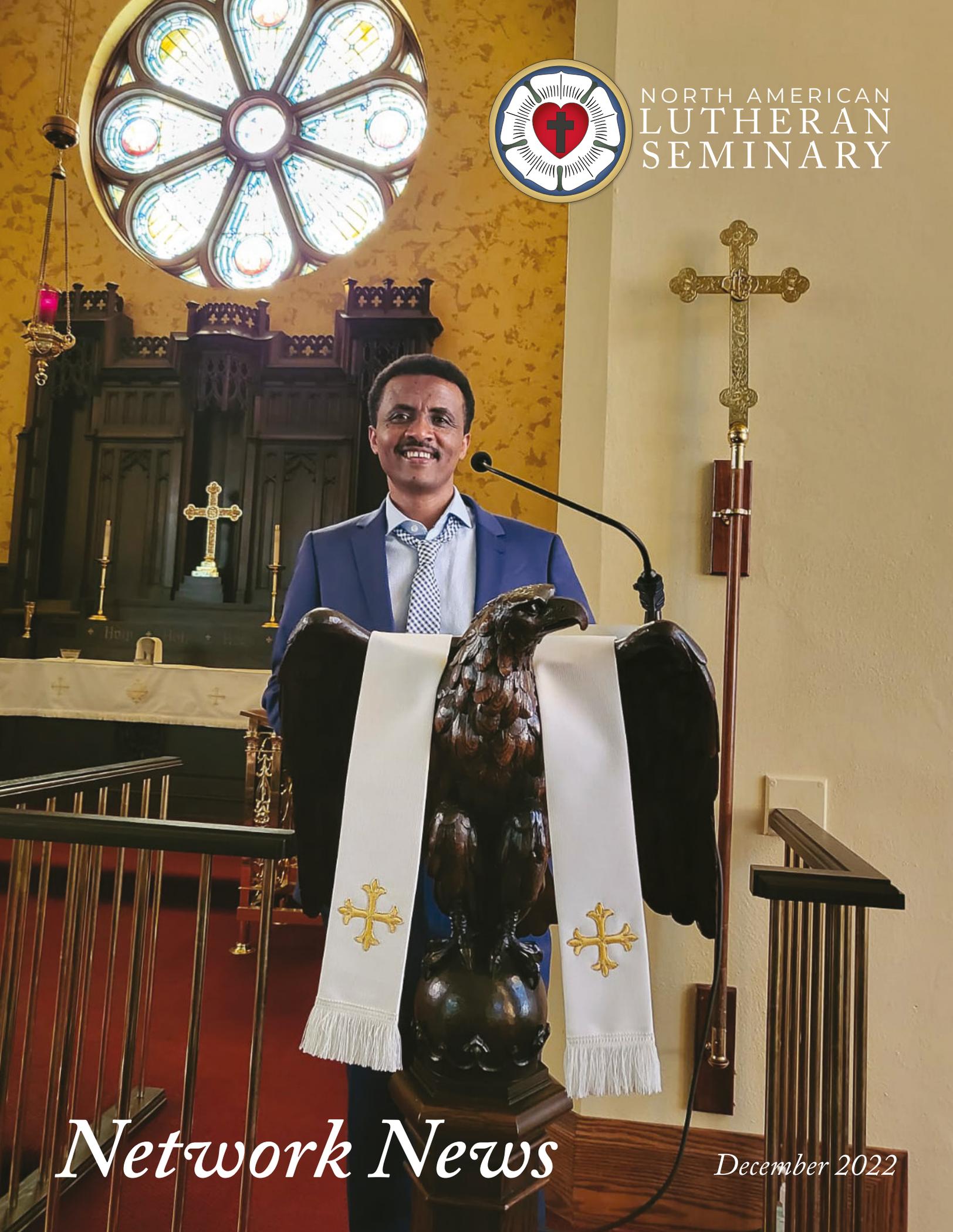




NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
SEMINARY



Network News

December 2022

Dear Friends of the NALS,

There is an original stanza from “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” that was, very unfortunately, removed from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. You will understand why it was removed when you read it.

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world hath suffered long,
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not the love song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.*

Some evidently think that “man at war with man” was too exclusive. This, it seems to me, is a good case of simply missing the point. The point being that human beings — men and women — continue to cause war and strife because we will not or cannot, “hear the angels sing.”

Christmas asks for silence. In one of the apocryphal gospels, the writer imaginatively described the virginal conception of Jesus. The moment when the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and “the power of the Most High” overshadowed her:

“... a great silence descended with a great fear. For even the winds stopped, they made no breezes. There was no motion of the tree leaves, nor sound of water. The streams did not flow, there was no motion of the sea. All things in the ocean were silent, and no human voice was heard....time almost stopped its measure. All, overwhelmed with great fear, kept silent” (Luminous Dusk, Dale Allison).

Christmas asks for silence. There are mysteries which cannot be easily articulated or logically defined. Yet, are still true. No dogmatic definitions of the incarnation do justice to the mystery. We stammer sheer mystery when we confess that our Lord Jesus is, *“God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man”* (the Nicene Creed). That’s a “mic drop” moment.

**The North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) forms men and women to listen to God’s Word.
Then, after listening carefully we can preach faithfully.**

**Thank you for your support of the NALS. May God grant you a blessed and quiet Christmas.
Quiet enough to hear angels sing.**



Yours Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric M. Riesen".

**The Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen
President, North American Lutheran Seminary
centered at Trinity School for Ministry**

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP

JANUARY 4, 12, 19, 26, 7-8:00PM EST

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The fuel of the local church is relationships. Whether it's the relationship with Jesus, the relationship with other believers, or the relationship with the community, we need to continually build and strengthen these connections, in order to more effectively share Christ with others. Come and learn how we can build these key relationships, through our vocations (calls), that they may be used for outreach and ministry.

