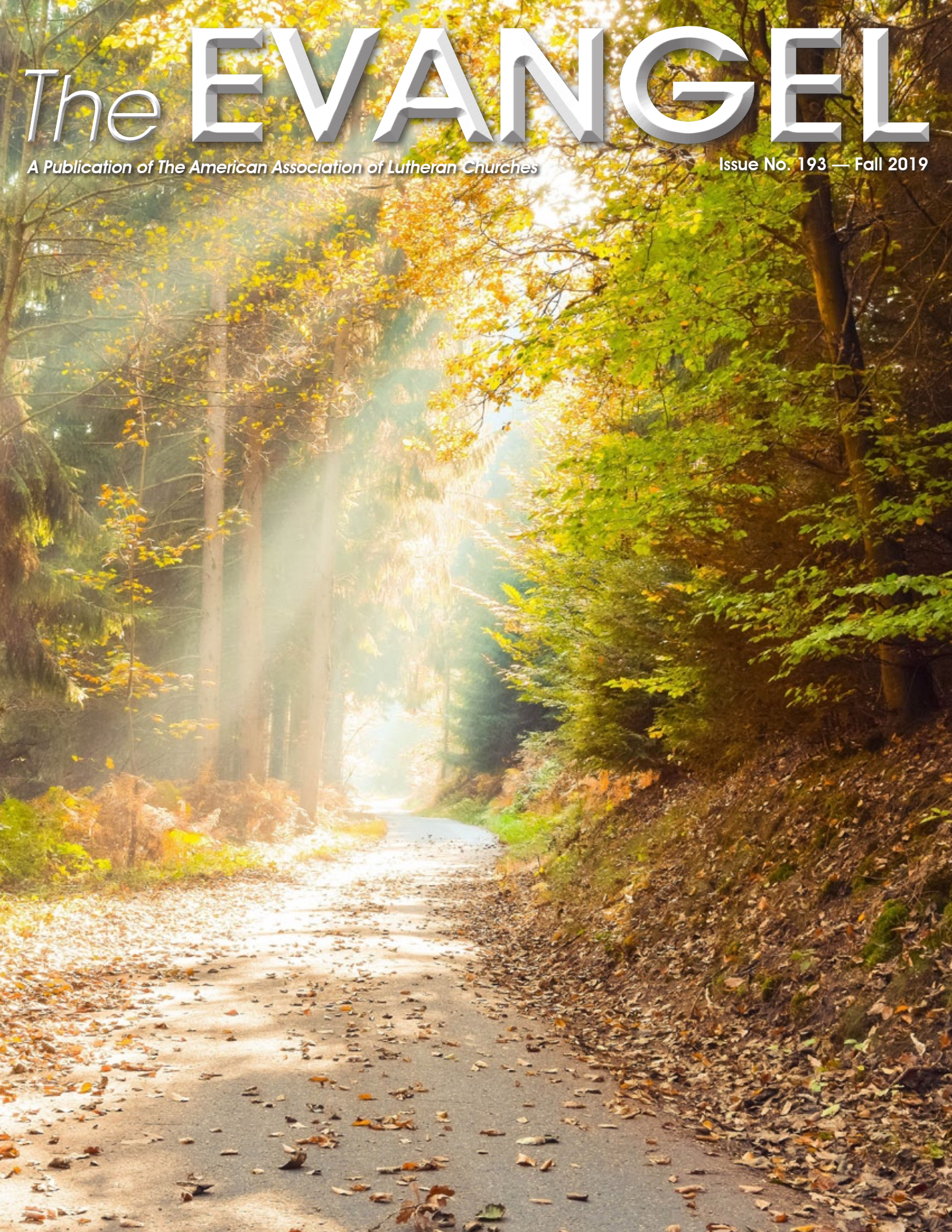


The EVANGEL

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Layout & Design: Lynette Macias

Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This edition of *The Evangel* explores all of the new growth that we have seen in our church body. We have new pastors being ordained, new momentum at the seminary, and new churches joining our ranks. God has also, just as miraculously and graciously, upheld our current churches and church workers. All of these things testify to the goodness of God, who has heard our prayers and answered them.



In this vein, I implore you to continue praying! Continue praying for more seminarians, for more qualified and equipped pastors, for passionate lay leaders, for robust support for all of The AALC projects and gatherings. Pray for our leaders, both spiritual and administrative. Pray for God's word to go out and change hearts and minds, that all people would hear the true Gospel message: that Jesus Christ came into this world to save us from our sin, to deliver us from death and the power of the Devil. And that by his perfect life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead, he has accomplished all that was necessary for us to inherit eternal life. This is the foundational truth that we all stand on. We confess together, and we pray together, trusting that the Lord indeed hears us.

It is so easy to forget about all of the other churches and church workers across the United States because we are focused on our own local church. This edition is meant to be a reminder that God has been, and is being faithful to all of us.

May the Lord bless you, and continue to work in and through you to bring this One True Gospel to the world.

In Christ,
Lisa Cooper

To submit to *The Evangel*, please send articles and pictures to theevangel@taalc.org, or mail them to 600 Warren Rd. Apt. 6-1A, Ithaca, NY 14850. Please be sure to indicate who wrote the article and who took the pictures, and include your contact information.

Springtime of New Growth

by TAALC Presiding Pastor, The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

The AALC has entered a springtime of new growth! It may be the heat of the summer, but for our church body, we see signs of new life, great excitement, and springtime growth in many places. We are thankful to Our Heavenly Father for His hand of blessing upon our seminary, our congregations and pastors, and our church body. In the paragraphs that follow, you will see several examples of blessed new growth. This is not an exhaustive listing. These are but indicators of a church-wide phenomenon of growth that causes us all to be encouraged and to give thanks to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ!

Growth at Seminary

Our seminary, American Lutheran Theological Seminary, has witnessed incredible growth since the beginning of this year. One example is that currently we have 3 seminary Interns serving TAALC congregations, and 3 more seminary Interns who may soon begin serving TAALC congregations. This is a tremendous gift to our church body, indicating a supply of new pastors about to be made available for Call to our congregations!

Also, we have added 2 new members to the ALTS Staff:

Mr. Duane Kleven, Seminary Administrator, joined our seminary staff in February of this year. He is an exceptionally gifted organizer and administrator whose guidance and effectiveness have already proven their worth. Under Mr. Kleven's leadership, the Master of Arts in Religion Degree Program has been evaluated and renovated, a new Master of Arts in Theology Degree Program has been created, and the Student Handbook and Internship Guidelines created by Pr. Dan Dapelo and Mrs. Emily Gerken have been formally reviewed and await implementation.

