes upon You, O Light of the world. We acknowledge You as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Cause our hearts to rest in the assurance that You will keep Your promises to us; so that even in our weakness, we will not doubt that with You as our ever-present Savior and Lord, You will be our strength. When we lack understanding, move us to unhesitatingly turn to You, O Incarnate Word; for You are the wisdom of God. Though we are beggars and paupers, we have these riches of heaven in You, precious Lord.

As we anticipate our AALC Convention in June, stir our hearts to pray for those who are planning and preparing for its events and activities. For You have said, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will act." Grant that by Your grace, our time together in worship and fellowship and the work of the Church may be directed by Your Spirit, bringing peace and unity and every blessing that You intend for Your people, the body of Christ.

Bless those congregations which are in the call process; move them to trust that You have a man for them who, at the proper time, will come to faithfully preach and teach Your Word and minister among them with Your love, O Christ.

Grant us humble hearts which move us to sincere repentance. Where there is disunity and dissension among us, bring forgiveness and understanding through the reconciling power of Your precious Gospel at work in the hearts of those in conflict. Grant us Your peace, O Prince of Peace.

Where Your pastors are stressed and struggling, breathe into them a fresh and energizing breath of Your Spirit. Enable righteousness to prevail in moments of temptation; bring energizing joy to their hearts in those seasons when the evil one would seek to convince them that their labors are in vain.

Draw near to make Your loving will and purpose known to husbands and wives, parents and children. Raise up men who recognize that their highest calling is to lead their families in the truth of godliness and righteousness. Sensitive their hearts to see the importance of Your Word to redirect their priorities and to guide their lives. Shape the hearts of wives to comprehend the significance of respecting their husbands, of praying for them and encouraging them day by day. And, in the busy pace of family life, cause parents to count the cost of their time with their children and of their spiritual impact upon their children, so that they may wisely nurture their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Bind us together, Lord; bind us together, with cords that cannot be broken. Bind us together, Lord; bind us together. Bind us together with Your love. Amen

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Special

CONFERENCE SECTION

INTRODUCTION BY LISA COOPER

Our pastors have been busy furthering their education, finding new ways to bring the Gospel to the nations, and strengthening their bonds of fraternal love and support, and this is what we see happening at these events. Though the main audience of The Evangel is laity, I am confident that through reading, we can be encouraged that our pastors are working to learn and grow in their faith in order to help teach us better. Along with this, some of these conferences are annual, and the laity is invited! If you want to consider attending, or want to listen to the recordings or watch the videos online, the information to do so is provided here.

In anticipation of the 25th General Convention coming up this June 21-24, which is centered around being “Missionally Minded People,” (the theme of the convention), we can appreciate these efforts of our pastors, and we can learn alongside them for the betterment of our local churches, our communities, and our own spiritual lives.



Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

“Be[ing] diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” Ephesians 4:3.

This edition of The Evangel focuses our attention on the many important conferences that were held during the past year. There were at least 10 conferences that I attended, each of which was characterized by an emphasis on the unity of our church body. Admittedly, at the beginning of 2015, we did not plan to have unity as our annual theme. However, in hindsight it is clear that this was the plan of Our Heavenly Father. How wonderful it is to look back and see that Our Lord’s Hand was guiding us each step of the way. How encouraging it is to look forward and know that He will be guiding us each step of the year ahead!

Regional Conventions

Five of our conferences this year were Regional Conventions. During convention, each region is required to take care of a lot of business: budgets are adopted, elections are conducted, and area concerns are presented and addressed. But this year, business took a backseat. The leading item on the agenda was our unity. Before we were even aware of it, God was drawing us together! Pastors and congregations were excited about meeting. Longstanding friendships were rekindled; new friendships were made. There was strong attendance including emeriti, seminary students, and congregational pastors and delegates. Some pastors were unable to attend because of congregational or personal health. They were genuinely missed and remembered with heartfelt prayers.