COURSE INSTRUCTOR



THE REV. BRAD HALES
NALC DIRECTOR OF RENEWAL MINISTRIES

LEARN WITH US
JANUARY 2023

In October, Macomb, MI-native Steven Neaton started with the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) as a communications specialist.

Steven is a lifelong Lutheran from Southeast Michigan. He graduated from Michigan State University in 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Religious Studies, and spent time studying at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA. He has served in two different Lutheran congregations, the most recent being Christ Lutheran Church in Santa Clarita, CA, as Digital Ministry Director. "Having spent time in local congregations and at a seminary in our network, I feel like it's a good match!" he said. "I'm excited to be a part of all the great things God is doing through the NALC and NALS."



Seminarian Sermon Series

Zechariah 14:1-21 | Matthew 24:1-14.

In Martin Luther's little work, *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*, he makes the intriguing assertion that we should press into the Old Testament to find Christ. Luther says, "[i]t is there that people like us should read and study, drill ourselves, and see what Christ is, for what purpose he has been given, how he was promised, and how all Scripture tends toward him." So, let us turn to the book of the prophet Zechariah to learn more about Christ. As we turn to this part of Scripture, which is full of visions and apocalyptic imagery, what we see at first glance is horrifying. However, we need to go back a chapter to pick up on what the prophet Zechariah has been saying to God's people.

The thirteenth chapter of Zechariah prophesies a time for Judah and Jerusalem to be cleansed from sin. At this time — "on that day" is the term used repeatedly by Zechariah — idols are removed from God's people. False gods, false prophets and the spirit of uncleanness are swept away like dust to be remembered no more, gone, done, vanished. The false prophets will confess their lies; even their parents will do away with them. Then, God whittles down His people by two-thirds, and those who remain He purifies through flame. Yet it is this small band which God claims for His own. Just as poignantly, though, they claim God as their own! This is the point at which we come to chapter 14 of Zechariah's prophecy.

We read that Jerusalem is besieged with devastating results. The Holy City is utterly defeated and ransacked. The raiders feel so secure in their victory over Jerusalem that they sit down and divvy up their stolen prizes — right in the middle of the city, for all the losers to see. "The spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst," the Lord says (Zechariah 14:1). Thankfully, God does not remain idle. On that day, God's feet stand on the Mount of Olives. His presence changes the very topography of the land, so that God's people seek shelter where His feet touch the earth (v. 4). On this unique day, God causes light to shine in the weak hours of twilight (v. 7). Living waters pour forth from Jerusalem to the east and west and flow continually, even in the dry summer heat of the Middle East (v. 8).

Then, the prophet declares, God becomes ruler over all nations (v. 9). Jerusalem is glorified as she is raised above all other cities around her (v. 10). Her security is guaranteed by the Lord; so that all who stand against the city will be struck with a wasting disease (vv. 11-12). On that day, the nations are so disoriented that they fight one another instead of Jerusalem. Subsequently, God's people gather up the wealth of all the nations (vv. 13-14). This is an undoing of the earlier ransacking Jerusalem suffered.

The final result is that all of the nations who are left come and worship the Lord by keeping the Feast of Booths (v. 16). The Feast of Booths was the festival of the final yearly harvest. Israel was to offer up sacrifices of thanks and praise for the fruitfulness of the land. The festival's name comes from God's command that His people come up to Jerusalem and live in simple dwellings, to remember how God provided for Israel's needs in the wilderness and give thanks for all He has done. You can find more on this in Leviticus 23. On that day in Jerusalem, Zechariah continues, all that was once considered common is sanctified by God. All pots for meat will be "Holy to the Lord," so that the sacrifices once meant only for priests to eat are shared by everyone (v. 21), showing the complete sanctification of all people in Jerusalem and Judah.

There are several connections between Zechariah's prophecy and Matthew's account: going back to the previous chapter in Matthew's account (chapter 23), we see Jesus rebuking the Scribes and Pharisees — teachers of God's Law — for their hypocrisy. Some of His harshest rhetoric can be found in this chapter: "they preach, but do not practice" (v. 3); "You blind guides," Jesus says (v. 16); "white-washed tombs" (v. 27) He calls them; "First clean the inside of the cup, then the outside," (v. 26). Christ is rebuking their spirit of uncleanness. He cries over Jerusalem, for it is within her walls that the words of God are twisted. Within the Holy City herself God's prophets are stoned and killed. Destruction is coming upon her, Jesus says (Matthew 23:37-39).

Then, we come to the first verse from our reading in Matthew (chapter 24). Christ's disciples are calling His attention to the beauty of the temple. Yet, Christ proclaims that it will be thrown down to the last brick (vv. 1-2). He goes on to describe the utter chaos which will come: earthquakes, famines and wars between nations. There will be false messiahs yelling for attention, beckoning all to hear their words, while the disciples of God's Son are threatened and hated (vv. 4-9). All of this, Jesus says while sitting on the Mount of Olives (v. 3). Yet, Christ continues, the Good News will be preached throughout the world as a testimony to all nations (v. 14). In other words, the Gospel will flow out from Jerusalem to the east, to the west, and all over the globe, before the end comes.

There are many similarities we can see in these two texts. However, there are also key differences. The biggest difference can be seen in the endings of each reading. Zechariah ends with God being worshipped by all nations. It ends with God being proclaimed King over all peoples. It ends with a feast, the Feast of Booths. Our reading in Matthew ends with the testimony of Christ reaching to all peoples on the earth. Most significantly, perhaps, the temple in Jerusalem is seen in the ending verses of Zechariah. Israel was commanded to go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths (Deuteronomy 16:16). In our second reading the temple is destroyed.

