



NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
CHURCH

MIDWESTERN AREA NEWSLETTER December 2023



I invite you to submit material for inclusion in future newsletters, but keep your information concise, to the point, and use “links” if you want to provide the reader with access to “long readings”. – Jess Abbott, Midwestern Area Assistant to the Bishop (AAB), 513-314-2028, midwesternaab@thenalc.org

AAB Thoughts

Matt 18:1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

A little child in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed the offering plates. When they neared the pew where he sat, the youngster piped up so that everyone could hear: “Don’t pay for me Daddy, I’m under five.”

Aren’t children wonderful?! Jesus thought so, and so do most of us this time of year. In Matthew 18 Jesus circles the disciples around a child and instructs them about “greatness” and entering the kingdom of heaven. It is not the first time Jesus points to children to teach adults lessons. Unfortunately, we are not given much information in the Gospels about Jesus’ relationship with children, other than he wanted them around him. So, perhaps we have to fill in the blanks a little with what we know about children.

I think we are all experts on children, since we all were once a little kid (yah, you might have to do a little regression therapy if you’ve become too much of an adult now). I imagine that Jesus saw the same things we do in little children. Of the many attributes of children there are two strong ones we should think about for our own discipleship. Each of them I

can imagine Jesus pointing to as attributes to keep rather than pitch when we grow up.

The first attribute is that children “engage”. Have you ever been in a store shopping and as you walked past a little one in a cart, they made eye contact with you, smiled and said “hi”? In fact, when I’ve observed it, the child is doing it with everyone he/she sees nearby. Imagine that, engaging with total strangers! My reaction has always been to be drawn in, to smile back, and to wave back. And, in the moment of being drawn in, if you ask a question, the child will burst forth with the greatest thing happening in life, like, “My mommy’s going to have a baby!” I think Jesus is telling disciples, “Be engaging, and share your good news!”

The second lesson we can take from children is to never omit “play” from our lives. We know there were times when children just ran up to Jesus, probably to hug him around the leg, or pull on his robe (and the disciples tried to shoo them away). If you think about it, play is long-engagement, and it builds relationships. Those who play together stay together. Whether its marriage, a congregation, or the work place, when “play” leaves the relationships, emotional distancing and brokenness are not far behind. Plus, play seems to rejuvenate us, and we need that to be strong workers; after all, one can’t play all the time.

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” So, if you know any little ones, sit down with them and play with those new toys they just got at Christmas. And after playing, rise up and engage others for the Kingdom of heaven this week.

– *Pastor Jess*

Latest and Greatest News!

Celebrating Pastors and Congregations

Greene, IA – St. John Vilmar. Welcome Pastor Tamara Keen, who was installed November 5th. Thank you to all who attended the installation from the Mission District to welcome and pray for Pastor Keen.

Westerville, OH – Grace. We welcome Pr. David Wendel. He has served on the NALC executive staff for many years, almost from the beginning of the NALC. He will begin his service among the people of Grace in Westerville in December. His installation service is planned for December 10 on Sunday morning.

New Plant Congregation

Osage, IA – First Grace. First Grace is officially a new mission plant of the NALC. A group from the local ELCA congregation had been working throughout the year in the hopes that a congregational vote to affiliate with NALC would pass. When this resolution failed in October, the group decided to move toward becoming a new congregation.

Seminarian Accepts Call

From Terese Whitten, Michigan Mission District: *“St. John and St. Paul in Illinois have voted to extend a call to me. I will be starting with them the first of the year. This means I will be in a different district and will miss being a part of the Midwestern Area as well. I will remember you all fondly. Thank you for all the encouragement and support you have provided!”*

Support for Full-Time Chaplains

It is important for our Chaplains (both clinical and military) to be able to gather annually to collaborate and support each other in their unique ministries. Thanks to the NALC and various congregation, we are able to support a limited number of scholarships for them to attend the annual Clergy Retreat (or the biannual Convocation).

Mission District Pastors Meetings

These are provided in case you happen to live closer to another MD's meeting and would like to attend for pastoral fellowship and support. Or, if you can't travel, you might consider joining a video conference call.

Michigan MD pastors and lay leaders via zoom, generally the second Saturday of each month at 10a. Pericope devotion followed by sharing of faith journey and concerns for prayer. Next: Dec 9th. Contact Pr. Abbott at midwesternaab@thenalc.org for Zoom invitation.

NW-Ohio MD pastors will meet Monday, December 11, 9 AM at First in Leipsic, OH. The next one after that will be Thursday, February 22nd, at Zion in St Marys.