Several of the conventions reviewed the historic roots of The AALC, recognizing the unity of faith and confession of our predecessor church bodies, even in the midst of their diversity in customs and traditions. Pastors and delegates reaffirmed their unity amidst diversity too. Characteristic of this emphasis was the theme selected by Pr. Nathan Hoff, Outgoing Regional Pastor of the Western Region, “Harmony with one another,” from Romans 15:4-7.

Youth, Staff, and ILC

The Youth Convention was a roaring success, with the largest gathering of AALC youth for many years. Over 300 youth and adults gathered in beautiful Estes Park, Colorado under the banner, “Victory.” The excitement of the presenters and worship leaders was contagious. Significant devotions and discussions added to an already remarkable week. Speaking personally, I had a wonderful time. I was honored to play guitar with the worship band, and was treated to my first experience of crowd surfing! Most exciting of all was to see young people who often had arrived as separated individuals, depart as dear friends in Christ.

The National Staff conducted weekly meetings and several special sessions as we attended to the needs of pastors, congregations, and the national church. Foundational in this process was a commitment by the National Staff to work as a team. Our methodology has been shaped, in some large part, by several books by Patrick Lencioni on building a leadership team.

Pr. Joe Dapelo was kind enough to be my companion on a trip to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Together, we attended the International Lutheran Council (ILC) meeting in September. The ILC is a worldwide association of confessional Lutheran church bodies with unconditional commitment to the Holy Scriptures as inspired and infallible, and to the Lutheran Confessions as a faithful exposition of the Word of God. It was wonderful to meet Lutherans from Asia, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, the nordic countries, and the Americas. One of the most significant moments during the conference was when the participants recognized the unique significance of our united voices. At a moment when other Christians are departing from biblical values, we determined to make a unified witness to the truth of Scripture and the true declaration of Lutheran doctrine.

Symposium and Pastors' Conference

In October, I was invited to Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, Illinois for the first annual Just and Sinner Conference. This theological symposium was hosted by Pr. Jordan Cooper and the people of Faith, Watseka. The theme, *Ordo Salutis* (Order of Salvation), reminded participants that our unity of confession is the bond of faith that unites Lutherans across the ages and around the world. I was invited to participate, along with Dr. Eric Phillips, and Pr. Jordan Cooper. Topics of discussion were: *Ordo Salutis*, Conversion and Election, Justification, Mystical Union, Sanctification, and Glorification.

The final conference of the year was the annual Pastors' Conference. This was an absolutely fantastic event with more than 60 of our pastors and seminarians gathered on the Concordia, St. Louis campus. We had intensive study of the Epistle to Titus led by Pr. Joe Dapelo, Pr. Chris Rosebrough, and Pr. Darrel Deuel. We took a close look at the current role of the pastor in our society and in our church body, with special focus given to the biblical responsibility of pastor as teacher. Presentations were made by Pres. Rich Shields, Dr. Craig Henningfield, and myself.

Times of fellowship, brotherhood, and personal care were as precious as the times of worship and study. We started our days early and often continued late into the night. Pastors were reluctant to leave conversations that were so stimulating and friendships that were so significant.

God has given us unity with one another: unity of faith and fellowship, and unity of ministry and mission. During this past year, we have experienced the Holy Spirit at work among us. He has gathered us together as the mystical body of Christ, maintaining precious relationships, repairing broken ones, and creating new ones. Thanks be to God for the unity of the Spirit in the body of peace that He has so graciously given to the pastors and people of The American Association of Lutheran Churches.





We look forward to further strengthening and expanding of our seminary. We are blessed to have two routes for pastoral service in our church body. One is the the on-campus route and the other is online. Each route offers excellent opportunities for preparing men to serve as pastors; these routes are not contradictory but complementary, each with its own strengths.

On Campus

Through our arrangements with the LCMS, our students have the privilege of studying on campus at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN (and Concordia Seminary, St Louis, MO). The students gain the benefit of top notch professors, they also study in an environment with daily worship and daily dialog with other students. The first two years are on campus with some participation in a local congregation. The third year the student, now called a vicar, serves full time in one of our congregations. The fourth year the student returns to campus to complete the Master of Divinity degree.