At this point, many Christians may have portions of the New Testament bubbling up in the back of their minds. Jesus said He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, although He was talking about Himself, His body and His resurrection (John 2:18-21). We see also in Revelation 21 that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Revelation 21:22).

Yes, the temple is in both readings, the temple in Zechariah, the one where the nations come and give thanks and sacrifices to God is Christ. Jesus of Nazareth is the place where we meet with God — the place where heaven and earth meet and dwell together. Jesus, the crucified One, is where we come to offer up ourselves as living sacrifices. We offer prayers of supplication and intercession — with thanksgiving — in the Name above all other names: Christ — risen and glorified!

There is one other place in the last chapter of Zechariah where we see Christ — right at the start of the chapter. In the first verse we see Jerusalem, the Holy City, despoiled, defeated, and destitute. Jesus ended His earthly ministry in the same way: despoiled, defeated,

destitute. He was despoiled, not only of glory, but of simple brotherly kindness. He was robbed, having His clothes stripped from Him, defeated in His court case, and left destitute — hanging upon a cross without even a sip of water to comfort Him. Before Jesus' very eyes soldiers gambled for His clothing, they divided up their spoil in His midst.

It is in the suffering of the human race — in the suffering of His people — where Christ shares our weakness. Exactly at this point, Jesus becomes the place where God and humans can finally be together for all eternity. So, it is through this suffering that Christ defeats His enemies and snuffs out all the powers which would separate God from His beloved creatures. The waters that flow out from Jerusalem can symbolize many things, but certainly they are the waters of Baptism. And in these waters God drowns His enemies and raises up the same people as His sons and daughters. Children who will spread the testimony of Christ to all the world.

So, we have completed our task. We have located Christ in Zechariah's prophecy. And since we know where Christ is, we can also locate ourselves in the reading as well. For we are with Christ since we have been made members of His Body (Ephesians 5:30). We find ourselves as the converted worshippers coming to the Temple — Christ himself — to offer thanks and praise in remembrance of what God has done for us. We also find ourselves among the citizens of Jerusalem, now able to partake of the Holy Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood, given to us in bread and wine.

And we find ourselves with Christ in His suffering and humiliation. Just as Christ allowed Himself to be defeated, we daily bring our old rebellious selves — who still oppose God as King — to death, to utter destruction, in the waters of our Baptism. Through daily repentance, our new selves live humbly before the One whose name is above all names and worship God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — as the One True God, taking His testimony to the ends of the earth and wherever God may lead us. Amen.

Dale Stanley
Senior M. Div. Student
NALS



Trinity School for Ministry Welcomes New Dean President, Seeks to Ease Pathway for New Students

The Trinity School for Ministry (TSM) Board of Trustees recently appointment of the Very Rev. Bryan C. Hollon, Ph.D., as the eighth Dean President. Dr. Hollon succeeds the Very Rev. Dr. Henry L. Thompson (Laurie) who retired during the summer.



Dr. Hollon most recently served as Professor of Theology at Malone University in Canton, Ohio, director of the C.S. Lewis Institute of Northeast Ohio, canon theologian of the Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes and chair of the Executive Committee of the Society of Anglican Theologians.

In addition to guiding TSM, an evangelical seminary in the Anglican tradition, Dr. Hollon also will play an instrumental role in the success of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS), particularly as the NALS is centered in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, at Trinity and works to form leaders and pastors to serve the growth of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

“We want to do everything we can to help the NALS succeed in its effort to educate and form students to faithfully preach, teach and live God’s eternal truth, through Word and Sacrament,” said Dr. Hollon. “All of us at Trinity have great affinity for the work the NALS is doing, and we want to make it easy as possible for the NALS as the administration and faculty work to fulfill the seminary’s goals.”

Dr. Hollon believes the relationship among the NALS and TSM faculty will be vital in supporting the goals of both institutions. “In addition to providing facilities for use by the NALS staff, faculty and students, we believe TSM faculty can also benefit by the growing number of professors and theologians now on the NALS team so students answering God’s call to serve congregations in evangelical and orthodox teaching can thrive.”



The NALS students study, worship and build friendships with Anglican students and with students of other traditions.

Dr. Hollon received his Ph.D. in Religion from Baylor University in 2006, and his M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2001. He is a proponent of the great consensual tradition that C.S. Lewis referred to as “Mere Christianity,” and as a scholar, he specializes in Ressourcement Theology, which is best exemplified in the work of Henri de Lubac. He is the author of *Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Cascade Books, 2008) as well as numerous book chapters, journal, and magazine articles.

Dr. Hollon was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) in 2015. In 2017, he planted and pastored St. John’s Anglican Church in Canton, Ohio, until a full-time rector was called in May of 2021.

Bryan and his wife, Suzanne, met at Baylor University and were married in 1993. They have three children. Harrison is a graduate of Mount Union University and lives in Columbus, Ohio. Claire is a senior at Baldwin Wallace University and John is a freshman at The Ohio State University.

The NALS Welcomes Four New Regents

Mrs. Lynnae Douglas of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Export, Pennsylvania; Mr. Richard Jansak of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Gastonia, North Carolina; and the Rev. Dr. Stéphane Kalonji of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Rosenberg, Texas, were elected to five-year terms on the Board of Regents of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) at the August 2022 Mission Convocation of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The three new regents were elected to five-year terms (rather than the original six-year terms) as part of the NALC's transition to holding Mission Convocations biennially.

Also, the NALC Executive Council approved the NALS Board of Regents' appointment of Mr. Roger Weyersberg of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Owosso, Michigan, as an additional regent. This is an appointed seat and Mr. Weyersberg will serve a two-year term.