The Rev. Dr. Tom Stover, Seminary President, pro tempore, began his duties on June 1, 2019. Dr. Stover is a TAALC rostered pastor serving Holy Trinity Church and Ministries in Minneapolis. Also, he is a Psychotherapist (Ph.D.) whose practice is in the Twin Cities. Now, by God's grace, Dr. Stover also is the President of our seminary. His immediate duties include: recruiting students, soliciting financial support, caring for professors and students, and communicating the present needs and future vision of our seminary to all pastors and congregations of The AALC. Dr. Stover is considering a new look for our ALTS website that will target specific demographics including 2nd career men who may be considering Lutheran ministry. Also, our new Seminary President has just returned from The AALC Youth Convention where he led workshops and addressed the convention regarding Christian vocations and Ordained Ministry.

Growth on the Clergy Roster

We continue to receive phone calls and emails inquiring about membership on The AALC Clergy Roster. Since January of this year, 10 pastors have been in conversation with the National Office. They have heard about the confessional faith of The AALC and want to learn more about our clergy rostering process. As a result, 6 new pastors have been invited to come to the October, 2019 Pastors' Conference as our special guests. In addition, 2 Lutheran seminarians who have just completed their M.Div. at non-Lutheran seminaries also have been invited as special guests. Finally, The AALC currently has 4 applicants scheduled to come before our Clergy Commission this Fall, and the possibility of several more applicants by next Spring!

As we continue to receive new pastors onto our Clergy Roster, the average age of our clergy is getting younger. Last year at this time, 30% of our clergy were under age 50. Today, that percentage has grown to 35%. By the end of this year, we expect the percentage to be even greater.

Growth of Congregations

We are grateful to God that Christ Lutheran Church in Chetek, Wisconsin has joined our church body. We look forward to formalizing their membership at our upcoming National Convention in June of 2020.

In addition, the National Office of The AALC is currently in conversation with several more congregations that have inquired about membership in our church body. Please pray that Our Lord Jesus will bless these conversations and continue to bring confessional Lutheran congregations and pastors to our church body.

The "Hold The Line" Conferences have been among the most productive outreach ministries for The AALC. We continue to expand and adapt these presentations in order to make them more relevant and pertinent in our ever-changing culture. I want to extend a personal commendation to Pastor Dean Stoner, who not only was instrumental in conceiving of the conferences, but who, with Mrs. Bonnie Ohlrich, has administrated their scheduling, financing, publicizing, and more. Also, I am grateful to Pr. Jamie Strickler and Dr. Jordan Cooper for their powerful presentations on topics as critical as: God's Word: The Holy Bible; God's Truth: Law and Gospel; God's Victory: Word and Sacraments; How Do You Know The Truth?; What Is The Church?; and Who Is God? Please remember these conferences in your prayers, asking Our Heavenly Father to continue this Springtime of New Growth for The AALC!

American Lutheran Theological Seminary

Seminary News

*By The Rev. Dr. Tom Stover, President Pro Tem
and Mr. Duane Kleven, Administrator*

Greetings:

In February 2019, I started in the role of Seminary Administrator. I knew from the start that the role was going to be a challenge. I had a lot to learn and aware the impact of my actions would not only affect our current student body, but the long-term health of the seminary and The AALC itself. Over the past several months, I have systematically reviewed every current and past student, every course, every program, and every instructor, the ALTS budgets and finances, the ALTS student administration systems and processes including every policy and procedure associated with seminary operations.

In collaboration with The Rev. Dr. Leins, Presiding Pastor; Pr. Stoner, Administrative Assistant to The AALC (Pro tem); Bonnie Ohlrich, Registrar; Laurie O'Brien, CHE Chair; I presented my findings and potential solutions required to move the seminary forward. The next few paragraphs highlight the changes we have made and the items under review.

The recent inclusion of The Rev. Dr. Tom Stover as Seminary President, Pro tem is a wonderful addition to the seminary leadership team as we look at the future of seminary operations.

—Duane Kleven, ALTS Administrator

Master of Arts in Religion [MAR] – prepares men and women for service in Christ's Church as a Commissioned Church Worker, or helper in the ministry of the local congregation, in such roles as: Deacon or Deaconess, Director of Youth Ministries, Bible Study Leader, or Missionary Service.

The Master of Arts in Religion degree program builds critical foundations in Biblical Exegesis and Systematic Theology forming an orderly and rational account of the doctrines of the Christian Faith with emphasis on practical service within the church. These are the persons who assist the pastor as he provides and oversees various kinds of leadership and ministry in the congregation. For example, Evangelism or Community Outreach Chairperson, or to simply answer the call to serve where God may choose.

The MAR program has been streamlined with four significant changes.

1. The program was reduced from 16 courses to 10 courses
2. Focused study within three concentrations: Administration, Outreach, and Pedagogy
3. Each track concludes with a master's thesis within the area of study
4. Former Greek requirements are replaced with a new course "The Bible in Context"

The Bible in Context course introduces the student who does not have an extensive background in biblical languages to the linguistic and interpretive tools which will prove most useful in the discipline of biblical interpretation. It is not a course in hermeneutics but provides or reinforces the background information necessary to move into such a study.

Master of Arts in Theology [MAT] – is a **NEW** program for individuals who desire graduate studies in the foundations of Christianity. The MAT program offers 4 areas of study: General Studies, Exegesis, Doctrine, and History. Each path ends with a master's thesis within the course of study the student has chosen. Like the MAR program, "The Bible in Context" is the entry point to the study of Hermeneutics.

Master of Theological Studies [MTS] – The MTS program prepares future pastors with critical instruction in the Greek language to read the gospel in the language in which it was written and detailed studies in Exegesis / Systematics / Church History / and practical applications of parish ministry.

The courses cover topics from Theological Prolegomena, Old and New Testament, Pastoral Theology and Life, to practical preaching. As an ALTS pastoral candidate, the student will also serve as an intern or Vicar for at least 12 months under the supervision of a senior pastor. The purpose of the Vicarage is to show the student the practical aspects of parish life, while they complete their studies. An MTS student will complete all 30 courses including a Vicarage on the path to ordination within The AALC.

The only change to this program is the publishing of the Vicarage or Internship manual.

Donations and Endowments – The American Lutheran Theological Seminary has three fundamental areas of support.

