



WESTERN AREA NEWSLETTER

Winter 2024

Greetings! This newsletter is a resource meant to gather some of what is going on in the Western Area of the North American Lutheran Church as well as provide a place to find a lot of what is available to pastors and congregations from the NALC and its members. I am Rev. Marv Combs, the Area Assistant to the Bishop (AAB), for our area here in the West. You can see our Western Area on the map above. I provide a direct connection of support for your Mission District Dean from the Office of the Bishop of the NALC.

FIRST THINGS

Greetings to you all. We have celebrated the birth of our Lord and now are emerged in the season of Lent; the busiest time in the church year. We have had a few things happen since the last newsletter and I want to highlight a few. In January the NALC held the annual Clergy Retreat in Orlando, Florida. This year's focus was on rest, reflection, and selfcare. Our very own Western Area pastor Rev. Ken Kohag, Dean of the Rocky Mountain Mission District, began the gathering with the opening plenary session, *Spiritual Grounding as a Grounding for Ministry in the Church*. There has already been interest expressed in next year's retreat. It will be January 28-30 in San Antonio, TX.

CONGRATULATIONS! Rev. Taylor Stempniak had been re-elected to serve another term as Dean for the Central Pacific Mission District.

Generosity

This newsletter will give some focus to the theme of generosity. The RESET program is an initiative designed to help pastors, congregations, and their members realize their calling to be generous with all the Lord has given them. You can request workshop information and see the material at this link. <https://thenalc.org/stewardship/>



Rev. Dona Johnson leading the RESET Workshop at the Central Pacific MD Gathering

**Some 'Generosity' examples in our
Western Area**

- In celebration of the 50 year anniversary of ministry in the Colorado Springs area, Black Forest Lutheran Church has donated \$50,000 to the 20/20 initiative of the NALC.
- St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, CA has donated
 - \$15,000 to the North American Lutheran Seminary to help support seminarians with travel and housing need for required in person classes.
 - \$12,000 to Tartu Academy of Theology in Estonia
 - \$8000 to Children's Hope Fund

Stewardship Is All About Relationships and Pastoral Care

Rev. Dona Johnson, pastor of GracePointe, Sedona AZ

Before Christmas one of our members invited a man to worship. After worship he shared what was going on in his life and we prayed for him. He was distressed and concerned about his marriage. He was alone and troubled, so we invited him to have dinner with us on Christmas day. But on Christmas Eve he came to worship with his wife. Mike followed up with him inviting him to breakfast and prayed for him. Then he shared how he and his wife decided they would work on their marriage. Then during the first week of January, he sent GracePointe a \$3500 qualified charitable distribution (QDC) from his retirement funds. When we called him to joyfully thank him for his generous gift, he said, "I like what you are doing in Sedona and how you reached out and prayed for me."

Stewardship is all relationships and pastoral care. Did you ever think stewardship was about pastoral care? You never know what people are carrying in their hearts—illnesses, emotional burdens and loneliness. So, it's about loving people where they are. It's truly giving with no expectations on return. I have spent a few years teaching and preaching faithful stewardship, but the more I live it, the more I realize that stewardship is not all about money, although it is one of many facets, the essence of stewardship begins and ends with love—love of God and love of neighbor. It is a visible expression of the Great Commandment. When the love of Jesus penetrates the human heart wonderful and amazing things happen!

In His abundance,

Rev. Dona Johnson



Congregations

<https://thenalc.org/congregations/category/western/>

We are encouraged by the amount of interest we are receiving from both congregations and clergy looking to become affiliated with the NALC. I expect many of these inquiries will become serious discussions. If you hear of any interest from congregations about the NALC you can contact your Mission District Dean or me. We welcome into the NALC and into our Western Area:

- Denny Park Lutheran Church in Seattle, WA
- Sadly, First Lutheran LC in Tulare CA held their final service last Fall. Please look for the specific details in the article Rev. Taylor Stempniak provided later in this newsletter.



Clergy Newly Received into the NALC and our Area

Rev. John Hoyem serving Port Madison Lutheran Church on Bainbridge Island, WA.

Rev. Melinda Jones serving St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, CO

Rev. Corey Smith (LCMC) serving Trinity Lutheran Church, Hermiston, OR

Deacon James Clapper was ordained at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs. He is now in North Carolina assuming his chaplaincy call.