The Board of Regents is made up of nine members, the bishop, and the seminary president. Its chief responsibilities are to provide oversight, supervision, and direction for the NALS Network and president, including fiscal plans, new programs and initiatives, and fundraising. The board's current chair is the Rev. Dr. Eric Waters of St. John Lutheran Church in Boerne, Texas.

The Board of Regents typically convenes quarterly and recently met in the Dallas/Fort Worth area October 19-20. The Rev. Dr. Eric Waters welcomed the Rev. Jeff Morlock, NALS Director of Vocational Discernment, to address the board. "It was so exciting to hear Jeff talk about some of his first meetings with potential seminary students," said Waters. "We look forward to the work that Jeff will be doing." In addition, the Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen, president of the NALS, reported to the board on the work of our new seminary professors, Dr. David Luy and Dr. Alex Pierce. The board also had a joint session with the NALC Executive Council to discuss how best to cooperate in areas of mutual concern such as communications, finances, and policies.

The Board of Regents has five meetings scheduled for 2023: three online and two in person.



**Mrs. Lynnae Douglas of
Emmanuel Lutheran Church**



**Mr. Richard Jansak of
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church**



**The Rev. Dr. Stéphane Kalonji of
St. Paul Lutheran Church**



**Roger Weyersberg
Redeemer Lutheran Church**

Advent Meditation

“We preach not one advent only of Christ, but a second also, far more glorious than the former. For the former gave a view of His patience; but the latter brings with it the crown of a divine kingdom. For all things, for the most part, are twofold in our Lord Jesus Christ: a twofold generation; one, of God, before the ages; and one, of a Virgin, at the close of the ages: His descents twofold; one, the unobserved, like rain on a fleece; and a second His open coming, which is to be. In His former advent, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger; in His second, He covereth Himself with light as with a garment. In His first coming, He endured the Cross, despising shame; in His second, He comes attended by a host of Angels, receiving glory. We rest not then upon His first advent only, but look also for His second. And as at His first coming we said, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord, so will we repeat the same at His second coming; that when with Angels, we meet our Master, we may worship Him and say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.”

– Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.1

Cyril was the bishop of Jerusalem in the second half of the fourth century (ca. 350–386/7). He gave catechetical instruction in the form of “lectures” to those preparing for and having recently received the grace of the Holy Spirit in the waters of Baptism. His lectures invite incoming and newly minted members of Christ’s Church to receive the Church’s creedally orthodox theology and help them to see how that body of teaching originates in Holy Scripture.

This particular lecture beckons us to hope for Christ’s second coming at the end of history even as we remember and celebrate His first coming as a babe in Bethlehem. Cyril reminds us that celebrating the incarnation of the Word during the season of Advent should lead us not only to look backward to the blessed nativity, but also to fix our gaze upon the future fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to return in glory. As the apostle Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 15, the life, and even the death of Christ is meaningless without the victory of Easter Sunday. In a similar fashion, the joy of the incarnation is inextricably bound up with the promise of Christ’s Second Coming. God’s faithfulness in the Old Testament gave Israelites reason for confidence that messianic prophecies would be realized at the proper time. Christians likewise behold the faithfulness of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and are thus strengthened in their hope for the blessed future which God has promised to His beloved children.

Cyril poetically guides his audience to contemplate the mystery of the incarnation by emphasizing the fullness of Christ’s deity, and the fullness of his humanity side by side. The eternal Word of God is eternally begotten of God the Father and yet He is conceived by the Virgin Mary as He assumes a human nature to Himself. The eternal generation of the Son is the first divine procession, the relation that distinguishes the Son from the Father in the Godhead. The birth of Jesus of Nazareth is at once the Spirit’s conception and the Word’s assumption of a human nature, soul and body. The humble birth of Jesus, which exhibits God’s patience and care for sinful human persons, is a descent concealed in a shroud of humility. The return of Jesus on the clouds, which displays God’s majesty and covenant faithfulness, will be a descent revealed in the glory of His brilliant light and the angelic host that attends Him.

1

Christ’s first advent was the unexpected inauguration of the kingdom of heaven. In humility and weakness, Christ came in the dark of night. He was conceived by a young unmarried maiden. His life depended upon Mary’s care, requiring swaddling clothes to keep Him warm and a manger in which to sleep. After living the “unobserved” life of a carpenter’s son, ministering as an outsider among the religious elite, and proclaiming the Good News of salvation to a “faithless generation” (Mark 9:19 nrsv), Jesus underwent the shame of the cross at Golgotha. When He appeared on the third day after triumphing over death, the risen Christ revealed Himself only to those with eyes of faith and only to the extent that their faith enables them to see Him aright.

Christ's second advent is the expected and awaited consummation of God's kingdom. In glory and power, Christ will come as "the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west" (Matthew 24:27). The risen Christ is presently interceding for His people at the right hand of God the Father. At His second coming, He will make "alive in Christ... those who belong to Christ" before "the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:22-24). The sight of the risen Christ returning will bring peace and joy to His "kingdom, priests serving his God and Father" while "those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Rev. 1:6-7b). What has long been anticipated will then be received, promises fulfilled and warnings meted out. Christians are to fast and remain faithful to our humble Savior so that when the kingdom of God arrives in power we may celebrate the return of our glorious Lord.

Cyril draws our attention to the way the Gospel of Matthew makes subtle use of the words of Psalm 118:26a: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." When Palm Sunday comes around this spring and we all proclaim, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew. 21:9), we are remembering the words proclaimed by the witnesses of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. At the same time, we must also keep in mind that Jesus Himself promised that the next time we would see Him with our eyes we too would cry out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39). The victory of Palm Sunday was fleeting — quickly overshadowed by the darkness of the crucifixion. But Jesus' triumph over all the powers of evil and darkness will bring a peace that is without end, for when Jesus returns to take up the faithful to be the heavenly Jerusalem in which He will have an everlasting dwelling we will enjoy union with God in Christ and God will be our all in all.