- Our capital fund for Seminary General Support provides for the day-to-day operations of the seminary. Please note, our classes provide the student an interactive classroom experience from the comfort of their home. We do not have the expenses normally associated with brick and mortar institutions—there is no grass to mow or buildings to be painted—we do not have any. We invest our operation funds into technology and programs to train pastors for an ever-changing world. All funds donated to ALTS General Support Fund are tax deductible.
- Our capital fund for General Scholarships provides financial support to our students to pay for tuition. It is our long-term goal to provide our superior education free of charge to any TAALC congregant wanting to serve Christ's Church and The AALC. Please note: ALTS can no longer accept directed funds to specific individuals due to IRS regulations. All funds donated to ALTS General Scholarship Fund are tax deductible.
- Our third option is a long-term investment or endowment in the success of ALTS. Contributions of \$25,000 or more, can be named in someone's honor. A portion of the annual earnings are used to support the Scholarship Fund and/or the Support Fund. The rest of the earnings are reallocated back into the endowment's principle to ensure that the investment continues to grow and yield more interest for future scholarships and support. An endowment fund is a gift that keeps on giving for years to come.
- Tuition paid by the students, currently \$400/class, is applied to direct operating expenses before any other source of income.

The seminary exists to train pastors for The AALC and provide Christian graduate studies to the laity. It does not matter if your donation is \$25 dollars or \$250,000 dollars. Your support, large or small, ensures the continued success of ALTS and The AALC well into the future. Contact Seminary President, The Rev. Dr. Tom Stover (Cell: 661.565.6977, Email: altspresidentdrtomstover@taalc.org) or Administrator Mr. Duane Kleven (Cell: 260.210.2087, Email: ALTSAdministrator@taalc.org) for more information on how you can support The American Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Financial Aid Student Support – Currently under review are process and procedures for students to request financial aid through the seminary based on financial need.

Marketing and Advertising – Under review

- Revitalization and updates to the ALTS website
- Audio and Video clips to promote the seminary and its programs
- Electronic and Social media utilization plan to include: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, ALTS/TAALC websites
- Other hard copy and electronic communication from ALTS to our congregations and supporters

The Vicar – We have three Master of Theological Studies [MTS] students currently serving as interns or Vicars as they complete their requirements on the path to ordination.

- Mr. Mike Callahan, Vicar of Our Redeemer's Lutheran in Williston, ND under the supervision of The Rev. Steve Lundblom
- Mr. Nathan Rinne, Vicar of Calvary Lutheran in St. Paul, MN under the supervision of The Rev. Joe Marsh
- Mr. Andrew Virkus, Vicar of Poplar Lake Lutheran in Fosston, MN under the supervision of The Rev. Gary DeSha and The Rev. Dick Day

Student Population

- Master of Divinity [M.Div.] Resident – 1 Student
- Master of Theological Studies [MTS] – 9 Students
- Master of Arts in Religion [MAR] – 0 Students
- Master of Arts in Theology [MAT] – 1 Student
- Colloquy – 1 Pastor

In His Service; Tom Stover, President; Duane Kleven, Administrator

Mr. Duane Kleven

Administrator, American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS)

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Greetings:

My background is very eclectic, beginning as a farm kid on the northern prairie in Minnesota. Our 1880 homestead sits a few miles south of Oslo, MN and a stone's throw away from Kongsvinger Lutheran Church, TAALC, my home church.

The prairie was not big enough, however, to contain my curiosity and imagination. I grew up watching rockets race to the heavens and men walking on the moon. You might think that I joined the Air Force or some other path that would lead to stars, but no. I instead joined the NAVY and volunteered for submarine service. While adventurous, going to sea in a steel vessel designed to sink is extremely dangerous business indeed. My travels have taken me around the world about 1 ½ times. I have been through the Panama Canal twice. My adventures have brought me to places in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, North Atlantic, Pacific, and the Arctic. On one such adventure we circumnavigated North America, spent 3 months under the Polar Ice Cap, surfaced through the ice 18 times, twice at the North Pole. Submarines are not for the faint of heart and I can assure you, there are no atheists on submarines.

Following the Navy, I completed a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration, from Eastern Connecticut State University. I have spent my career consulting for Fortune 50 pharmaceuticals, and healthcare organizations in various capacities and roles as an analyst. Somewhere in and amongst all that, I also volunteered about 20 years with the Boy Scouts of America culminating as the District Commissioner for Southeastern Connecticut.



I married my high school sweetheart, Rebecca Kemmet in 1984, whose family is from the Bismarck ND area. We exchanged vows at a lovely chapel on Warner Robbins Airforce Base, near Macon GA. Rebecca had no idea what she was getting herself into—imagine if you will, starting your marriage knowing that you must keep secrets from your spouse. My dear wife Rebecca never knew where I was going, how long I would be gone, or because of the danger, if I would return; to say my wife is a saint, is an understatement.

Rebecca and I settled in Connecticut and raised two children Jonathan & Ashley, now adults, each with children of their own, Caleb-4, Sophia-2 ½, and Amelia-3 months and growing. In 2011, Rebecca and I returned to our roots on the Northern Prairie and are members of Kongsvinger Lutheran Church, TAALC, Oslo MN.

God has granted me many talents which I freely share with those around me. My talents grant me the ability to plan, organize, manage, and to see beyond the given situation, this gives me success in my career which then supports my family. I am thankful for the blessings and challenges in my life. As Seminary Administrator, supporting those who would go out and preach and teach the Word is honorable service. Here I am...

I welcome your calls and emails: Cell: 260.210.2087, Email: ALTSAdministrator@taalc.org

In His Service,
Duane Kleven

The Ordination and Installation of Abraham Anthony McNally

March 3, 2019 at Christ Lutheran Church, Germantown, MD

By Jeane Flesch

The Reverend Doctor Curtis Leins, Presiding Pastor of TAALC conducted the service of ordination. Pastor Irvin Stapf then placed the stole of Pastor Ministry on Pastor Abraham McNally.

Pastor McNally was born and raised in Evansdale, Iowa, where he had lived his entire life surrounded by his twin brother, parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. His home church of Ascension Lutheran Church in Waterloo mentored his growth in God and was where he underwent his seminary training and internship. We rejoice in his coming to Christ Lutheran Church to be our Pastor and part of our Family of God.