A Special Note:

Our Area welcomes Iglesia Luterana San Juan Baptista and their pastor, Rev. Esteban Salazar to the NALC and to the Southwest Pacific Mission District. They are a new ministry of Bethel Lutheran Church in Santa Maria, CA. Pastor Esteban will become the shepherd of this ministry. His wife, Angie, is also now a NALS candidate through the Ordination Under Special Circumstances program. This ministry serves a very important part in the Santa Maria community, specifically the local farm workers and their families. As they begin ministry together, anyone who can help fund this worthy ministry is encouraged to contact Bethel Lutheran Church at (805) 922-6601 or email

officebethelsantmaria@gmail.com

Pastor Esteban & Iglesia Luterana San Juan Baptista



Congregational Resources

Area Discernment Retreat

On June 27-29 of this year, the Central Pacific Mission District will be hosting a free discernment retreat for college aged and second career men and women who may be hearing a call to ordained ministry. This three-day retreat will provide participants with practical next steps and answer questions about seminary, while focusing on equipping and nurturing the spiritual gift of discernment. We'll be offering worship, Bible studies, time for personal prayer and reflection, hands on workshops, and a chance to hear from pastors in the field and national representatives.

If you have someone in your congregation who is curious about ministry or who you'd like to see use their gifts to serve the church as a pastor or deacon, please consider encouraging them to attend this retreat. The retreat will be hosted at Lone Sequoia Ranch, right outside of Sequoia National Park, and participants are only responsible for the cost of transportation. Please have participants register by April 15 at <https://bit.ly/471Tpvf> (caps sensitive!). For promotional materials for your congregation, including brochures and posters, questions, or alternate registration, email Pastor Taylor Stempniak at ptmarie96@gmail.com.

Retired Pastors/On Leave from Call;

If you know of any NALC retired pastors or those on leave from call who are new to our Area, please let me know so I can add them to our contact list.

NALC Disaster Response: Sunday July 21 to Saturday July 27, the Central Pacific Mission District will host a mission trip for anyone interested helping rebuild the town of Paradise, CA. Work projects include repairing homes damaged and destroyed by wildfires. For more information, contact Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Coordinator at [740-509-1132](tel:740-509-1132). The greatest need is Home Depot and Lowe's gift cards. Please ask your congregations to host a disaster response Sunday and collect gift cards for our youth to use in Paradise!

Youth Continental Gathering 2024;

NALC young people will come together this July in Texas for a time of worship, study, and fun. Check it out at <https://cyg.thenalc.org/>

Connect with the Area Assistant to the Bishop (AAB);

Let me know if you would like me to come for a presentation, consultation, or event and I'll work with your Mission District Dean to make that happen as schedules allow. My email is; Westernaab@thenalc.org

Seminary/Candidacy News; The North American Lutheran Seminary is offering a June InterTerm course titled *Word & Sacrament Mission in a Post-Christian World*. The focus is on what it means to be mission driven in today's culture. Special audit rates are available. Info is at <https://www.thenals.org/2024-june-interterm/>.

First Lutheran Tulare Closes

Dean Taylor Stempniak

After 90 years of faithful service to the Lord and the surrounding community, the leadership of First Lutheran Church decided to dissolve the congregation and sell the building to a local church. As their dean, I first met with the people of First Lutheran Church in 2022, at which time they could no longer support the salary of a pastor, but told me that they were ready to put aside everything that had distracted and divided them over the years because they only wanted one thing now: to continue to worship the Lord together. Due to their willingness to change worship times, I was able to serve them in conjunction with a local Missouri Synod pastor, Pastor David Jung, for a year and a half. During which time there were baptisms, visitation, and the congregation continued to grow in love towards the Lord and one another.

This past summer, after tremendous prayer and discernment, the council approached me with the decision to dissolve the church. They wanted to see the resources God had blessed them with spread throughout the kingdom, and everything from the finances to the paraments has been set aside for congregations throughout the country, and the building is now being utilized by a local congregation who had outgrown their house church. We held a final worship service and the rite for the closing of a congregation on All Saints Sunday of 2023. During this service, the symbols we use throughout the liturgy

are blessed and processed out of the church. It's an opportunity to give thanks for what has been accomplished through the Lord in this space, and a reminder to us that the work that the Lord does isn't finished when a building closes. We bless the cross, the chalice, the altar book, the church records, so many precious things, but the last thing we bless is the people, with the words from 1 Peter 2:9,

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."