May we join together in giving thanks and devotion to the Christ of both the first and second advents as we remember so that we might have hope. As we wait, let us return to the words of the psalmist which captured the imagination of the author of the Gospel of Matthew and Cyril alike:

- ²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*
- ²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*
- ²³ This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*
- ²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*
- ²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*
- ²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.*
- ²⁷ The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.*
- ²⁸ Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.*
- ²⁹ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.*
- ³⁰ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

– Psalm 118:21-29 NRSV



Dr. Alexander H. Pierce

Assistant Professor of Historical Theology
North American Lutheran Seminary



NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
SEMINARY

The Patristic and Medieval Horizons of the Lutheran Reformation

Dr. David Luy, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
Dr. Alexander Pierce, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology

North American Lutheran Seminary
Ambridge, PA

June InterTerm
June 12-16, 2023

Course Description

What do Irenaeus of Lyons and the Gnostics, Augustine of Hippo and the Pelagians, and the writings of medieval mystics and scholastics have to do with the Lutheran Reformation? In this year's NALS June InterTerm, Dr. David Luy and Dr. Alex Pierce will consider these and other related questions in order to reflect more deeply upon what it means for churches, pastors, and theologians to be "Traditionally Grounded." Seminarians, pastors and lay leaders are invited to join us as we think about this Core Value of the NALC. The course focuses attention upon patristic and medieval roots of Lutheran theology, and presents the reformation as an attempt to renew rather than to repudiate the church's catholic inheritance. Students who take this course will gain familiarity with the richness of early and medieval Christian thought and spirituality. The class will also reflect intentionally upon how these theological resources can inform and enrich church ministry in the 21st century.



Listen, God is Calling!

The Bible is overflowing with stories about God's call. God called Noah to build an ark. God called an elderly Abraham and Sarah to leave their home and begin a nation. God called young Samuel out of a deep sleep and Esther "for such a time as this." God called a reluctant prophet named Jonah to save a nation and a teenager named Mary to give birth to the Savior of the nations. God called Peter to be a rock upon which the Church could be built and Paul, the persecutor, to be an emissary of grace.



Martin Luther taught us that God claims each of us in Holy Baptism and gives us a life mission that will bless others and contribute to human flourishing. To recognize our baptismal calling is what we mean by vocational discernment. It's a process of listening to the Spirit of God through the Word of Scripture and the community of the church. Specifically, God calls some people as ordained ministers, and it is this vocation that is in urgent demand right now in the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

In this regard, I look forward to Thursday, April 18, 2030. This day will mark a full decade from the establishment of a goal to raise up 300 new pastors in the next 10 years as part of the NALC's 2020 Vision. It will be a great day of celebration and gratitude to the Lord for His faithfulness in making the goal a reality! But how will this happen?

Somewhere in our congregations right now an infant was just baptized who has a call from God to ordained ministry. Somewhere in our congregations right now there's a fourth grader who has a call from God to ordained ministry, and they are the troublemaker in Mrs. So-And-So's Sunday school class. Somewhere in our congregations right now, an eighth grader has just been confirmed who has a call to ordained ministry, and they complain to their parents that, "church is boring." Somewhere in our congregations right now there is a high schooler who is preparing to go on a weekend retreat that will change their life forever, as faith will come alive and God's call to ordained ministry will be affirmed. Somewhere in our congregations right now there is a college student or career person who has a call to ordained ministry, but is questioning it, or running from it to pursue a different path. I know that these people exist, because each of them was me at different times in my life.

When you read the above paragraph, did it resonate with you personally? If so, you may have a call from God to Word and Sacrament ministry. Did it make you think of someone you know who is discerning, or should be discerning a call to ordained ministry? We will reach our goal of 300 new pastors by 2030 as you, along with every disciple in our congregations becomes an NALS prayer partner, asking the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest (Matthew 9:38). We will reach our goal as you and others answer the call to become student recruitment ambassadors, asking the Lord to give you eyes to see whom He may be raising up for such a time as this.

The Rev. Jeff Morlock

Director of Vocational Discernment

jmorlock@thenals.org

724-595-7595

NALS Travels to Africa to Help Build Relationships for Future Formation

In November, a delegation of North American Lutheran Church (NALC) staff traveled to Africa with the goal of establishing a deeper relationship with sister churches in Africa, including North American Lutheran Seminary President, the Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen.

While there, the group participated in a Reformation Conference hosted by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Then, the group was invited to Tanzania to meet with Lutheran leaders. Then, from Tanzania, we traveled to Dubai to participate in a commencement service for graduates of Leadstar University.

Our prayers are being answered as we continue to have the faith and hope of establishing more cooperation in theological education and pastoral formation not only in North America, but around the globe.

“It would be ideal for seminary students to have the opportunity to study in cross-cultural settings,” said Riesen. “We have much to learn from each other.”





Central Pacific Mission District Sets Bar for Pastoral Formation With Scholarship Program

The Central Pacific Mission District (CPMD) of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), which serves Northern California and Northern Nevada, recently awarded two scholarships for students pursuing their pastoral formation at the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS).

The CPMD, one of 37 mission districts serving NALC congregations, is one of the leading mission districts when it comes to promoting and seeding the development of new pastors.

“Somebody had to do it,” said Craig Wheaton, the unofficial chair of the district’s Scholarship Committee. “So we did.”