The Little Church That Gives Big

By Larry Farner and Sharie Adrig, Emmanuel Lutheran Church

A failing ELCA congregation, formerly ALC, was on August 22nd of 2010 re-invited as the second of only two TAALC congregations in the State of Washington. Beginning with an average Sunday attendance of a couple of dozen, Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Bremerton, Washington now has an average Sunday attendance of 56. Standing on the promises of a typical conservative Lutheran congregation, Emmanuel has committed to sponsoring a number of local community and overseas projects, including a commitment to supporting missionaries in two separate locations in Africa. In 2018 Emmanuel donated 2,160 pounds of food and \$2,190 to the local food bank, they shipped 88 boxes of gifts to Operation Christmas Child (shoebbox ministry) and, had 56 kids and volunteer teachers and leaders in VBS. But there was a time not too long ago, when Emmanuel Lutheran Church was ready to close the doors.

HOPE COMES TO EMMANUEL. A miracle happened in the fall of 2010. There was a small congregation which had broken away from a larger ELCA church and were now meeting in the basement of the local Community Center. They call their small group Hope Lutheran Church. Hope Lutheran was tiny in numbers, averaging 5-6 on a Sunday, but it was large in faith. Hope was praying, looking for God's direction for their next move, their next step.

Meanwhile, another congregation was also praying for God's direction for their future. Emmanuel had lost members over the years and was experiencing financial constraints. Although Hope Lutheran had some money and

a faithful pastor, they did not have a building. Emmanuel had a beautiful building (with need of repairs), but not the means to support it. The question was asked, "Should



Operation Christmas Child

we close the doors?" Many prayed that it would never happen. Hope was praying, on-the-other-hand, that they could relocate and grow. Then, two former members of

Emmanuel who were having issues with the ELCA congregation where they currently visited Hope, and, seeing the situation, suggested that Hope

contact Emmanuel to request they hold early Sunday services in the Emmanuel sanctuary. Emmanuel agreed.

Later, Emmanuel released their pastor and was conducting services through lay leaders and visiting pastors. Pastor Tim Cartwright from Hope offered to preach the same sermons for Emmanuel that he delivered at Hope. Soon Emmanuel members began to talk to the members of Hope, asking if they could come together as one church. The member of Hope explained that they were members of The AALC, a conservative synod that had originally been a part of the old ALC. And, since Emmanuel's roots came from the ALC, the older members understood Hope's doctrines.

Emmanuel Lutheran then discussed the possibility of leaving the ELCA to merge with Hope Lutheran and to affiliate with The AALC. After much discussion, the members of Emmanuel unanimously voted to merge with Hope and become a member church of The AALC. The name Emmanuel Lutheran has a history in Bremerton, Washington, so the members of Hope agreed that the name should remain as Emmanuel Lutheran, TAALC, and soon the transition was complete.

Since we joined together eight years ago, Emmanuel has grown. It went from two struggling congregations to one stronger congregation standing firm on the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. Our Church's doctrine and social statements are based on the Bible. We believe that we have a calling from God to reach out to the community and beyond. Yes, we have had struggles but the rewards that the Lord provides are great!



Vacation Bible School



The National Youth Gathering

by The Rev. Steve Ludbloom

Youth from California to Wisconsin made the trek to gather at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, CO

The air was thin, but the Spirit of God was thick as we gathered in His name and delved into His Word at the 2019 TAALC Youth Conference. The theme was "All In" based upon Luke 9:23 – "And (Jesus) said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"

Our main speaker was Pastor Bill Yonker. Bill is a seasoned LCMS pastor and conference speaker. Pastor Yonker brought the Word each night. He worked the theme "All In" around 5 foci: All in(formed), in(spired), in(volved), in(vested), in(fluential). Pastor Yonker has tremendous gifts in combining Biblical theology with storytelling and he throws in key Hebrew and Greek terms to flesh out greater understanding of Biblical passages.

Each morning and evening session began with Swen and Dean. God has gifted these two brothers with the abil-

ity to quickly enable folks from all ages and stages to interact with one another in joyful Christian Fellowship. They accomplish this through their excellent song-leading, great storytelling, and unparalleled crowd interaction skills. Dean also led our morning group Bible Study.

One staple of the conference that the youth love is a 30-minute block of quiet time for private devotions and prayer. This is called, "hang-time with God." The youth and leaders disperse throughout the camp and meditate upon Bible verses and questions centered around the theme of the day.

The afternoons began with various workshops led by TAALC pastors





and leaders as well as different conference speakers. After the workshops there was free time for all sorts of different activities that the YMCA of the Rockies offers.

There were other notable contributors to the conference. First an improv group called “Happy Fun Time.” They were well-received by our youth and they led some afternoon workshops. The conference worship band represented a cross-section of musicians from different TAALC churches. The band was led by Scott Strosahl from Ascension in Ames. Finally, a keynote speaker named Brian Barlow spoke the truth in love about the LGBTQ movement in America. Brian spoke first-hand about being delivered from a homosexual relationship. Brian is now married, has three children, and is studying to be an LCMS Pastor. He shared many great resources that are available.

One afternoon involved an outreach to the other campers at the Y. There were racing games and then an activity called “Blind Maze” that illustrates the desperation of life without Christ.

Once again, The AALC Youth Commission—through much prayer and collaboration—did a great job of putting together this excellent conference. Of course, it was all made possible by the many wonderful sponsors from our churches who gave up a week to volunteer their time in order to serve the Lord through serving our youth. And once again Our Heavenly Father blessed us as we gathered in His Name.



Photos courtesy of The Rev. Steve Ludbloom



On the Mountaintop with the Students of The AALC

by The Rev. Dr. Tom Stover, ALTS President Pro Tempore

It was such an honor for me to be surrounded by and communicate with our students who took this Youth Conference very seriously. They were faithful in their presence, and contemplative as they prayed; they asked great questions and we worshiped the Lord on the mountaintop together.

What a pleasure it is to be on the mountaintop surrounded by other believers, to be *ALL IN* for the Lord: being informed, inspired, involved, invested, influential. What a joy, how exciting, how inspiring it is, but wait... now I'm down in the valley surrounded by life, and this *ALL IN* sounds kind of unrealistic, daunting, and overwhelming. On the mountaintop, bathed in the light of Christ, and surrounded by other believers, it all seemed so possible, but now I'm just one person, and there is no way I can do this on my own. You know what? You can't! But here is the good news: Jesus can! The truth is, he's not sending you out on your own; he's not pushing you out of the nest saying, "Go get em tiger." Remember what he promises us; "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deut 31:8) and not only this, but he has also promised to give us the tools to do the job: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1Peter 4:10).