Online

Over the past five years we have developed an online curriculum for the Master of Theological Studies. At the 2014 Convention the program was approved as an accepted route for appropriate pastoral training leading to service as pastors in The AALC. The students also have the opportunity for continuing service to congregations as part of their pastoral formation. There are differences between the programs, there is significant overlap of study. Each approach has distinct advantages for training pastors.

Current Status

On Campus Status: We currently do not have any students on campus; but we have two candidates for probable enrollment in Fall 2016. If you know of men who might be interested in seminary, please have them contact me.

Online Status: We have 22 men enrolled in the pastoral track, three women desiring theological education for service apart from the pastoral office, and two lay leaders. We currently have six professors teaching theology and one teaching Greek. With this approach, we hope to offer every online class at least every other year, and possibly more often. **Future Plans** We have two longer range goals for ALTS. One is to offer a Lay Academy online. This would be for local congregation lay leaders to study selected topics that would assist them in serving in their congregations. This training would not replace but supplement what the pastor does for training lay leaders.

The program is in the very early stages of planning, so no details. In the coming year I hope to contact all our pastors to get their input on what would help them in their own ministries. We may offer a preliminary course in the next year. The goal is not to teach another seminary class, but to teach it at the level appropriate for lay leaders. Watch for more information in the coming year.

There has been some interest beyond the US for theological education for non-Lutheran pastors in other countries. The goal would be to help them better serve their people and get an extensive exposure to Lutheran theology. Again, this is very preliminary, but fits within a five year goal.




Just & Sinner

2015 Conference

by Lisa Cooper



The first annual Just and Sinner Conference was held October 22-24, 2015 at Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, Illinois. The theme of the conference was the Ordo Salutis, or the Order of Salvation, covering topics like conversion and election, justification, sanctification, mystical union, vocation, and glorification. The four men tasked with covering these topics were: the Rev. Eric Phillips of Concordia Lutheran Church in Nashville, TN; the Rev. Lewis Polzin of Trinity Lutheran Church in Bemidji, MN; the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, the Presiding Pastor of the AALC; and the Rev. Jordan Cooper of Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, IL.

The conference was structured around a series of lectures. Each topic was covered, and then there was a short time allotted for question and answer. With the help of many volunteers at Faith Lutheran Church, there was food, coffee, and snacks offered throughout the conference. In an attempt to widen the audience of the content of the conference, all of the lectures have been recorded and posted online. In addition to that, a live podcast was recorded and also posted online.

Though the content of the lectures was intended for educated laity and clergy, there were profound moments of real-life application from all of the speakers. Why do these doctrines matter? How do these doctrines change how we live our lives, and how we relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ?

THE LECTURES CAN BE ACCESSED AT
FAITHLUTHERANWATSEKA.COM



BRINGING THE REFORMATION TO THE WORLD:

A REPORT FROM THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

By Rev. Joe Dapelo

Buenos Aires

The International Lutheran Council (ILC), a worldwide association of established Confessional Lutheran church bodies, met for their World Conference from September 24th through 27th in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Conference representatives are made up of the Presidents/Bishops/

Chairmen of the now 38 Confessional Lutheran church bodies that are members of the ILC. The AALC was represented by our Presiding Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, as well as Rev. Joe Dapelo, secretary for our Commission for Doctrine and Church Relations (CDCR).

The General Convention of The AALC voted to join the ILC as a member church body in 2007. All member churches of the ILC hold an unconditional subscription to the Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God, as well as the Lutheran Confessions as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God (quia). Partners in the ILC include church bodies from North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

The ILC is blessed with faithful leaders from around the globe. The current chairman of the ILC, Bishop Hans-Jorg Voigt of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany, is a prominent leader in Christianity. He was recognized as "Bishop of the Year" in 2013 by a Christian news service in Germany after penning his Pastoral Letter, "Discovering Marriage and Family as Gifts of God."¹

¹ Block, Matthew. "Hans-Jorg Voigt Reelected ILC Chairman." www.ilc-online.org. 26 September 2015

The other members of the Executive Council of the ILC are President Robert Bugbee (Lutheran Church-Canada) as Vice-Chairman, President Gijsbertus van Hattem (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belgium) as Secretary, President Norberto Gerke (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay), Archbishop Christian Ekong (Lutheran Church of Nigeria), President Antonio del Rio Reyes (Lutheran Church of Philippines), and Chairman Jon Ehlers (Evangelical Lutheran Church of England). The Rev. Dr. Albert Collver of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod also serves as the Executive Secretary of the ILC.