A few years back during the NALC Mission Convocation, the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, President Emeritus of the NALS, asked attendees to look around the room and note the number of older pastors who would soon be on the cusp of retirement. “She really opened our eyes to the headwinds churches soon would be facing,” said Wheaton. “It was a crisis in the making and it’s now on our doorstep.”

Over the next nine years, the NALC needs 300 pastors and lay church leaders to serve the ongoing growth and needs of the church. The only way to form that number of pastors is through the NALS’ network of campuses spread across North America.

Wheaton said the CPMD decided to first address the expected gaps in pastors in California and up the West Coast. The CPMD decided that one way to address these gaps was to begin talking among congregations and commit to providing scholarships to potential pastoral candidates.

Wheaton, 57, serves in an interim capacity at New Hope Lutheran Church in Foresthill, California, and is studying to become a pastor through the NALS as he prepares for his second career, helps lead the CPMD Scholarship Committee. He is assisted by Victoria Salwasser, office administrator at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Fresno, California, and Pastor Jonna Bohigian, who is currently serving as a chaplain at Saratoga Retirement Community, Saratoga, California.

“We initially aimed our efforts within the district, but quickly realized the need is far greater than just California,” said Wheaton. “The five churches across the district all got on board with that decision, made the scholarship a budgetary item with a dedicated account and began spreading the good news through email distribution and newsletter articles, as well as via eblasts to all current seminary students.”

Wheaton credits the success of the program to the banding together of the district’s five congregations. “Coming together meant a lot and set an example for other churches to work to support students and the formation of pastors,” he said.

Since the program launched in 2016, five scholarships have been provided, with the most recent awarded to Dale Stanley and Pastor Hailey Halmstad, each of whom received \$3,250.

Pastor Hailey Halmstad, 45, who after a decades-long career in human resources, decided to pursue candidacy in the NALC in fall 2019. She was called and ordained as a pastor via the NALC’s Ordination Under Special Circumstances (OUSC) program. Pastor Hailey, who is married with five boys ranging from 8-years-old to 19-years-old, will complete her M.Div. degree in December 2022. Currently, she is serving two churches: Bethel Lutheran Church in Hawkins, Wisconsin, and Bethany Lutheran Church in Catawba, Wisconsin.

“The mission district has been very gracious with the scholarship,” ...said Pastor Hailey. “It would be so much harder without it.”

Scan to watch
Dale Stanley’s
‘Thank You’ video





*Top photo: Pastor Halmstad is pictured, center right, on her ordination along with Bishop Dan Selbo, center left.
Bottom photo: Pastor Halmstad, bottom right, with her confirmands.*

Dale Stanley, another at its Seminary Center located at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania (a suburb of Pittsburgh). He recently moved his wife and four children to the campus area to complete his formation.

Wheaton, the CMPD Scholarship Committee and the scholarship recipients credit the positive and supportive environment created by both the NALS and NALC. “Because of the work of folks like the Rev. Dr. Eric Riesen and Barbara Knecht, Online Education Administrator for TSM, we are all very excited as we learn and grow in our faith.”

While the scholarship program was designed to meet the needs of future seminarians, Wheaton and his committee counterparts are imploring other mission districts and their churches to look at the current social environment and see how the need can be filled now. “God has placed teenagers, young adults and older adults before us.”

Wheaton added, *“People who are being called to serve need our prayers, but they also need our support, so they don’t end up in debt at the end of their formal education.”*

“The need is great, but the harvesters are few,” said Wheaton. *“We can do more.”*



Mr. Craig Wheaton
CPMD Scholarship Committee Chairperson



Ms. Victoria Salwasser
CPMD Scholarship Committee member



Pastor Jonna Bohigian
CPMD Scholarship committee member

Getting to Know Alexander Pierce

Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at the North American Lutheran Seminary



The North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) recently announced Alexander H. Pierce, Ph.D., will serve as Assistant Professor of Historical Theology to help form students for service in the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). This position has also been added to Trinity School for Ministry's on-campus faculty.

According to the Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen, president of the NALS, Dr. Pierce was hired to serve the seminary at a point when the church is experiencing significant growth. "Dr. Pierce will help elevate the seminary's commitment to delivering the knowledge and tools necessary for tomorrow's pastors and church leaders to be the stewards of classic, orthodox, biblical theology in preparation for Word and Sacrament ministry in the NALC," said Dr. Riesen.

Prior to joining the NALS, Dr. Pierce served as an Assistant Postdoctoral Teaching Professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. As an Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Pierce will utilize his wide-ranging research and theological expertise — evident in his many scholarly articles, presentations, seminars and workshops — to educate seminarians across the NALS campus network.

In 2012, Dr. Pierce, 32, received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Northwestern College, St. Paul, MN, with a concentration in Biblical and Theological Studies. Subsequently, he received his Master of Arts degree in Systematic Theology, as well as his Master of Divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 2016. He completed his Doctorate in Theology, with a concentration in the History of Christianity, at the University of Notre Dame in 2022.

Dr. Pierce, his wife, Cassandra, and his five children are currently active members of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Mishawaka, Indiana. He also serves as the president of the board of directors at Covenant Christian School, where three of his children are enrolled in a Spanish immersion program.

Q&A with Dr. Pierce

1 What is your background?

I was born and raised in Minnesota to a lower middle-class family. I grew up camping and playing sports. My father was not a "believing" Christian, and my mom only intermittently attended church, but she eventually came to faith while I was a teenager. As I grew older, I struggled and sought meaning and fulfillment in all the wrong places. But in my teenage years, I found Christ and my relationship with Him began to change everything. I shifted from an aimless wanderer to someone living for God in response to God's love for me. I began ordering my life to the service of God's kingdom and Church. Along the way, my family moved to Deerfield, Illinois, where I attended seminary for about four years, and now, we are presently wrapping up our time in South Bend, Indiana, where I have been privileged to serve as a member and president of the board for our children's local Christian school.