The gifts God so graciously provides for us are not given to us to use and abuse, but instead, they are given to us to hold to lightly, and care for as good stewards so that when the time is right, we can release them for his work of building up and encouraging one another. And here is the cool part: the Lord uses these gifts through us to others around us as we become Larve Dei (*the mask of God*) and that, my brothers and sisters, is being *ALL IN*.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.



Making More Room For Worship

at Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, Iowa

By Greg Flugum, Chairman, Pilot Knob Lutheran Church Council

Our church has now performed The Living Last Supper for three Easter seasons with tremendous success. We can seat roughly 120 for any event with our standard seating. Each year we have been blessed in needing to add folding chairs to accommodate the additional attendees that numbered as high as 150 plus. With the added chairs, the actors were crowded some but were able to still pull off a good performance.

After the second year's performance it was decided our raised chancel area was just a too confining for all of the elements within the performance. Some segments had to happen off the raised platform making it difficult for the audience to see.

With a lot of discussion, we came up with a plan to temporarily extend the right side of the chancel platform to the wall. This was done quickly at a low cost to get us by with the assumption it would be removed and placed in storage. We painted that section black to make it somewhat obscure and not distract from the performance. This added space made a world of difference for the viewing audience. Those that had been there the year before commented how much easier it now is to see the final acts of the Living Last Supper making the whole experience more enjoyable.

After the Easter season had finished, we had not removed the temporary platform and some of our members started to comment how nice it was to have added area up front to display flags, plants, posters, etc. This started multiple conversations as to what we should do to make this temporary area more permanent and beautify it so it would blend into our front area. These discussions automatically merged into more lengthy thoughts about the loose carpeting on the steps and adding a step the adding a similar area to the left side to match the now existing right side?

As usual, more discussions ensued so we scheduled a congregational and recommended making the two platforms permanent and re-carpet the entire area with the steps a different color so they stand out.

Now that it is completed it is a true blessing to have such a beautiful chancel. One thing discovered right away was we can serve many more during Communion Sunday—what a rich blessing. We are anxious to perform The Living Last Supper on such a nice large platform. We thank God for providing the necessary skills and funds to have this beautiful addition completed.



Pastor Spotlight:

Benjamin Baker

By the Rev. Dave Spotts

Pastor Benjamin Baker was received on The AALC pastoral roster in the summer of 2017 by colloquium. He holds a Masters of Divinity degree from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Pastor Baker sought out ministry in the American Association of Lutheran Churches because of our commitment to historic Lutheran belief and practice. Pastor Baker told me, "I wanted to be a Lutheran pastor in a fellowship of churches that loved the Lutheran confessions." We trust that he has found just such a place in The AALC.

After serving as a long term supply pastor in Fosston, Minnesota, Pastor Baker received a call to serve as the pastor at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church in Traer, Iowa, and was subsequently installed on May 12, 2019. He lives in Traer with his wife Gretchen and their daughter Meg, who is 12 years old.

Traer is a small town of about 1700, located on U.S. Highway 63, south of Waterloo, Iowa. St. Luke's is a small congregation, with a current attendance under 30. As well as serving the church congregation, Pastor Baker works at a store in the area, supplementing his income.

I asked Pastor Baker about his goals for the local congregation. In keeping with his desire for a home in a solid confessional church body, he is actively involved in catechesis. He said, "I want (the congregation) to know well the promises that God has given them in Jesus and I want them to be familiar with God's Word and know how to understand it." The doctrines of the Lutheran Reformation are a great treasure, confessing and delivering the Gospel in all its sweet and life-changing power.

Pastor Baker is teaching a weekly adult Bible class on Wednesdays, building Scriptural foundations for the teachings of the Lutheran confessions. Above all, he said, "I want each of the congregants to trust in Christ alone for their salvation, to know what He has done for them and promised them, and to cling to those promises in faith.

The riches of the Gospel call all people to trust in the Lord and live out a Christian life in community. In particular, Pastor Baker's prayer for St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church is that it will draw people not only from Traer but also from the surrounding communities into fellowship with Christ within the context of the local church. Please join in prayer for Pastor Baker, his family, and the congregation of Christ's people in Traer, Iowa, as they live out the Gospel in community.



What are the Hold The Line Conferences all about?

An Interview with Rev. Stoner, and the Rev. Dr. Leins

There have been many articles in *The Evangel* about the Hold The Line conferences, and chances are that you have heard about them on social media as well. As the editor of *The Evangel*, I saw a need to give a more comprehensive picture of the work that has been done through these conferences, so I held a phone interview with Rev. Stoner, the national missions developer for The AALC, and the Rev. Dr. Leins, the presiding pastor of The AALC.

What exactly does “Hold The Line” mean, and why did you pick that name for these conferences?

Leins: I think that Lutherans come from a long line of people who “Hold The Line.” Certainly Martin Luther was a man who knew how to Hold the Line. Untold pressure was pressed upon Luther and his followers to conform to the culture and Luther refused. He declared that salvation by grace through faith is the foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. The infallible, inerrant word of God has the final authority in all matters of life—over all demands of the culture. It is the only rule and norm of the Christian life. Today, Lutherans are facing a not-so-different moment. There are forces in the culture that press us to immorality, Biblical illiteracy, and many other ways to deny the truth of scripture both in practice and doctrine. Through these conferences, we are calling Lutherans to stand with us and “Hold the Line” in our post-Christian culture.

Stoner: I was tasked with trying to find a picture to convey this idea of “Holding the Line.” If you’ve seen the Facebook events, you’ve seen the picture. Those are soldiers, but they are not weaponized. They are standing in a line in a defensive posture. I think this picture is a most appropriate picture for what we’re trying to convey and do.

Leins: We’re not about the business of bashing other Christians. What we talk about is the same message that historic orthodox Lutherans have continually proclaimed: the supremacy and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures, and the right interpretation of Scripture as explained in the Book of Concord.

How are these conferences structured and what topics are covered?

Leins: Each conference in the first iteration included three parts: 1. God’s Word, the Holy Bible. In this section, there is a brief explanation that defines the terms used for our understanding of the Holy Scriptures: infallible, inerrant, and inspired. After each session, we allow a time for questions and discussion. The question portion is vital. We want to put material out there in front of them, and allow them to dialogue about it. Lutherans from other backgrounds, non-Lutherans, non-Denominational, and Roman Catholic members have come to dialogue about this.



Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins speaks at the Hold the Line Conference at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Napoleon Township, in Napoleon, Ohio. Photo by Pastor Dan Dapelo.

The second section is on God's Truth: Law and Gospel. This session helps us understand that Bible's word is in the context of Law and Gospel. Definitions of Law and Gospel are given, and explanations of false views. We need to hear both Law and Gospel to rightly balance the Word of God.

The third section is God's victory: Word and Sacrament. God delivers His powerful gifts to us through the means of grace. The Word is performative; what it says it does. The sacraments, Baptism and Communion, do God to us.

How has this structure changed with the second iteration of conferences?

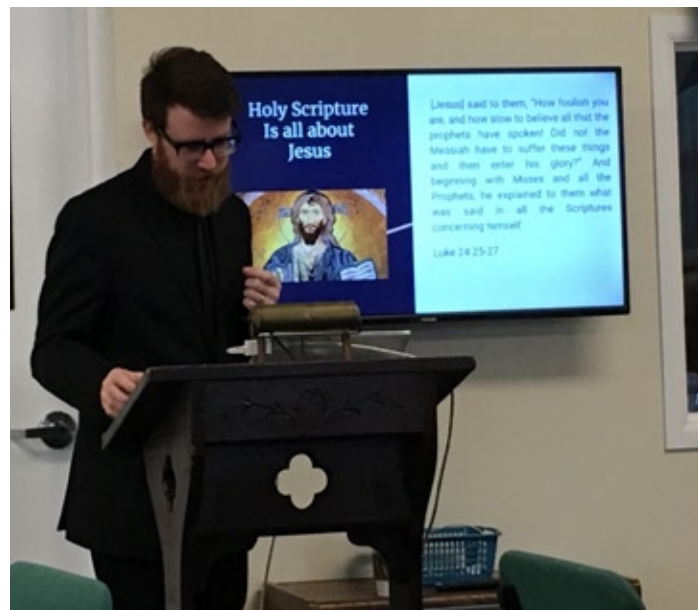
Leins: Two categories of questions kept happening. The first series pertained to epistemology: "How do you know what you know?" There are lots of folks claiming knowledge and the authority to present knowledge. We evaluate these knowledge-claimers: science, skepticism, human reason, rationalism. We unpack the historic development of 17th-20th century of philosophical thought, and how theology, philosophy, and science are conflated. That section outlines the slippery slope that moves us from the age of rationalism through where does it lead, and the case for Christ, and how we respond to these things. Then we spend time looking at Scripture and what believers believe.

Second, the question we answer is one of ecclesiology: "What is the church?" We were receiving new definitions. Is the church simply a response to a dying culture? What is the right function of the church? This second section begins with a typological presentation in the Old Testament. We contrast them with the anti-type, or fulfillment, in the New Testament. God sets up a form, then makes it crystal-clear in the New Testament. The Flood. The Serpent. The Passover meal. The birth of the church at Pentecost. Jewish archetypes. Then we see the completed fulfillment in the New Testament. We look at the assault on the Bible, and respond to these concerns. In this section, we also address apostolic tradition, and truth about what the church is and does. After lunch, we dialogue.

People from every denomination and persuasion have been saying "Well, I believe that!" We had southern Baptist pastors come forward and say "I'm a Lutheran. How do I join?"

Stoner: We had an ELCA pastor who quoted to others there "I wish I had learned this in seminary."

Leins: People have attended from the Eastern Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Catholic Church, among others. Through these dialogues, we have received one congregation, and we are currently in talks



Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper presents at the Hold the Line Conference at Westhempstead, NY. Photo by Lisa Cooper.

with six. Dozens of pastors have already rostered with us, are already installed and are serving churches. God has blessed this movement. God has placed his blessing upon this, and blessed laity as individuals, congregations, and pastors.

Through Hold the Line, we have new friends. We seek to nurture these new relationships. We had a woman pastor from the LCMC attend. She appeared to take it all in, though she understood that by what we were saying that we do not ordain women pastors. However, because our dialogue is positive, and not negative, no one took offense. There is no pointing fingers and saying people are wrong. We focus on doctrine.

Who is invited to Hold The Line conferences, and how much does it typically cost?

Stoner: Certainly the host congregation, and anyone they want to invite. It is open, and ecumenical. We've had Reformed, Evangelical, Lutheran. It's open to anyone in that regard, though originally was more toward many in some Lutheran circles: NALC ELCA, LCMC who have grown weary of where church leadership has taken them. Any community members are also invited. I don't know if we've had anyone travel significant distance, but we've had people willing to drive a considerable distance. We have used social media promotion, and direct mail. But most importantly, we encourage congregation to make personal invitations. These invitations are always the most effective.

The cost to attend is \$25. For two guests, it's \$45, and if 3 or more come, the rate is \$60. We decided to charge for these events because it gives it greater credibility. If the event is free, then the folks who plan on attending have more skin in the game. More money invested tends to mean that people are more likely to attend the event. We encourage the host congregation to invite any and all people, and give them a complementary free ticket. Some individuals have written checks to cover expenses, and these contributions go to The AALC.

Leins: Folks have really been hungry to hear people say out loud things they have already believed. "I haven't left the church, the church left me." They hear us say things that their hearts have been longing to hear. We trust the Bible as a rule of all faith and life, it resonates with them. They literally applaud, smile, and they bring out their checkbooks. I'm not saying this because I'm trying to raise money—it's a thank offering. They're trying to say "thank you" in a tangible way. They want this word of God to get out.

Stoner: They are rejoicing in their hearts that they're not alone. When we offer this rally cry to stand with us. That is how they perceive it—it's a rally cry to stand on the Bible. They're getting those checkbooks back after. CAM is so excited. They are committed \$1,500 of CAM money to help cover the expenses of The AALC.

How many Hold The Line conferences have happened so far, and where were they held?

Leins: We have had WV, Grandview, Fayetteville, Calvary St. Paul, Holstein, Napoleon, WV again. We will have eight this year. And we already have people knocking on our doors for 2020.

Who are the speakers for these conferences?

Stoner: Presiding Pastor Dr. Leins, Dr. Jordan Cooper, Rev. Jamie Strickler. The host congregations will offer a brief devotion and prayer. There may be a hymn offered at the end of the event. The message is consistent, even when the speakers change, and our own clergy has been fed by these conferences.

What motivated you and CAM to begin this conference series?