We were all greeted warmly by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina and their president, Rev. Carlos Nagel, as well as the faculty of their seminary, Seminario Concordia. We were blessed to worship in two different congregations (San Justo and San Pedro) the last two days of the conference, followed by a tour of the seminary where they served us a wonderful meal, and put together a program to honor our presence. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod helps numerous Lutheran bodies from Latin America and South America send their seminary students to the seminary in Buenos Aires.

While other some of the other countries have their own seminaries, Seminario Concordia is truly a seminary of South and Latin America, not simply Argentina.

The World Conference itself gathered around the theme "Bringing the Reformation to the World." In anticipation of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation (October 31, 2017), and in recognition of the deteriorating culture that we live in, the ILC and its member church bodies seek to bring the strong witness of Law and Gospel to the world through building up churches, training pastors, and promoting the truth of Scripture and the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. Throughout the week papers were presented on the Augsburg Confession, as the conference discussed justification, church and ministry, and the sacraments.

The Executive Committee of the ILC has engaged in dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). While the Roman Catholic Church has been in dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation since 1964, many Confessional Lutheran bodies have taken issue with the documents that have come out of these dialogues, specifically The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and the more recent From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation 2017. The ILC seeks to provide a Confessional Lutheran voice to this dialogue, and to engage the issues from a sound Biblical and Confessional stance. The first official meeting between the ILC and the PCPCU was scheduled for October 7, 2015.

The conference also sought to develop a strategic plan for the ILC to gather and support Confessional Lutherans, and, as the theme suggests, bring Reformation theology to the world. Dr. Leins and myself were blessed to make connections with Lutherans around the world, and we are prayerful that these relationship will develop into partnerships and fellowship agreements for The AALC with Lutheran bodies from Africa to Eastern Europe, as well as North and South America.

For further information about the International Lutheran Council visit:
www.ilc-online.org

Also, all papers and sermons presented at the conference can be found online: <http://www.ilc-online.org/files/2015/12/Journal-of-Lutheran-Mission-December-2015.pdf>



Dr. Leins and President Robert Bugbee, Lutheran Church-Canada



Dr. Leins and Bishop Modise Maragelo of the Lutheran Church of South Africa



Dr. Leins and Rev. Alexander Burtsev, President of the Lutheran Church of Kazakhstan



Rev. Chris Rosebrough



Rev. Matthew Richard



Rev. Jonathan Fisk

Reformation Seminar Grand Forks, ND

By Don Mathsen

Area Churches Host Reformation Seminar

More than 200 individuals from throughout North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota attended the "Road to Reformation" Seminar on Friday, October 30, 2015, in Grand Forks, ND, at the Hilton Garden Inn. Initiated by Kongsvinger Lutheran church of rural Oslo, MN, the Seminar was jointly sponsored by 17 congregations in the region of northwest MN and throughout ND representing churches affiliated with four different Lutheran groups. The theme of the Seminar was the "Solas of the Reformation". Presenters included Pastor Chris Rosebrough of Kongsvinger speaking on Sola Scriptura, Rev. Jonathan Fisk of St. John's Lutheran (Oakes, ND) speaking on Sola Fida and Sola Gratia, and Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard of Zion Lutheran (Gwinner, ND) speaking on Sola Christus. Rev. Dr. Mark Buchhop of Immanuel Lutheran (Radium, MN) and the Wittenberg Lutheran Chapel (LCMS campus ministry at the University of North Dakota) served as the Emcee.