2 How did you discern your career path relative to your degrees?

While pursuing an undergraduate degree in ministry, I realized many of the practical aspects of ministry could be learned through participation in a local congregation; I needed to learn more about the Bible, theology, and the Christian tradition; and eventually, I found joy in academic theology and saw it, too, could serve as a possible context for ministry and even evangelism. These realizations led me to pursue my M.Div. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where I would be able to train for ministry in an ecclesial or academic setting, which would include evangelical Protestant students and teachers who affirmed the Gospel but belonged to a variety of confessions. While progressing at Trinity, my enjoyment and aptitude in studying theology deepened and I began to sense my ministerial vocation coming into focus as one that would be fulfilled in an academic setting involving teaching, research, and writing. Once I realized I wanted to do historical theology, to study theology in conversation with the riches of the catholic tradition, I began seeking more specialized preparation and applied to Ph.D. programs, which led me to research the History of Christianity area in the Theology Department at Notre Dame.

3 How did you discern the role ministry would play in your life?

When I came to faith as a teenager struggling through life, it became clear to me early on that there was no more important mission than to share the Gospel with others who had not received the gift of faith, who had not entered into the embrace of the risen Christ, and who had not encountered the little Christs that make up the Church. The nature and context of my calling to ministry became clear over time as I grew in my personal relationship with Christ and continued walking on the journey of faith. God has employed great mentors and friends in my life to help in cultivating and nurturing my growth despite plenty of challenges along the way.

4 What are your goals relative to being called to serve at the NALS?

While there are many goals, fundamentally, I want to help students to grow in spiritual maturity and to see themselves as wayfarers in the drama of Salvation. I desire to help to prepare pastors for the ministry of Word and Sacrament and thereby to meet the needs of NALC congregations. I also want to offer guidance to those training for ministry as they consider the questions of our day in the light of Scripture as well as the insights of classical, orthodox Christian theology. I will do everything in my power to train pastors to see the broader catholic tradition as the story of God's work in the church across the ages; to understand the Lutheran Reformation and Lutheran theology in the context of the catholic tradition; to learn from earlier Christians' interpretation of the Bible; and to avoid being captive to the present by learning from the successes and failures of the past.

5 What is your teaching style?

In teaching, my principal goal is to produce the conditions where significant learning is likely to occur. I design my courses teleologically, first determining the course learning goals so I can then order decisions regarding content, assignments, and assessment to those chosen ends. I invite my students to join me as fellow pilgrims in the journey of faith seeking understanding. So, in the classroom, I enjoy lecturing and fostering guided discussion among students, which can deepen their understanding and present the truth in a persuasive fashion, but also arouses the affections of their hearts for the God we worship. My classrooms are usually free of technology, and I only use PowerPoint for visual aids when bringing in examples from sources such as art history. Instead, I prefer to work on a board to guide students through a lesson while keeping our interactions more direct. Inasmuch as "memory is the residue of thought," I look to create active thinking in the classroom. This approach can take the form of having small writing exercises in class or having students break into small groups to discuss a question or subject. Along these lines, I also strive to incorporate teaching methods and strategies that serve students' diverse learning styles.

6 What do you hope seminarians will learn under your tutelage?

Theology is an exercise of the mind and the heart, and the unity of doctrine, ethics, and worship must be coordinated, not divided. I pray they will learn what it looks like to be Lutheran pastors who are credal, confessional, and catholic. Moreover, if Scripture animates the Lutheran Reformation and Lutheranism, the Catholic tradition provides the broader horizon within which Lutheran distinctives make sense. As Lutherans, we don't need to be insecure about our creeds or confessions but can rather enter into thoughtful and engaging conversations with non-believers and believers from other traditions with openness, being resolute while also humble and teachable. One of the most crucial lessons I want students to take away is the importance of friendship. The NALS is a community, and together, those friendships will enable students to support and guide each other across not only Lutheran traditions, but across other evangelical traditions, such as those at the Trinity School for Ministry.

7 Why do you believe you were called to this profession?

The Lord called me to this profession. Growing up outside the church and receiving the gift of the Gospel as a life-changing event has given me an inexhaustible gratitude for God's unsurpassable love and mercy. As a result, I intend to bring a warm affect into my classroom and engagement with students. I care about developing mentorship relationships with them as well as lasting friendship and recognize that anything I accomplish, achieve, or contribute is so obviously the work of the Lord in me, it is undeniable. I bring passion to my teaching and research because I firmly believe it is a matter of spiritual life and death. Theology is not, for me, a cool or distant academic exercise. It is, instead, a journey of faith seeking understanding and I have always found great joy and satisfaction in searching out answers to big questions, "why" questions, "whence" questions.

8 How can the NALS better serve its seminarians and the future of the church? What role can you play in that future?

I see my role as helping to clarify the identity and vision of the seminary, to communicate it across the NALC, and to strengthen the trust and partnership between the NALS and NALC. Obviously, enrollment in general and participation in Ambridge's residential program, in particular, is essential for encouraging spiritual formation and promoting, through shared experience, "ownership" of the seminary of the NALC. I also think it will be important to develop continuing education opportunities for pastors, including the development of programing to help more people in a greater variety of situations to prepare to administer Word and Sacrament to churches in need of leadership. Lastly, I look forward to helping to build a faculty committed to rigorous scholarship, skillful teaching, and integrated spiritual formation.

9 What do you do for fun?

My wife, Cassandra, and our five children, ranging from 6-months-old to 13-years-old, enjoy the outdoors — camping, hiking and fishing. We also enjoy sports, travel, and board games with friends and family. And, of course, we are avid Notre Dame fans.