Leins: Pastor Stoner was the creator of the concept. He and I were making visits across The AALC, and we began seeing the kinds of pressure and persecution that Bible-believing people were facing across the country. Many people across the country do not know about The AALC or our confessional standards; we have never left the tradition. We needed to let people see that we are holding the line. We were on our way back from somewhere in the south and somewhere

between Florida and Northwest Ohio, and by the end of the car ride, virtually the whole thing was birthed. We didn't have all of the lectures outlined, or the speakers picked out. We had the presentation style: how do we deliver it? What kind of venue? That kind of stuff was birthed quickly. That really was the brain-child of Pastor Stoner.

Stoner: In God's providence, we had a conversation with Jamie Strickler who is associated with the Institute of Lutheran Theology. Dr. Leins was obviously a big part of this, too. He came up with the questions that were asked and the appropriate answers. It really was a moment when God the Holy Spirit inspired us and brought some creativity. Strickler brought some methodology. Dr. Cooper brought some theological substance and ideology. They are both well-read theologians who express the faith dynamically and with excitement. We can all count upon each other. We can exchange and rotate talks freely. To hear Dr. Cooper explain and teach a lecture that I have prepared is inspiring.

What is your favorite takeaway from these conferences? Are you still learning new things?

Leins: I think mine is a reiteration of something that has been said before: Bible believing Christians often have no acquaintance with how Lutherans explain proper doctrine. The chief doctrine helps us to frame our correct doctrine. When we present the truth of the Bible, many other denominations find themselves shaking their heads yes! When they hear the *Satisfactio Vicaria*—that concept—when it clicks, it is so exciting to see. "I didn't know that I was Lutheran my entire life" they say. "But my church hasn't been telling me this." The Church catholic (universal) is a real entity. There are workers in the church of Christ across the world. People can misunderstand what I'm saying. Non-Lutherans come and say "I believe this too."

Stoner: I think that people have a moment in these conferences, maybe at the end, when they realize that God's hand is at work here. That their faith is strengthened. They are hopeful once again. Maybe they're in a church that's in darkness, or they see the culture around them. Then they see God at work in them and around them at these conferences. They are captivated and hopeful. The word of God is actually doing its work.

Leins: It's drawing people to the cross. He's actually doing what he promised. He's drawing people to Himself.

Stoner: We are not sectarians or unionists. But there are a whole lot of non-lutherans and there's much more that they have in common with us that they haven't realized in the past. It's more than just a thing on the church-level. It's very personal.

Leins: There are some that have questions, or different caricatures of what Lutherans believe. What we won't do is take the opportunity to beat up on people, but we will point people back to Holy Scripture.

Stoner: We are really intentional about nurturing new relationships. We've made friends with folks in ELCA churches, but they don't want to split their church apart. We're not encouraging them to split their church, but now they have friends. We are walking with them. It's an interesting thing. I think most people, if they're ELCA they walk in and expect us to beat them up or point fingers in self righteousness.

Leins: They're expecting a church about society and culture; finger-wagging in one way or another. What we are not doing is that. In addition, we are not spending a lot of time quoting confessions or church doctrine. Many people who come don't have background in that (laity, non-lutherans). What we point to is the Bible. What we want to do is establish a common foundation: Do we believe the Bible is the Word of God? Once we have that foundation, we can get somewhere.

Have these conferences had an impact in terms of gaining interest in The American Association of Lutheran Churches?

Leins: There has been significant growth—extraordinary growth. God has heard the prayers of our people. Our petitions are being favorably received by our Heavenly Father. And, in some measure, this is also attributable to our meager efforts in the Hold The Line conferences.

Stoner: We won't let any stone go unturned. We are pretty determined that if we have a new friend, we want to develop that relationship. That is one thing that has brought about a lot more friends. We're not trying to steal sheep, or anything that's not in good order, or speak against anyone, but we are determined to really see where relationships can take us.

Leins: We're inviting pastors, individual members, whole congregations to get to know us, and we're going to meet them. We're going to Duluth, where a new pastor is coming to us through Hold The Line will now be installed. On the way, we're visiting another pastor who is interest in The AALC through Hold The Line. We will do a face-to-face on the way.

Stoner: It's our second visit with this pastor. We keep receiving inquiries.

Leins: We invite them to Hold The Line. We invite them for face-to-face. We sponsor them to come to the Pas-



Rev. Dr. Leins speaks at the Hold the Line Conference at Christ Lutheran Church in Germantown, MD. Photo from Christ Lutheran Church's Facebook page.

tors' conference and National Convention at our expense. We travel. We visit with them. They get to know us. We'll travel 600 miles to sit with a man and have lunch. The AALC is characterized by: 1. Confessing; 2. Caring; 3. Calling. We want them to know who we are, what we believe, and that we take care of our own. We function as a family in Jesus Christ.

How can we support the efforts of CAM and you, the National Mission Developer, in this endeavor? And how can we request a conference to take place at our own church?

Stoner: I think if they want to offer some financial support, they should give money to The AALC. It is not necessary to make a special designation of funds. If someone is moved to give a gift, it is helpful. We simply don't think in terms of the financial costs in terms of doing these things, but if someone has an interest in being a host congregation, they should reach out to me. We can have a conversation. If someone wanted to support the Hold The Line conferences, offer a gift to The AALC.

Leins: If people are interested/inspired, call us. Email us. Let's talk. What inspires you? What can we do to help you? Those who are hungry for a statement about the power of God at work this way. We want to talk. Give us a chance to get to know each other. Let's walk together.

To God Be The Glory, Great Things He Has Done

By Joan Sethre

Pastor Ollie Urdahl and the Missions group that went with him, recently returned from Haiti where they attended a Pastors conference and brought supplies and encouragement to Pastor Marcel Tennival's mountain village. Pastors there are under his tutelage and guidance.

Haiti is a small nation in the Caribbean about the size of Maine, with a population of eleven million. The nation is considered one of the poorest in the western hemisphere. Pastor Ollie has led several mission trips to Haiti, with members paying their own way and filling large suitcases with supplies.

Six hundred students attend the school and the church services overflow with attendees. Students receive their noon meal, bought with cash that we sent, and were therefore assured of one meal a day.

The group, along with all in attendance at the filled-to-capacity worship service, also witnessed a blind lady receiving her sight and how she praised the Lord following her healing.

New Hope Lutheran Church of Newfolden Missions Groups have conducted wellness clinics, dug wells, built latrines, and generators and trucks are always in need of repairs.