The Reformation Seminar focused attention on the upcoming 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. The overall theme of the Seminar was to present the great foundational truths of the 16th Century Reformation and their relevance to the 21st Century. The need for diligence and discernment in being aware of the influences of secular philosophies and false teachings within today's North American Church was emphasized and compared to similar influences in the 16th century Church.

Pastor Rosebrough emphasized the need to defend Sola Scriptura based on the authority of the Word itself and the implication that has on teaching and practices within the Church. Pastor Fisk emphasized the work of the Cross; that faith is not hopeful speculation; our good works are not a measure of our faith; and that faith and grace are gifts made real by our hopelessness. Rev. Richard characterized the "false Christ's" preached in the Church today and emphasized that it is Christ Alone PERIOD not Christ Alone COMMA - nothing needs to be added to Christ Alone for our salvation.

While most of the attendees were from the 17 Sponsoring Churches, it was estimated that at least 25 churches affiliated with 7 different Lutheran or Reformed bodies were represented at the Seminar along with students from UND and NDSU.

Recordings of the Seminar presentations are available on the Kongsvinger website - <http://www.kongsvingerchurch.org/events.html>, the Worldview Everlasting website - www.worldvieweverlasting.com, and on the November 2, 3, 4 editions of Fighting for the Faith <http://www.piratechristian.com/fightingforthefait>

THE AALC PASTORS' RETREAT



INTRODUCTION BY LISA COOPER

We were so blessed again to visit Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri for the Pastors' retreat, held on November 2nd-5th. The pastors and leaders in the AALC came together to worship, to study the Scriptures, to eat together, and to learn more about what it means to be a teacher. There were three Bible studies on Titus; the first was lead by the Rev. Joe Dapello, the second by Pastor Chris Rosebrough, and the third by the Rev. Darrel Deuel. They covered, respectively, the three chapters of the book of Titus.

Now, I know that I could report on every message given at this Conference, but each address was so full of valuable information, it would quite quickly become too long to print in this format. If you want to see some of the presentations given at the conference, you can look them up on YouTube by searching "AALC Pastors Conference."

The four main speeches given at the Pastors' retreat were on the theme of pastors being teachers. "Pastor as Teacher of the Scriptures" was given by the Rev. President Shields, "Pastor as Teacher of the Lutheran Confessions" was given by the Rev. Dr. Henningfield, and "Pastor as Teacher of the Liturgy" was given by the Rev. Dr. Leins.

I have here condensed the main speeches given beginning with a piece entitled "The Diminution of the Pastoral Office," which was given as a background. I hope that these will be helpful to all who read, not just those who are in the office. We are all called to continual study of the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the Liturgy. These are invaluable resources for all of us.



The Diminution of the Pastoral Office



PRESENTED BY THE REV. DR. CURTIS LEINS
SUMMARIZED BY LISA COOPER

To begin the Pastors' Retreat, our Presiding Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins delivered a message concerning the pastoral office. He began his address with an overview of how postmodernism has affected the church. First, he explained, postmodernism has called into question authority, creating a pervasive distrust of anyone in a position of power. Secondly—and really an extension of the first—it has called into question truth itself. My truth may be different than your truth, and that is considered to be okay. Postmodern contemporary ethics have also been impactful by normalizing deciding “what parts are authentic and what parts are corrupted, what parts are to be debated and what parts are to be discarded.” If ethics are called into question, we have a fundamental disunity as members of a church community.

Our postmodern culture has also created the non-denominational church. Leins explains, “Congregational identity is not based upon oneness in Word and Sacrament but upon group experience, exciting entertainment, acts of social justice, or the cult of pastoral personality.” If identity is not founded on Word and Sacrament, anything else goes. The church basically becomes a social club. A number of subsequent issues arise: a dismissal of theological education; an attitude that anyone can be a pastor, and of course, where there is no education, any number of problematic doctrines and teachings may follow.

In conjunction with postmodern ideology, the pervasive bootstrap mentality of Americans have changed the culture in our churches. Scripture teaches a contrary message: we cannot by any means achieve our own salvation. Instead, we look to alien righteousness—righteousness that comes from outside of ourselves—the righteousness of Christ. This bootstrap mentality does not only affect congregants, but it also affects how we perceive pastors. If anyone can be a pastor, that means that pastors are no smarter, and no better than any layperson, which means that we can fire him or hire him based on if we like him or not.