NE-Ohio MD, **Every Monday** Pastor Pericope study, Zoom at 10am. Email Pr. Koch at mekoch46@gmail.com for Zoom invitation

NC-Ohio MD, Pastors Fellowship 10am. Nov 16th, at Resurrection, Catawba Island, OH. And Feb 15th at St. Paul, Clyde, OH. Email Pr. Pennington for more information penningtonkm@gmail.com

Mission District Pastor Retreats

These are provided in case your MD doesn't have a retreat, or if you'd just like to get away from your area and enjoy the environs of other wonderful places.

Iowa MD, Jun 10-11, 2024. Contact Dean, Pr. Christopher Staley for more information; cbstaley@netins.net

Candidacy for Ordained Ministry Seminarians in the Midwestern Area

Michelle Kouse, North American Lutheran Seminary network (NALS) / Fuller Seminary, M.Div program. SW Ohio MD. *Not entranced yet subject to approval October 9-10.*

Monica Barman, Fuller Seminary, M.Div program. NC Ohio MD. *Not entranced yet subject to approval October 9-10.*

Scott Stine - Fuller Seminary, M.Div program. SE Ohio MD.

Keith Deak, NALS Center at Trinity School for Ministry, M.Div program. SE Ohio MD. *Not entranced yet subject to approval October 9-10.*

Ethan Zimmerman, NALS Center at Trinity School for Ministry, M.Div program. NE Ohio MD.

Molly King, St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, M.Div program. SE Ohio MD

Kent Haley, Ordination Under Special Circumstances Program. New Life, Gallipolis OH, SE Ohio MD.

Pam Grandmaison, Trinity School for Ministry (NALS), Ambridge PA, Michigan MD

Seminarians working on Certifications in the Midwestern Area

Rochelle Lemieux, St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, working on Pastoral Care certification, Heartland MD

Heidi Yahl, Institute of Lutheran Theology, Pastoral Ministry certification, NW Ohio MD

Christian White, Institute of Lutheran Theology, Pastoral Ministry certification, NW Ohio MD

If you know of any seminarians in the Midwestern Area not listed here, please email them to Jess with school, degree / certification being sought, and their Mission District.



Youth News and Opportunities

July 1-4, 2024 **NALC Continental Youth Gathering**, St. John's Lutheran Church, Boerne, TX (near San Antonio). **We Belong "I know my own and my own know me"**.

Registration now open. See updates and information at <https://thenalc.org/cyg/> This four-day gathering provides opportunities for NALC youth to grow in faith and relationship with others as the body of Christ. Youth will worship together, study God's Word, participate in large and small group sessions, reach out to the community through mission events, and engage in fellowship and fun!

July 21-27, 2024 **NEXUS Institute**, at Grand View University, Des Moines. The week is being sponsored by the NALC. For more information: <http://www.grandview.edu/NEXUS>

May 5-11, 2024 **NALC Young Adult Gathering**, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. For those age 18-28. Application deadline is Dec 1. For more information, contact Pr. Teresa Peters.

"Solid" Lutheran Bible Camps

- Ingham Okoboji in Milford, Iowa, which is near Minnesota, South Dakota, and Nebraska.
- Riverside in Story City, Iowa nearer the middle of the state.

Resources for Congregations Without Pastors

Online Confirmation Program - contact the Southern Area Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Mark Braaten, 903-316-1594 mbraaten@oslctyler.org or Pastor Teresa Peters at tpeters@thenalc.org

Confirmation / Catechism Web Courses [Free] – Luther House of Study, <https://lutherhouseofstudy.org/courses/>

On Line Sermons

Pastor Jess Abbott posts services / sermons on YouTube. Go to YouTube and search “Abundant Grace Lutheran Church Westchester”. Or contact Pastor Jess at midwesternaab@thenalc.org

Pastor David Wendel posts sermons on YouTube https://youtu.be/gCcD_lvwCbA, he also posts them on his Facebook page and the NALC Fellowship group; or contact Pastor Wendel at dwendel@thenalc.org

Lutheran Adoption Conference April 10-12, 2024

Join a gathering of Lutheran leaders at the Hyatt Regency Houston Intercontinental Airport at the Lutheran Adoption Conference. Enjoy the testimony and talents of Dove Award-winning musician and adoptee Mark Schultz. Experience the fellowship and celebration (did somebody say, “Banquet!”?). Discover the expert information and exciting opportunities.