Reaching out to people is a large part of the fun that groups enjoy.

New Hope shares over half of their budget for missions, and I tell you this not to boast, but to tell you how the Lord blesses.

New Hope is a charter member of The AALC, and Joan had the honor of being on the constituting board.



Little Max O., who is being raised with other abandoned children at the Ternival Residence in Haiti, "adopted" Pastor Ollie Urdahl and loved falling asleep in his arms.

Prayer Bookmark

1. Clergy Commission
2. Rev. Daniel Cloeter
3. Bonnie Ohlrich Secretary/Coordinator
TAALC/ALTS
4. Abiding Grace Lutheran Church *Gillette, WY*
5. Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper, Seminary Professor
6. Rev. David F. Johnson
7. American Lutheran Church *Mandan, ND*
8. Rev. David M. Johnson
9. Ascension Lutheran Church *Ames, IA*
10. Your local community
11. Rev. Dr. James L. Hoefler
12. Ascension Lutheran Church *Waterloo, IA*
13. Dr. Dan Kruger, Treasurer of The AALC
14. Bethel Lutheran Church, *Rowland, PA*
15. Bible Lutheran Church *Dodge Center, MN*
16. Online ministries
17. Rev. Dr. Thomas Stover, ALTS President Pro Tem
18. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church
Saint Paul, MN
19. Rev. Dean Stoner, National Mission Developer
20. The Persecuted Church
21. Rev. Michael D. Holsten
22. Radio Ministries
23. Rev. Jamie Strickler
24. Christ Lutheran Church *Chippewa Falls, WI*
25. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Presiding Pastor
26. Rev. Loyd Ginn
27. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church *Ellis, KS*
28. Regional Mission Developers
29. Rev. Irvin Stapf
30. Emmanuel Lutheran Church *Kelliher, MN*

Prayer Bookmark

1. Christ the King Lutheran Church *Chesterfield, MI*
2. Rev. Paul J. Johansen
3. Rev. Roger Twito, Assistant Presiding Pastor
4. Christ Lutheran Church *Duluth, MN*
5. Call Committees
6. Rev. William P. Moberly
7. TAALC leadership
8. Christ Lutheran Church *Germantown, MD*
9. Board of Appeals and Adjudication
10. Rev. David Breidenbach *EEMN*
11. Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran Church
Albuquerque, NM
12. Rev. Darrel Deuel
13. Christus Victor Lutheran Church *Fayetteville, NC*
14. ALTS Seminarians
15. Rev. John Hallock
16. Clam Falls Lutheran Church *Frederic, WI*
17. World Mission Commission
18. Publications Commission
19. Community Lutheran Church *Wausaukee, WI*
20. Standing Committee for Men
21. Eastern European Missions Network
22. Dr. Adam Francisco, Seminary Professor
23. Board of Trustees
24. Elim Lutheran Church *Brush Prairie, WA*
25. Rev. Martin Lalthangliana *Lutheran Church
of Myanmar*
26. Rev. Dave Spotts, Seminary instructor
27. Rev. Phil Meadows
28. Emmanuel Lutheran Church *Bremerton, WA*
29. Rev. Dr. Craig Henningfield, Seminary
Professor
30. Rev. Richard Sunderlage



A Sign from Above

by The Rev. Devon Woodyard

The Barn Again Lutheran Church in Cedar Crest, NM, has a beautiful location next to a favorite local restaurant and an area highway. For a few years our hand-made signs advertised our presence, name, hours of worship service, etc., until one day they were suddenly torn down and demolished. Initially there was no word on what had happened, no eye-witnesses as to why our sign, which was hanging from a post high up in the air had suddenly come crashing down? We wondered if it was deliberate? Vandalism? High winds? An accident?

Then one day someone at the restaurant next door said that they thought a delivery truck hit it. It was an accident. That was it. There was no apology. No clue who did it or if they would come forward and offer reparations. Nothing more was offered or given. We wondered what to do next? File an insurance claim? Investigate a little more and possibly find out who did it and see if they would offer to replace it? More time passed and we began to wonder, was it a sign from God?

Word got out that our sign was gone and a few months later a generous donor came forward with an offer to replace the former sign with an electronic one.

As you know, electronic signs can be very expensive, and yet very eye-catching. As was mentioned before, we are located in a great location to reach the local population with words of Scripture and encouragement and we have received many positive comments about our new sign from above. Start to finish, the whole process has been a great lesson in patience, hope, and belief that God can and does take our hurts and disappointments and turn them into something better than we even hoped or imagined.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." Romans 8:28

Faith Lutheran Church announces Ordination of new Pastor Alexander A. McNally

By Dr. Rodney Bohlmann

On Dec. 9, the second Sunday of Advent 2018, Faith Lutheran Church, Watseka, IL enjoyed a new beginning with the ordination and installation of the Rev. Alexander A. McNally. Members of the clergy, led by Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, presided over the ordination during the 9 a.m. worship service. Previous Faith Pastor Rev. David Spotts assisted, as did Pastors Rev. Dr. Duane R. Lindberg and Rev. Richard Sunderlag. Rev. Alex McNally's brother, Pastor Abraham McNally, also assisted in his brother's ordination.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Rodney Bohlmann

McNally's ordination was witnessed by his parents, his grandparents, his great-grandmother, uncles, and aunts from his hometown of Evansdale, Iowa, near Waterloo, along with the congregation of Faith.

His extended family, joined with members and friends of Faith for dinner and dessert provided by Faith Lutheran Church. During dinner Lindberg spoke briefly, informing the group that the McNally twins were baptized by him 31 years ago in coincidence with the formation of the American Association of Lutheran Churches. Lindberg is acquainted with members of Faith from his previous appointment as presiding pastor of the association.

McNally now assumes the duties of ministering to Faith, to Watseka, to Iroquois County and beyond.

**This article originally appeared in the Iroquois County Times Republic on Dec. 12, 2018, page 5. It has been edited.*

Generations Serving Together

by Don Yount



This picture includes four generations of the Yount family as an ushering team at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Elk Grove, California. Pictured from left to right: Don Yount, Sr., the Father, Grandfather, and Great Grandfather of members of the team; Trevor Yount, grandson; Caleb Yount, great grandson; Christopher Yount, grandson; Mike Yount, Jr., grandson; Mike Yount, son, and father of Mike Jr. and Trevor. Don has been a member of St. Peter's since 1952, and all members of this team were baptized at St. Peter's.

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