The diminution of the pastoral office is not only caused by the culture outside of our churches, but it also comes from the historic roots of the AALC. As the AALC, we have a variety of historical roots both ethnically and theologically. Leins explains the problematic extent that any of these roots can yield: “A German ‘Herr Pastor’ mentality that at its worst yields a Pastor that dominates instead of shepherds, a Norwegian/Haugean influence that at its worst diminishes the distinction of and need for the Pastoral Office, and Swedish high liturgy that at its worst yields meaningless pomp and ceremony and an accompanying loss of personal piety.” With all of the beneficial things that any of these traditions bring, there are some things that need to be guarded against. So what is the answer to this problem? What can we possibly do? We must return to a biblical job description. Pastors are not hirelings to be fired at will, but they are called by God to serve. They must be able to teach, they must be proficient readers and understanders of scripture, they must be apt to preach, exhort, and administer the sacraments. By performing the duties of the office, the pastor is serving in his God-given role. This is not to be met with postmodern skepticism, but with gladness that God would bless us with the gift of a pastor.

Pastor as Teacher of the Confessions

PRESENTED BY THE REV. DR. CRAIG HENNINGFIELD
SUMMARIZED BY LISA COOPER

The basis for the Rev. Dr. Henningfield's message about teaching the Lutheran Confessions was a particularly important image: grace. Grace, or in Hebrew, the word "hhen," depicts (quite literally depicts in the structure of how they made the letters) two different images: a wall, and a sprouting seed. This sprouting seed referred to a continuation of lineage. To say this another way, "hhen" would mean "a wall that continues." Henningfield explained that this idea of "hhen" carries the weight of the safety of community, as one would return home to be encircled by camp walls. He carries this image throughout his talk, asserting that the impact of teaching the confessions should be to encourage community, to encourage among congregations an understanding of the community of grace.

The Lutheran Confessions are "precious insights that were written with the unity of the Christian church in mind." They seek to teach sound doctrine, teach faithful practice, and to guard against false teachers and their messages.

For the sake of the time constraint of his message, Henningfield focused on the first 21 articles of the Lutheran Confessions. He made three main observations. First, that these articles are full of images of teaching. Without teaching, these doctrines would profit nothing. Furthermore, the context and practice of these doctrines are grounded in the scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, and the writings of the church fathers. These doctrines are not meant to be inaccessible musings, but to be understandable, practical, and teachable.

Second, Henningfield pointed out that the Confessions have a practical cultural awareness. Those who wrote our confessions continually refuted various contemporary groups who taught false doctrines. He went on to say, "Christian truths must be taught or there is no way for such truth to be received in a local community." The doctrines of the faith must be taught in the contemporary context, and they must stand against all of the false teachings of the time.

The third observation was that the Lutheran Confessions emphasize learning. "Learning engages the mind through study; learning engages the body through practice; learning engages the community through the teacher; and learning engages life through experience." Through learning, the doctrines that are taught are internalized. And, as a charge to pastors, Henningfield explained that, "If you do not cause others to learn the Truth in Christ, they will learn the lie in some way." This is what teachers of the faith are up against. There will be continual noise from our culture, and from false teachers everywhere. If you do not teach the true faith, your congregants will be left wanting.

Pastors are called to be lifelong students of the Scriptures and of the Confessions. Congregations cannot unite around what they do not know, and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church are begging to unite us. This is the goal: that all pastors can teach according to the Scriptures, and that congregants can understand the doctrines of the church. Together, they can come together in a community of grace ("hhen") with gladness, praising God for His mercy and love in Christ Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

Pastor as Teacher of the Liturgy

Summarized by Lisa Cooper

Of all of the talks given at the Pastors' retreat, I encourage all of you to listen to this one on Youtube if possible. There is so much information packed into this speech, and Pastor Leins allowed questions throughout, all of which are made available to you in the recording.