Yeshiwas Amsalu Muleta to Serve Congregates in South Carolina Through Ordination Under Special Circumstances



Yeshiwas Amsalu Muleta was selected for Ordination Under Special Circumstances to serve the Ethiopian and Eritrean congregation in Columbia, South Carolina, which has been without a minister for more than 10 years. This is his story.

As a newborn Yeshiwas Amsalu Muleta's journey in faith began. Yeshiwas was born to parents who were members of the Ethiopian Eastern Orthodox Christian (EEOC) tradition. As a regular attendee of EEOC church, his parents had him Baptized at 40 days old. "They believed I could inherit the faith of Christianity by partaking in the sacred Sacraments. Hence, my Christian faith began with the goodwill of my family, which made me embrace the faith of EEOC by default."

Yeshiwas' humble beginning was wrapped in a meaningful given name, comprised of two Amharic words 'የሺ-YESHIE'(thousands) and 'ዋስ-WAS'(guarantor). Put together it means, "Mr. Guarantor for Thousands."

Yeshiwas explained, "The odds in my life journey hit a climax when a medical school at which I was studying closed its doors in 1991 because of the civil war aggravated in Ethiopia. This event shattered all my hope. I was brought to crossroads about the meaning of life. During this peak season of a horrible battle in life with feelings of defeat and futility, I turned to seek answers from my religious tradition."

Yeshiwas' search for answers led to a "chance" encounter with another Christian tradition. He says, "I bumped into a student in college who helped me to know more about Jesus and Scripture. The significance of the cross of Christ was appealing to my search for meaning. The insight I got about a God who suffered — on the cross — for the sake of others was enticing to my pursuit of meaning in life."

After a few visits to Mekane Yesus and Muluwongel churches in Gondar, Ethiopia, in 1992, Yeshiwas had a tangible experience of receiving and committing to the Lord in personal faith. He received Christ Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

"The day of my faith commitment was the most sacred time of realignment with God through His Son Jesus Christ. The blessed day of all the days on my calendar of life," he said. "God's gift of sincere faith prompted a major turnaround in my faith life. The questions of life, origin, meaning, and destiny were no more. I experienced liberation and newfound freedom from the oppressive power of sin and death. I enjoyed new life in Jesus."

Yeshiwas became a college Christian fellowship regular attendee. In addition to the college Christian fellowship, he attended regular weekly programs of Mekane Yesus Church Gondar from 1992 to 1994 in Gondar, Ethiopia. After graduation from medical school in June 1994, he moved to the Wollo Region of Ethiopia where he met his wife, who accepted Christ as her Savior in the Mekane Yesus Church in Nazareth, Ethiopia. Both were active participants in the Dessie Mekane Yesus Church.

Partaking in life through knowing and accepting Jesus as his Savior not only revived his hope of eternal life but also reshaped his understanding of the value of relationships with God and with people. "Subconsciously I dismissed marriage during my adolescent and early adulthood life." But through time the Good News of the Gospel shaped his perception of the value of relationships. "Truth in Scripture helped me to believe that married life between a man and a woman is the standard and sacred foundation for family and community. Divine providence helped me to meet my wife in 1995. We were married in July 1996."

God blessed Yeshiwas and his wife with a daughter and four boys, who are currently attending high school and college.

While enjoying life in Christ and with fellow believers in different Protestant traditions in Ethiopia, an opportunity to move ensued in 2009. Yeshiwas and his family moved to Canada, where he stayed for 10 years reflecting on the call of God and volunteering in local evangelical Ethiopian churches (Ethiopian Evangelical Church and Heyaw Kal Evangelical Church, Ottawa).

There, his faith journey began to make more sense. Yet there were gray areas where he needed greater clarity from God. As the inner and outer dimensions of calling in his life converged, he began to question if he was really qualified for ministry. He began to realize that all the joys and sorrows in life were meant for his formation towards the fulfillment of his “calling.”

As Yeshiwas reported, “Reflecting on some major experiences in my life stirred my conviction that some things cannot be ascribed to a second cause or mere chance. As the poet said, ‘Life is about a weaving and I cannot choose the colors, He (God) weaveth steadily.’”

Yeshiwas kept praying to God for understanding about ministry and the scope of his calling. Joining seminary became the heart of his next chapter. Yeshiwas said the Lord, whose guidance never deserted him, guided him to Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, which he joined in 2019 and from which he graduated in 2022 with a Master of Arts in Christian Formation.

Ever caring for others, Yeshiwas racked up notable achievements in his medical career, including the establishment of Maternal and Child Health Center and offering standardization of childcare in an orphanage, which gained international recognition. He also served as a volunteer minister in churches for over 25 years.

“I consider myself a bi-vocational minister and I am looking forward to engaging in ministry opportunities God brings my way,” said Yeshiwas. “I believe it is the next thread of God’s tapestry that will add another color to the journey of my faith life towards culmination.”



About Ordination Under Special Circumstances

A candidate for Ordination Under Special Circumstances (OUSC) must normally be nominated for the OUSC by a congregation who is willing to call the candidate or by the Mission District Dean, or by an Area Assistant to the Bishop and also achieve a two-thirds vote of a congregation’s council. The candidate may be retired, semi-retired, or have other employment, and is required to study online courses at the NALS.

For more information about OUSC, visit the link below or scan the qr code to the right.
<https://thenalc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/OUSCprocessdoc.08042022.pdf>



The NALS, centered at the Trinity School of Ministry in Ambridge, PA, serves seminarians from across North America through a network of campuses, including Beeson Divinity School (Birmingham, AL); Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA and Houston, TX); Sioux Falls Seminary (Sioux Falls, SD); and Concordia Lutheran Seminary (Edmonton, AB).



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