Join faith leaders, policy makers, adoption experts, life advocates, and more. Participants will explore possibilities for increasing distinctively Lutheran adoptions across the United States. For developing information and updates, visit <http://lutheransadopt.org/>

State of the Midwestern Area

These numbers constantly change based on new information each month, or corrections to prior erroneous information. As time passes the number are expected to become increasingly accurate.

Congregations with Pastors.....	92
Pastors with Congregation calls.....	101
Congs w/o Pastors, IN Call process	26
Congs w/o Pastors NOT in Call process	20
Interim Pastors (in congs w/o Prs.).....	10
Pastors of Specialized ministries.....	9
Retired Pastors (not Interim now).....	36
Seminary Students.....	7
Home Churches (not congs yet).....	2
Total Congregations	138
Total non-retired Pastors	120

Congregation Vacancies

The NALC website has a great section to see congregations looking for a full-time or part-time pastor <https://thenalc.org/call-process/>

NALC Life Ministries

The NALC Life Ministries Team focuses on life issues - from conception to the end of life. The Team offers support for participation in life marches and responding to life issue legislation. The Team is planning to develop educational materials based on Holy Scripture to help pastors and congregations address the entire range of life issues - reproductive technology, abortion, adoption, foster care, human trafficking, end of life and more. The Team is also willing to provide presentations on life issues at events in your Mission District or in your congregations. You may contact any on the Team for more information.

Rebecka V. A. Frontz (rebeckaandrae@gmail.com; 724-787-7780)
Pr. Dennis Di Mauro (dennisdimauro@yahoo.com; 703-568-3346)
Pr. Al Towberman (atowberman@zoominternet.net; 724-698-3644)
Pr Scott Licht (slicht@lutheransforlife.org; 515-238-5496)
Pr. Melinda Jones (revmhjones@yahoo.com; 843-270-3675)
Pr. Amy Schiffrin (acschiffrin@gmail.com; 563-929-0909)
Pr. Steve Shipman (prsteveshipman@gmail.com; 570-916-7780)
Pr. Mark Chavez (pastor@reformation-nalc.org; 717-823-7739)

Newsletter Distribution List

If you know someone who would like to receive this newsletter regularly, please provide name and email address. It will only be emailed, and they will be Blind copied (Bcc).

Midwestern AAB Schedule Contact me if you'd like me to suggest some short presentations I can make at event. For

convocations, I can provide a short update on NALC priorities and recent efforts.

The following events are on my radar to attend:

Jan 16-18, 2024 – Pastors Conference, Drury Plaza, Disney Springs, Orlando, FL

Apr 8-10, 2024 – NALC Seminarian Interns retreat.

May 4, 2024 – Ohio Mission Region (and all Ohio Mission Districts) Convocation

Jun 10-11, 2024 – Iowa Mission District Pastors Retreat

Aug 9, 2024 – NALC online Convocation

Sep 21, 2024 – Iowa Mission District Convocation, St. John, Western Douglas

Pr. Mark Knappe, WI & MI Upper Peninsula MD (co-dean)

262-844-2234, solideogloria1@icloud.com

Pr. Tom Reiff, WI & MI Upper Peninsula MD (co-dean)

715-892-9914, treiff@outlook.com

Prospective Specialized Ministries & Military Chaplains

If a seminarian or pastor asks you about the possibility of serving as a military chaplain (Active Duty, Reserve or National Guard), Civil Air Patrol Chaplain, Hospital / Hospice chaplain, or fire, police, para-church minister; direct them for assistance to Jess Abbott at militaryendorser@thenalc.org Jess is the NALC's official Military Endorsing Agent for all NALC clergy currently servicing or seeking to serve in the U.S. or Canadian Military. See the "Our Work" tab in the NALC website for more information; <https://thenalc.org/specialized-and-military-ministries/>

Midwestern Area Deans

Pr. Jess Abbott, Midwestern Assistant to the Bishop
513-314-2028, midwesternaab@thenalc.org

Pr. Bert Schultz, OH North West MD
715-418-1037, jcgracepastor@outlook.com

Pr. Mark Daniels, OH Mission Region & SW Ohio MD
740-603-5287, markluth91@gmail.com

Pr. Tom Jacobson, OH South East MD
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Pr. Michael Koch, OH North East Mission District
330-635-8008, mekoch46@gmail.com

Pr. Kathy Pennington, OH North Central Mission District
715-554-4658, penningtonkm@gmail.com

Pr. Christopher Staley, IOWA Mission District
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Pr. Jess Abbott, MI (lower peninsula) Mission District
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Pr. Doug Gast, Heartland (IN-KY) Mission District
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