First, he asked the question: what purpose does liturgy serve? Is it a "meaningless motion, or a gift of God?" Liturgical worship is not empty words or motions. Rather, liturgy emphasizes the nature of worship. Worship is heaven-to-earth-ward. Leins explains, "Our worship life mirrors our salvation experience. We did not choose God. God chose us in Jesus Christ." This is the basis of the historic liturgy. God gives us gifts, and we respond with praise and adoration. This is the pattern throughout a liturgical service.

Next, to explain the historical context of our liturgy, Leins delved into some of the Jewish antecedents (how our liturgy is based on the worship in the synagogues of Jesus' time), and the scriptural roots (how our liturgy is fundamentally based in the words and truths of Scripture). The beginning section of our worship service mirrors Jewish temple worship with the public reading of the Scriptures and corporate prayers. In addition to this, there is a robust theology connected to the sacrificial meal in the Passover that is fulfilled in our partaking of the Lord's Supper and the liturgies surrounding it. Scripture also serves as the root of our contemporary liturgy. Each liturgical element employs the words of the Scriptures, and embodies that heaven-to-earth-ward motion. For example, the Gloria is grounded in Luke 2:14, Revelation 4:11, and 5:11-14. Leins also examined the development of these liturgical elements over time, starting with the inception of the church in Acts, moving through the early church, up through the changes made by Luther in the Reformation, and up to today.

Finally, examining the AALC, it is apparent that there are many different practices derived from many different roots. There is no "right" way to have a liturgical church service. The elements practiced are more often than not, derived from the historical roots of that particular congregation. We have churches that are "high church," and those that are "low church." We have churches that have German roots, Norwegian roots, Danish roots, and Swedish roots. In all of these churches, liturgical worship will look different, and that is good. That is who we are as the American Association of Lutheran Churches.

To highlight the responsibility of pastors to teach the liturgy, Pastor Leins cited the axiom "lex orandi, lex credendi," or "the law of prayer is the law of belief." This means that the way we worship is going to be what we believe. If pastors take the time to explain the liturgy, to explain how and why we do the things we do in worship, it will lead to a more robust faith of the congregants.

Pastor as Teacher of the Bible

Rev. Rich Shields

Summarized by Lisa Cooper

Although it seems obvious that a pastor should know the Bible, President Shields explained that to "know the Bible" is more than just supporting doctrinal positions. The Bible is so much more than a bunch of doctrines strung together, it is the Word of God. To know the Bible, one must continually be a student of the scriptures. Furthermore, the Bible is a fundamentally connected book. God inspired it to be so. This means that there are themes and connections to be made throughout the Bible. These connections often take the form of contrasting statements: Law and Gospel, Now and Not Yet, Two Kingdoms, Two Kinds of Righteousness, Theologies of Glory vs. Theology of the Cross.

Teaching these things is a talent, of course, but it is the only gift/talent required of the pastoral office (1 Tim 3:1-2). To study and to teach the Bible, it is important to keep in mind the genre of the book being read. In addition to this, pastors should be equipped to teach according to the themes and narratives that appear in the scriptures. President Shields then offered some teaching methods, explaining the value of questions in Bible study.

In teaching the Bible, pastors may struggle. First, pastors are often tempted to overestimate Biblical knowledge of their congregants, making fleeting statements expecting people to fill in the blanks. This can isolate people who do not have that biblical knowledge required. Another way pastors fail in teaching the Bible is by underestimating people's intelligence. It is imperative to teach the Scriptures at the appropriate level for your congregants.

Finally, the attitude displayed by a pastor is imperative to effective teaching. President Shields cited Galatians 5:22-33: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." To foster a community of learning, a pastor must be gentle and approachable. Ultimately, it is important to keep in mind that God will work through His word even when we fail. This is a great comfort.



Pastor Dave Spotts



The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins





Rev. Dr. Craig Henningfield



Rev. Jordan Cooper



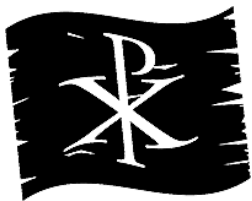
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